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**Researching the City** edited by Kevin Ward. London: Sage, 2014, 167 pp. FAQs, refs and index, £21.99. ISBN 978-1-4462-0211-1 (pbk)

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As Kevin Ward, the editor of this excellent student guidebook to urban research methods argues, the specificity of urban research is typically absent from general student-oriented guidebooks to social science research methods, while a detailed analysis of methods and their use is lacking from most general student textbooks on the various histories, philosophies, concepts and theories of the city or the urban. *Researching the City* was thus designed with the intention of filling this gap in the literature, providing a much needed interface between approaches and methods in general, and urban studies, or ‘researching the city’, in particular. The book is composed of substantive chapters by established scholars on the most widely used urban studies methods, utilising detailed case study examples which draw, very pertinently, on their own experience. Chapters include, the design, and writing up, of research projects (Kevin Ward); archival methods (Stephen V. Ward); interviews (Allan Cochrane); urban ethnography (Kate Swanson); questionnaires (Nik Theodore); discourse analysis (Annette Hastings); diaries (Alan Latham); GIS (Matthew W. Wilson); and visual methods (Bradley L. Garret). The layout of the book is exemplary for its intended audience: simple and effective, with relatively short and readable chapters, very clear headings, a FAQs section, ‘follow up’ references (sometimes with brief notes from contributors), and an extensive bibliography for each field. At 167 pages, including index, it is also a handy, slim and portable volume in contrast to many comparable reference works.

The chapters, as Ward contends, were designed to provide “a mix of insights into the methodological and theoretical assumptions that accompany the use of particular methods as well as some more grounded instructions into their actual use” (p.160-161). That this aim is accomplished so well, is in large part down to the methodological advice relayed by the expert contributors in each chapter, drawing on their own personal experiences of research. Ward’s introduction sets the tone throughout by recounting his own dissertation travails, acknowledging that he, like many of his fellow undergraduates, had little idea of what his study should be on, or

how to do it. Indeed, the risks, or “various health warnings” as Stephen Ward puts it (p.34), associated with research processes are pinpointed ruefully throughout by the contributors from their own experience, usefully personalising a processes that we all continue to learn from in an iterative and reflexive fashion. These touches of fallibility, even solidarity, will undoubtedly be appreciated by students grappling with the demands of their own dissertations for the first time.

But of course the book is concerned more with what to do and how to do it, than what not to do, and students will greatly appreciate the detailed personal insights to be gleaned from the contributors reflections on their own previous research case studies. Each chapter has its own value in this sense, but for this reviewer, Kate Swanson’s thorough recollection of her urban ethnographic research in Chapter 5 with street working children in Ecuador stands out here, addressing various research risks she underwent without ever losing sight of the excitement of ‘doing’ geography with new methods in new situations. This chapter exemplifies the book at its best: illuminating, informative, personal, clearly written and even inspiring. Bradley Garret’s work on visual methodologies, or ‘Worlds through Glass’, in Chapter 10 will also inspire students with its emphasis on research as a process of “*being and doing*” that blends and blurs representation and practice (p.135). Of course the subject of Garret’s work, urban exploration, is innately ‘edgy’ and ‘sexy’, but what comes across in his account is also the sense of an emerging field - visual methodologies - that is there for the taking for a new generation of students whose technological knowledge often exceeds that of their teachers. Indeed, Garret consistently emphasises just how much new technologies generate the possibility for new methodologies and new areas of research.

The sense of a rapidly mutating methodological field is also intimated by Annette Hastings in Chapter 7 when she refers to the emerging possibilities for discourse analysis arising from the use of new computer software and databases in ‘corpus linguistics’; by Matthew Wilson in Chapter 9 who discusses the rapidly expanding field, both technologically and methodologically, of GIS; and by Stephen Ward (Chapter 3), Nik Theodore (Chapter 6) and Alan Latham (Chapter 8), who discuss respectively how archival, interview and diary methods are being renewed through online technologies. Such examples suggest that students are well placed to pioneer new methodologies in the current conjuncture; a prospect that may just help them

navigate the practical and necessary research 'health warnings' peppered throughout the book. Research, however, is not just about method, but subject and approach. In Chapter 2, Ward stresses that a dissertation is primarily an *intellectual* project and that reading widely is therefore essential (a point, he argues, that many students fail to digest). One thing I liked about the contributions was that each stressed criticality and reflexivity - the 'reflexive injunction' as Cochrane calls it in Chapter 4 - with regard to research, without swamping the reader with their own preferred 'ism'. The result is that the book provides a critical, reflexive, responsible orientation towards research that offers plenty of room for interpretation or divergence by student readers.

I have very little criticism to make of the book, but one minor quibble is the lack of collective research methods such as co-research or PAR, or experimental methods such as psychogeography. Perhaps a chapter summarising such methods (add your own) might have inspired students to develop some exciting new methodologies. However, as Ward stresses in Chapter 11, the methods chosen are the ones most widely used in urban research and close attention to these methods is thus reasonable for a general student research and methods guidebook. Also, given that these methods are avowedly widely used, the ratio of seven men and two women contributors, all white, could have shown more parity. This should not deflect from the book's distinctive contribution in the field, but such considerations demand attention in the discipline more broadly. These questions aside, there is a great deal to recommend in this accessible, engaging and informative book. Students will surely find its practical advice on research methods, replete with a wealth of personal hints and tips by experts in the field, and the general business of designing and writing up a dissertation both useful and entertaining. For academic staff, it will be an invaluable book to refer students to, one that is likely to inspire conscientious, reflexive and critical work while providing sound practical advice for thinking through and completing the research project from design to writing up. As such it would be an excellent addition to university libraries as a standard reference work uniquely traversing the specific interface between urban research and methods and approaches.