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Zoned in the USA: The Origins and Implications of American Land-Use Regulation

Sonia A. Hirt
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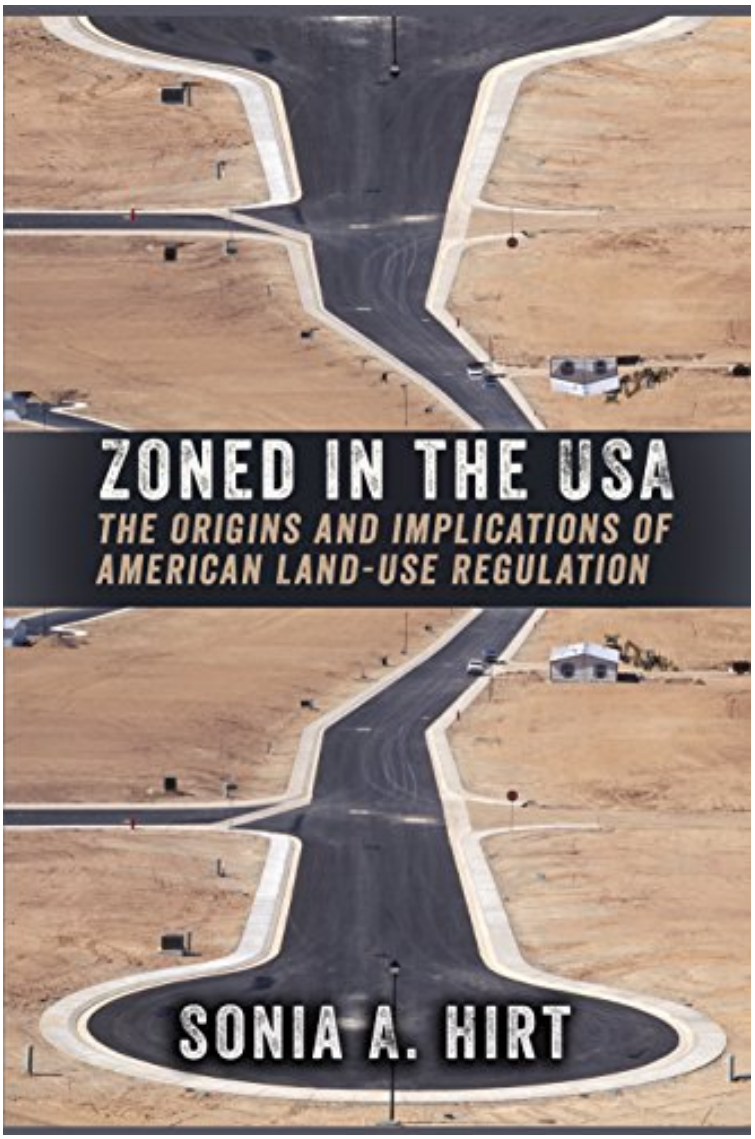

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Sonia A. Hirt : Zoned in the USA: The Origins and Implications of American Land-Use Regulation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Zoned in the USA: The Origins and Implications of American Land-Use Regulation:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. myth-bustingBy Michael LewynThis book destroys a variety of myths about American land use and zoning.One common myth is that home ownership is "the American Dream"-more common in the U.S. than elsewhere. Not so! Hirt shows that 65 percent of American housing is owner-occupied-

less than the European Union average (70 percent), Canada or Australia. Moreover, many American homes are effectively owned by banks through mortgages; 45 percent of U.S. houses have a mortgage, while the European Union average is 27 percent. The major difference between the U.S. and other democracies is that Americans generally live in either detached houses or apartments, while in some other countries the middle-ground housing of attached single-family homes (such as duplexes and rowhouses) is more common.Another common myth is that U.S. zoning is less restrictive than European zoning. In fact, American zones tend to rigidly separate land uses; the majority of residential land is devoted to single-family housing, and single-family houses can almost never be in the same zone as businesses or multifamily housing. By contrast, other nations regulate by intensity of use but not so much by type of use; for example, Germany's most common residential zone, "general residential", allows multifamily housing and retail uses as long as they are on a small, neighborhood-serving scale. Land-rich Canada and Australia tend to be more like the United States, but nevertheless are more flexible, usually allowing smaller houses than most American cities.Why were Americans so willing to accept such strict regulation? Hirt explains that in the early 20th century, pro-zoning interests argued that zoning was a means of increasing homeowners' property values and excluding lower socio-economic classes. In other words, middle-class Americans perceived zoning as a license to print money. Hirt also suggests that Americans were more willing to subjectively believe that single-family houses were special and superior-perhaps because most Americans were only a generation or two removed from rural life.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. As a relatively new planner, I found the book ...By Galaxy _HeelAs a relatively new planner, I found the book to be informative. It's well written, and not too difficult of a read.0 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Tommy EngramGood historical overview.

Why are American cities, suburbs, and towns so distinct? Compared to European cities, those in the United States are characterized by lower densities and greater distances; neat, geometric layouts; an abundance of green space; a greater level of social segregation reflected in space; andmdash;perhaps most noticeablymdash;a greater share of individual, single-family detached housing. In Zoned in the USA, Sonia A. Hirt argues that zoning laws are among the important but understudied reasons for the cross-continental differences. Hirt shows that rather than being imported from Europe, U.S. municipal zoning law was in fact an institution that quickly developed its own, distinctly American profile. A distinct spatial culture of individualismmdash;founded on an ideal of separate, single-family residences apart from the dirt and turmoil of industrial and agricultural productionmdash;has driven much of municipal regulation, defined land-use, and, ultimately, shaped American life. Hirt explores municipal zoning from a comparative and international perspective, drawing on archival resources and contemporary land-use laws from England, Germany, France, Australia, Russia, Canada, and Japan to challenge assumptions about American cities and the laws that guide them.

"Why can a German get his taxes done by walking downstairs while I, in a perfectly dense neighborhood in Los Angeles, need to get in my car to find akonditorei?This is, essentially, the question Sonja Hirt asks inZoned in the USA, a surprisingly rousing analysis and history of American zoning laws.It takes an outsider like Hirt?who is Bulgarianand therefore familiar with both European cities and governmentalpower?to recognize the stark differences between the control of land in American cities and that in their counterparts elsewhere in the developed world. A professorof planning at Virginia Tech,Hirt positions herself as the Alexis de Toqueville of planning, equally baffled and fascinated by the odd world that Americans have built."?Josh Stephens, Planetizen (March 2015)"This is an excellent book and an impeccable introduction to American zoning for anyone interested in US city planning and urban geography. In one sense, it is a primer on US zoning theory and practice: it provides all the basic elements and history in a mercifully succinct manner in under two hundred pages. This would bean ideal book to give to a student or colleague just cutting hisorher teeth in urban studies. Yet, at the same time, SoniaHirt makes some original contributions to the field by clearly placing American practices in international and historical perspective. Thebookworked for me on both levels. I have been reading US books on urban history and geography for nearly fifty years, starting with postwar studies of zoning by the likes of John Delaphons, Stephen Toll, and Richard Babcock, and histories of planning and urban development by such authorities as Peter Hall, Mel Scott, and Sam Bass Warner; I even reached back to the pioneers of American urban studies like Robert Hurd, Herbert Swan, and Louis Mumford. It was a pleasure to encounter them again here and be reminded of the twists and turns of citymaking in the United States. It was even more of a delight to be shown that history with such remarkable clarity and in a new light."?Richard Walker, H-Environment (March, 2015)"[Hirt] provides a succinct overview of the history of zoning in the US. She compares zoning in the US to five European countries?England, France, Sweden, Germany, and Russia?to highlight its distinctiveness.The story of American zoning reveals its origins in the early-20th century, fashioned to maintain property values and protect Americans'investments in their homes. The book tells the story of how local, state, and federal governments have contributed to the use of zoning to preserve the single-family detached home, connecting zoning to other policies, such as transportation and home loan financing. This is a terrific book for collections on housing, land use, zoning, and law."?D. Schultz,CHOICE(July 2015)"Thiskind of comparative research

deserves moresupport and encouragement. Although it isdifficult to do, it holds out the promise of aricher analysis of the historical development ofinstitutions?particularly, as in this case, whencross-national policy transfer is an explicitpart of the history."?Jerome Hodos, Journal of American History (March 2016)"Hirt has given us a thorough history of what we have been doing and a fine description of what we can learn from other countries. Nicely illustrative tables/figures and 'textboxes' make it well suitable for upper-division and graduate students." ndash; Ulf Zimmermann, Planning Perspectives, (July 2015)"Sonia Hirt contends that America's approach to land-use control, which puts such a premium on insulating single-family homes from all other uses, is unique from most other places in the western world. American exceptionalism is effectively demonstrated in this comparative analysis. Hirt is careful not to overly judge the American system and suggests a paradox regarding our demonstrated proclivity to value individualism (as symbolized by the single-family detached house) and yet support a land-use system that so rigidly regulates how we shape our human settlements. Her sources are rich, and her access to non-U.S. sources is extremely impressive."?Christopher Silver, Dean and Professor, College of Design, Construction, and Planning, University of Florida, author of Planning the Megacity: Jakarta in the Twentieth Century "This very important book represents a significant contribution to the literature on U.S. land-use regulatory practices. The comparative framework of Zoned in the USA is distinctive. It allows Sonia Hirt to identify the uniqueness of U.S. zoning in its origins, its institutional arrangement, and its physical outcome. I know of no other work that as insightfully compares U.S. practices to the international experience. Hirt shows that the U.S. approach to land-use regulation represents a historically conditioned and highly consequential set of policy decisions that constitute a fundamental break with processes of urbanization globally and throughout history."?Jonathan Levine, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan, author of Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land UseAbout the Author Sonia A. Hirt is Professor and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies, Virginia Tech. She is the author of Iron Curtains: Gates, Suburbs and Privatization of Space in the Post-socialist City and coeditor most recently of The Urban Wisdom of Jane Jacobs.