

Ian Davis. *Shelter After Disaster*. Headington, Oxford, England: Oxford Polytechnic Press, 1978, 92 pp.

There is nothing startlingly new in this book. The facts and conclusions presented have been known for a long time – but sadly enough are not heeded. In the real world, often the ideal is lost to roles, pressures, aid quotas from a donor agency, political pressures or some “planner’s” dream as to what is best for the poor suffering victim. Yet these real world factors must be considered.

This book does an excellent job, however, of pulling together a brief history of emergency shelter, widespread myths and the “disasters” caused by the improvised emergency shelter itself.

While the book deals primarily with emergency shelters provided in underdeveloped countries, the fundamental problems are just as applicable to the more developed countries. Response to the requirement for shelter have taken three basic forms. First, there are forms of housing or shelter which either ignore or deliberately attempt to modify the cultural habits of the occupants. Secondly, there have been attempts to produce “universal” solutions. Thirdly, there have been successful attempts at shelter that fully recognize the cultural traits of the occupants.

Chapter Two, “From Myth to Reality,” makes the book worth its price. Here the author lists a series of situations that are assumed in the minds of the general public (placed there most frequently by the media in attempts to dramatize the event). Then he tells what really is the situation. For example, the picture is given that disaster victims are dazed to a state of inactivity or that victims panic. Yet there is no evidence to support this; in fact, the evidence indicates the reverse is true. To the professionals in the field of disaster response, these facts are well known. Unfortunately, those to whom this book would be more enlightening — the policy makers, media representatives and politicians — are less likely ever to see it.

The book is somewhat limited for full application to the developed nations that do not depend on outside resources in time of disaster. The examples and illustrations (which incidently are very good) are more oriented toward underdeveloped nations. Hopefully, the book will get into the right hands.

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