Initially, research on Linguistic Landscapes (henceforth LL) focused on public spaces and the views of passers-by (Landry & Bourhis 1997), and it was not obvious that these early studies would lay the ground for a whole research tradition, increasingly equipped with its own journal and edited volumes on different aspects of the topic. In this new publication, connected to a panel at ISB13 in Limerick/Ireland in 2017, the editors have collected eleven chapters around the idea of LL as a tool for learning beyond typical classroom spaces. This focus is particularly interesting, as LL started very much outside the classroom but has since taken an important position in education-related research as is visible by the choice of the topic “Semiotic landscapes in educational spaces” of the 13th LL workshop edition in Hamburg in 2022.

The three parts of the volume cover a broad geographical range from New Caledonia to Minnesota and Washington D.C., from Germany and Ukraine to Tanzania and Turkey, to Taiwan, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Ireland, and Israel, thereby reporting on an impressive number of language contexts. The first part starts off with research on spaces that are consciously designed as learning spaces, such as a German immersion village in the Midwest of the USA or Gallaudet University as a space for signers and non-signers. The New Caledonian LL becomes itself a tool for learning for Australian students who are challenged to understand social issues through the lens of language politics and representation. In the second part, learning is seen as a key task in commercial and public buildings: linguistic signs are present in Tanzanian hospitals to inform and educate patients, to teach English to textile workers in Turkey and to learn about languages in a museum space in Southampton or the international airports of New Zealand. In the third part, the LL is analyzed from an activist perspective, be it as an educator in the case of Tel Aviv-Jaffa or as part of pressure groups surrounding the Irish vote to keep or repeal strict anti-abortion laws. In a post-flood resettlement area in Taiwan, LL are used to construct new ties to new places for those who had to flee their villages and landscapes due to natural disaster. The editors themselves contribute a chapter on readings and presence of activist voices in
Göttingen (Germany) and Lviv (Ukraine), visible through the mobile signage in specific areas of the two cities.

Overall, learning is highlighted throughout the volume as an intrinsically social activity, embedded in social practice and this reminds us of the words of the educator Dewey (1990[1915]) who claimed that learning spaces needed to be equipped for working and not just listening (and reading, I would add). The LL is in this way seen as a tool to uncover processes of learning through the researchers, but it is also constructed as a relevant tool for policy makers. In this way, the LL is not necessarily focused on language learning but also on ‘civic education’ (for example related to health issues or to ways to move properly through an airport) thereby highlighting the role of language in hosting and guesting (Vigouroux 2019). This role is however deeply entrenched with power relations between those who are in possession of the ‘proper’ linguistic and civic skills and those who are supposedly in need of education. Using the LL to assign individuals their role as either owners of a place (and enact hosting) or as temporary guests with the obligation to adapt to intended ideological assemblages is one analytical thread that runs through the book, albeit rarely explicitly mentioned. If there is one critical comment that could be made about this generally very carefully edited volume, it is to not question the assumption of ‘necessary’ education of the public. In some chapters, we/them dichotomies that are constructed through the LL seem to be taken for granted (i.e. in the case of English-language teaching to Turkish speakers which is not reciprocally met with equal learning obligations for English-speaking staff or in the expectations of (the lack of) civic behavior in the hospitals). In others, the authors manage to address potential problems of othering (i.e. in opposing the migration stories of individualized skilled workers with those of groups of refugees whose skills are not mentioned as a resource) quite explicitly. Questions about the voices of users of the learning spaces could be asked and, in many places in the book, the reader is challenged to rethink the use of (typical and a-typical) educational spaces.

As this book is primarily about learning outside of designated learning spaces, it presents a fascinating endeavor that takes the reader through many spaces of learning and makes them reflect on the ways in which learning can be understood. This aligns nicely with earlier publications, by Corinne Seals, dealing with language education and sociolinguistic challenges (see Seals & Olsen-Reeder 2019). As a contribution to the growing body of literature on the LL, the book leaves the reader with diverse, well-reported, and understandable examples of how the LL can intervene in learning experiences, and it raises the relevant question about where the classroom ends. And maybe even more important: what is the classroom about? Finally, it becomes obvious how spaces, even if they are not
labeled as classrooms, are designed to educate – through and about language – and how the LL can be one way to make those processes visible.

References


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