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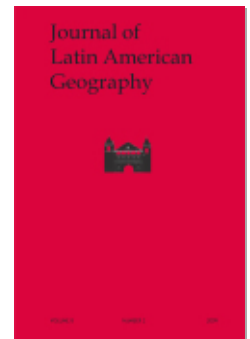
Álamos, Sonora. Architecture and Urbanism in the Dry Tropics (review)

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Journal of Latin American Geography, Volume 8, Number 2, 2009, pp. 237-239
(Review)

Published by University of Texas Press

DOI: 10.1353/lag.0.0048



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and thereby makes them more accessible to English-language readers. His original contributions include vivid description of game spectacles, interpretation of the sports' cultural meanings, and theorization of athletics in terms of social status and political-economic power. Although the book's "unparallel investigative paths" (p. xvii) treat the two cities somewhat differently—highlighting issues of race and national identity in Rio versus those of masculinity and sexuality in Buenos Aires—the empirical materials suit this approach. Ultimately focus on urban stadiums provides a cohesive conceptual framework for comparative cultural urbanism. Written for both academic and general audiences, the book seems appropriate for undergraduate or graduate teaching as well as more widespread readership. I highly recommend *Temples of the Earthbound Gods* as both a lively read and an insightful reflection on sports and society in Latin America.

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Alamos, Sonora. Architecture and Urbanism in the Dry Tropics. John Messina. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008, xxii and 165 pp., maps, photos, notes, glossary and index. \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 978-0-8165-2651-2).

Geographers will find much to savor in John Messina's crisp, concise and skillfully presented townscape portrait of colonial Alamos, Mexico. This is a very readable architect's study of a lesser known, but well-preserved colonial Mexican mining town in the southeast corner of the state of Sonora.

The reader may wonder, as I did, why bother to write an entire book about colonial architecture for a small Mexican town (population approximately 10,000), when others have trod this path before on larger stages? The author's response: it's personal. He visited Alamos in the mid- 1980s and discovered not merely a town, but a cultural artifact worthy of a book. I decided to give Messina the benefit of the doubt, especially when, on page five, he promised he would offer "an attempt at fervor rather than pedantry." I thought: "*¡rale!*"

In a discipline that has rocketed forward with its embrace of flashy technology and hard science over its more humanistic past, cultural and urban geographers will appreciate a basic premise of Messina's townscape study—that the greatness of cities and towns lies in their deep connection to the land. The book emphasizes that Alamos' was literally built from the earth-- its structures derived largely from adobe crafted from the region's sand, clay, silt and water. Further, this town would never have risen up near the banks of the Río Mayo, had it not been for rich silver deposits on the slopes of the neighboring Sierra Madre Occidental mountains. This premise serves as a thread that weaves through the book, and resurfaces at its close, as one of the critical lessons of Alamos' urbanism.

Among its virtues is the book's compact presentation—six chapters that run logically from history (Chapter 1) and urban morphology (Chapter 2), to more micro-design issues like the plaza (Chapter 3), the Alameda and other elements of urban place (chapter 4), private residences (chapter 5) and finally, lessons learned (chapter 6). Chapter 1, "The Making of A Town in Northern New Spain, " traces the evolution of Alamos from its origins as a silver mining center in the late 17th century. We learn that the town lies on an important ecological frontier, at the cusp between the dry arid lands of the desert to the north, and the tropical latitudes that begin to the south. This unique ecological

zone ultimately defines the economic base for Alamos, and its building typologies and settlement pattern.

The above point is driven home in Chapter 2, "Urban Morphology." A key theme in this chapter is the connection between Alamos' urban form and its natural environment. Not only are adobe buildings born from the clay and sand they sit upon, but building forms and the larger urban pattern were shaped by local climate and topography. For example, the use of Islamic/Spanish patios creates an important air circulation system for homes and other buildings; narrow streets provided shade from the hot desert sun, and hilly terrain altered the flow of the rectangular street grid. Taken together, these elements, in the author's words, "all contribute to an extraordinary sense of one being in a very habitable place." (p. 29).

Using photographs, computer-generated figure-ground maps, floor plans, archival history and detailed description, the author walks the reader through Alamos, along its winding streets that lead to the plaza. Chapter 3 (The Plaza and the Bishop's Dream) and Chapter 4 (Urban Realities and Fantasies) cover history and contemporary public spaces, and other iconic design elements, including the government palace, church, 18th century *casonas* (mansions with interior patios), the market, and the town's true social center—the Alameda. Chapter 5 ("La Casa Alamense") describes the architecture of private homes in Alamos, which the author argues display a mix of influences, from Islamic and Spanish colonial designs to the architecture of the Mexican hacienda. Messina celebrates the resulting rich design details: the courtyard, the *zaguan* (passageway), the *rejas* (iron grill), and the thick adobe walls.

For practicing architects, planners or applied geographers, the work's staying power may rest with the finale—Chapter 6, "The Lessons of Alamos." Oddly, while most of the lessons of Alamos emerge from its inherent sustainability, the author seems to steer clear of that paradigm. Perhaps he views the idea as pedantic. *Ni modo*. The fact is that the story of Alamos lies in its ecological integrity: patios as the "lungs" of a house's air circulation (particularly when homes are built with common walls that eliminate side yards and side windows), narrow streets that "slow down a vaquero with too many *correas* under his belt" (p. 33), and the rich possibilities of adobe as a building material. On this latter point, the author comments that modern day adobe builders tend to use Portland cement (which lasts longer) rather than traditional lime and sand plaster for the outer coating. But this does not permit the adobe to "breathe," and thus any water that may enter the surface cannot evaporate during dry seasons, as it did in the past, leaving the building to deteriorate from within.

I have only two minor concerns with the book. First, Messina intended the narrative to be about Alamos' elusive "spirit of place," as he suggests in the book's introduction. Yet, in my view, he has stopped just short of completing this task. While his book masterfully *describes* architecture, street form and the built environment, it screeches to a halt when it comes to *analyzing* social meanings of place in a bit more depth. For example, one of the more intriguing observations in the book, seemingly made in passing, is that there is a territorial separation between the social space of Anglos (in the plaza area) and *Mexicanos* (around the Alameda). This fascinating place-making condition cries out for more discussion.

A second point that probably falls along the lines of "analysis" is that part of the story of the making (and remaking) of Alamos is what I would call "global connections." The author points out that, beginning in the 1940s, Americans began buying up historic buildings. Over the last half century, nearly 95% of the historic buildings have been renovated, and a sizeable number of foreigners live full or part-time in the town, and have injected millions of dollars into remaking the townscape, and

redefining its economy. The Arizona highway connection no doubt adds to Alamos' integration with North America. Since this global connection is not necessarily the case for other revitalized Mexican colonial cities such as Oaxaca or Querétaro, this point seems worthy of some further analysis.

These observations amount to the fine tuning of what is a polished volume that scholars and those concerned with historic preservation, design, and sustainability will want to have on their shelves. I am pleased to add it to mine.

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De-coding New Regionalism: Shifting Socio-political Contexts in Central Europe and Latin America. James W. Scott, ed. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009. 262 pp., figures, tables and index. \$114.95 hardcover (ISBN 978-0-7546-7098-8)

James Scott's edited volume is an excellent compilation of case studies on the topic of institutional de-centralization and regional formation in Latin America and Central Europe. The purpose of the comparative analysis is to enhance understanding of the social, economic and institutional causes that lead to region-building, as well as to grasp some of consequences of the process in terms of advancing democratization and improving economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability and social equity. The cross-continental comparison is premised on the argument that both regions, Latin America and Central Europe, have been undergoing a deep, "systemic transformation" which entails "rapid institutional change within and environment of insecurity, political instability and rapid socio-economic polarization" (definition by Györgi Enyedi, cited on p. 26).

The book consists of thirteen chapters. It is divided into five parts: Introduction, Systemic Transformation and the Politics of Scale, Case Studies of Region-Building in Latin America, Case Studies of Region-Building in Central Europe, and Conclusion. The Latin American cases include Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela; the Central European cases include Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Romania.

The most important asset of the book is that theorizing from the case studies is taken seriously. Unlike many other edited volumes, which include a scant introduction and conclusion that merely summarize the empirical cases, *De-coding New Regionalism* includes several theoretical chapters, which make up about half of the book. Written by the editor and other authors, these chapters are a solid attempt to make theoretical sense of regionalization as a key component of global post-Fordist economic restructuring and post-welfare-state institutional change. Regardless of the wide variety of empirical contexts, the volume makes clear that certain common themes persist. Perhaps most importantly, regionalization appears to be generally a top-down process, driven by central (national) governments as part of their comprehensive efforts to pass down responsibilities (without necessarily passing down resources) to sub-national government levels. In this sense, regionalization can be seen as a state response to increased financial constraints and neo-liberal prescriptions for an entrepreneurial mode of governance, rather than a bottom-up process driven by local actors interested in promoting public participation in governance or strengthening intra-regional (e.g. cross-municipal) cooperation in issues related to social equity or environmental sustainability. In fact, it appears that in some of the cases, the formation of regions has been used by national