Preface

When I was initially approached to compile a volume that could serve as an international handbook on urban policy the number of deserving themes soon exceeded the realistic limits of one volume. This is therefore the first of what is expected to become a series of volumes. Generally, themes were chosen for their relevancy in the global urban policy arena. In books of this nature, editors are tempted to find contributors whose views broadly correspond or if there are differences, do not deviate too far from one another. In this volume the approach was the complete opposite. Some of the themes selected for the book have attracted a great deal of debate over the years and in those respects, prospective contributors were purposely targeted for their known differences of opinion on those matters, hence the subtitle: 'Contentious Global Issues'. In such cases authors were asked not to shy away from controversy. The purpose of the approach was twofold: to provoke healthy debate for the sake of putting on record arguments that are often wished away by opponents on both sides of current divides, and second, to cover themes that would be of interest to a wide readership and would do justice to an international handbook of urban policy.

The volume is divided into five parts. The introduction and concluding chapters form the first and last parts of the book. The second part deals with urban morphology and structural issues. Urban sprawl versus urban densification, location in economic space and urban restructuring are the three main issues being addressed here. The question whether market-driven urbanization or enforced urban densification holds the most benefits for society over the longer term has attracted enormous attention from the academic community over the past two decades and still does. Closely tied to this theme is that of the disappearing urban–rural divide in parts of the developed and developing worlds. Both are politically loaded issues. Main arguments for and against the two forms of urban development are offered on both sides of the debate in this book. What impact globalization had on the redistribution of economic activities and what knock-on effects these patterns had on the economic transformation in former communist countries are the other two issues looked at in this part of the book.

Social and economic inequality in urban areas has always been a contentious issue. The third part of the book deals with these and other related social topics. As politically loaded concepts, urban poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth are looked at from different angles in this volume. In one chapter social exclusion is looked at from a European perspective. In others, the mobility of people, socially and in terms of their redistribution internationally, is being looked at. Migration is becoming an increasingly sensitive political issue worldwide, and the patterns of crime, terrorism and the fear of violence that are sometimes linked to it are regarded as very important factors, shaping people's perceptions about urban living today. It is these factors that give 'place' a special meaning in today's urban space.

The fourth part of the book covers a variety of urban policy issues focusing on urban sustainability. The issues that are covered range from spatial and organizational integration of urban management, to infrastructure, to environmental management issues.

Some of the most prominent researchers in each of the fields covered in this volume were approached to contribute – a list from which the editor is obviously excluded! To do justice to the idea of an international handbook, authors were asked not to write exclusively for the advanced student but to provide enough basic material to enable the novice to connect the dots in the various fields. It is hoped that, collectively, the chapters of this volume, as well as those that will follow, will provide some new insight into the width of the range of issues that impact urban policy today – insight that may open up new areas of research in the future.

Based on the selection of themes and the way in which the contributors handled the material the book should be of interest to the layman, but in particular to scholars in the fields of social science, economics, geography, regional studies and planning.

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