

REVIEW ESSAY

Broadbent, Alan.

Urban Nation: Why We Need to Give Power Back to the Cities to Make Canada Strong.

Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2008.

245 pp.

ISBN: 9780002008839.

Sancton, Andrew.

The Limits of Boundaries: Why City-Regions Cannot be Self-Governing.

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008.

173 pp.

ISBN 978-0-7735-3464-3.

It is now relatively easy to find the data to support the idea that Canada has become an urban nation. The share of population living in cities, the destination of recent immigrants, the location of economic output and a number of other variables all clearly point to Canada as an urban nation, no longer the rural-resource based country of yesteryear. Yet this fact of our new national urban circumstance raises a series of complicated and thorny questions about how to best govern an urban nation. Fortunately, two recent books will help to stimulate a healthy and comprehensive debate. One is Alan Broadbent's *Urban Nation: Why We Need to Give Power Back to the Cities to Make Canada Strong* and the other is Andrew Sancton's *Limits of Boundaries: Why City-Regions Cannot be Self-Governing*. Just a casual look at each book's subtitle suggests the differing perspectives and ideas regarding the future governing of our urban nation.

Urban Nation's most provocative thesis is the creation of city-provinces out of Canada's three largest urban regions: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. To support this bold rewriting of Canada's political map, *Urban Nation* begins by examining Canada's settlement history. Chapter one focuses on the two waves of urbanization, the first occurring during the Industrial Revolution when Canada's cities and towns were populated by rural to urban migration trends. The second wave of urbanization occurred between 1950 and 1985, which resulted in a consolidation of urban growth within the three cities of Toronto,

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Montreal and Vancouver. Chapter two examines the role immigration has had on the growth and development of Canada's system of cities. It discusses some of the challenges and benefits of increased immigration on the policies and programs of local, provincial and national governments. Chapter three pulls together the themes of urbanization and immigration discussed in the previous two chapters to examine a new deal for cities, one that would address the fiscal, political and governmental issues to enable cities to control their own destinies. The next four chapters explore in greater detail the issues of governance (Chapter 4), powers (Chapter 5), finance (Chapter 6) and leadership (Chapter 7) that would need to be addressed in the formulation of any new deal for Canadian cities. These chapters raise important questions regarding the best type of governance structures, financing of city programs and infrastructure needs, and the brand of leadership that is needed as Canadian cities enter the new millennium.

The next three chapters offer some solutions with each providing more progressively bolder ideas than the next. Chapter 8 takes aim at the federal government's neglect of Canadian cities. It offers ways in which the federal government could help in areas of mass urban transit, low-income housing, immigration and education. The next chapter, however, begins by stating that the ideas and approaches outlined in previous chapters are mere "baby steps" which offer only incremental measures for cities that are now acting as mature governmental bodies trying to survive, and better yet prosper, in an increasingly linked global economy and environment. Bold steps are needed; and in Chapter 9, Broadbent outlines an ambitious plan whereby the provinces would transfer powers of provinces to Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal.

Chapter 10 takes this bold step by redrawing the Canada's political map to create 1) the new city-provinces of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, 2) combine Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba into one province, 3) combine the Maritime Provinces into one province, 4) and create federal electoral districts that truly reflect the realities of our Urban Nation. Broadbent bases this new map on a variety of principles including subsidiarity, representation by population, wealth sharing etc. Of course, Broadbent realizes that the process of creating this new map will be politically difficult, but he asks, "what is the alternative?" Do we continue with small incremental changes—a new city charter here, a local government boundary adjustment over there, a new upper tier government somewhere else? These incremental measures will not give our country's best assets—its city-regions—with the necessary governance tools and structures.

Urban Nation's bold proposal for the rewriting of Canada's political map is curiously devoid of any specific discussion of boundaries. Not much is said about differing notions of what constitutes the limits of city-regions. In fact,

Urban Nation's solitary map illustrates Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver as only large black dots. It is these unanswered questions of boundaries and governance that is the focus of Sancton's *The Limits of Boundaries*.

The central thesis of *Limits of Boundaries* is that cities cannot be self-governing because of the fluid nature of their boundaries, thereby differentiating them from the more stable boundaries of sovereign states. Advocating greater autonomy for cities means attempting to fix boundaries that essentially cannot be fixed in space. Urban, economic and political spaces are constantly contested ones, which raises problems and issues when trying to transfer more powers to municipal governments. Over what territory will these new powers be applied?

Sancton begins with a review of well-known authors and their ideas of city-regions and metropolitan governance. In Chapter two, he observes that the boundaries of central governments, i.e., sovereign states, have been remarkably stable over time with boundary changes usually coming in times of war rather than through political negotiation. In the next chapter we learn that the demarcation of municipal boundaries has traditionally followed the urban built-up area, but urban growth beyond municipal boundaries poses problems. Questions of boundary change (annexations, amalgamations, etc) and the creation of metropolitan levels of government are discussed and ultimately dismissed as viable solutions for the better governance of city-regions.

Sancton argues that, because a city-region's urban-economic growth will render municipal boundaries arbitrary and changing them is wrought with definitional problems of where to draw the political line, it is basically futile to change municipal boundaries to best match the fluid urban-economic sphere of the city-region. Chapter four explores the current theories and ideas regarding city-regions with a particular look at European examples.

Overall, municipal governments must deal with boundaries that do not match the real metropolitan area. This mismatch ultimately requires a complex mixture of intergovernmental relationships and institutions. Chapter five examines the relationship between central and regional municipal governments. Here the reader is challenged to consider whether municipal governments are the only form of government appropriate to governing the city-region. Sancton posits the idea that other institutions, in particular central governments or special-purpose bodies can, and often do, have important roles to play in the planning and development of city-regions. In particular, central governments are advocated as the best authority over long range major infrastructure projects and plans.

In Chapter 6, Toronto is presented as a case study by examining the changing boundaries of the Toronto city-region from the 1990s discussion of the Greater Toronto Area as presented in the Golden Report, to the Central

Ontario Zone defined in the Ontario Smart Growth Panel, to the more recent establishment of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Recent provincial leadership in creating the Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan and the Green Belt plan for the Toronto city-region is presented as an argument against more self-governing powers to Toronto and perhaps a lesson in the role provincial governments can play in the proper governing of city-regions.

Defining the boundaries around city-regions is quite difficult. *Urban Nation* challenges us to think in bold terms to redraw city boundaries to better match our nation's changing economy and economic links with the rest of the world. *The Limits of Boundaries* forces the reader to think seriously about these boundaries, but argues that stable multipurpose boundaries are almost impossible to draw, making it difficult to design the institutions necessary for self governance.

Both books share a common concern about Canadian city-regions—however defined—and examine solutions that are needed to best govern and plan for their development. Such an examination, both authors would agree, must go beyond the boundaries of the central urban municipality.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Andrew, Caroline, John Biles, Myer Siemiatycki and Erin Tolley, Editors.

Electing a Diverse Canada: the Representation of Immigrants, Minorities, and Women.

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

278 pp.

ISBN: 9780774814867.

“I never thought I would live to see this day” was the repeated comment of many African-Americans on the inauguration of Barack Obama. The hope and inspiration drawn from the event speaks to the importance of our democratically elected representatives looking like us, speaking for us, reflecting our experiences and hopefully acting on behalf of groups long denied proportionate and effective representation.

Do Canada’s politicians reflect our diversity and our supposed commitment to a multicultural society? This edited volume shows that federal, provincial and municipal elected representatives in major urban cities across the country are disproportionately white, male, middle-aged, well-educated, and of European ancestry. No one should be surprised by this. The book adds to an already significant body of research that has repeatedly described the under-representation of women, visible minorities, First Nations peoples, and new Canadians amongst elected representatives. While the book does not follow historical trends, when taken together with other research, the conclusion must be that our elected representatives have never reflected or represented our diversity and any progress has been shamefully slow.

The chapters follow a similar methodology. Each author—Myer Siemiatycki on Toronto, Irene Bloemraad on Vancouver, Carolle Simard on Montreal, Shannon Sampert on Edmonton and Calgary, John Biles and Erin Tolley on Ottawa, Karen Bird on Hamilton, Joseph Garcea on Regina and Saskatoon, Karen Murray on Halifax, and Brenda O’Neill and Jared Wesley on Winnipeg—compares the gender, ethnicity, religion, visible minority, age and education and foreign born characteristics of each city’s census region with those of municipal, provincial and federal representatives elected to office in the 2004 Federal election and the closest provincial and municipal election years. Information on the background of representatives was obtained through surveys or other information where respondents did not reply.

Chapter after chapter reports that elected representatives do not reflect the diversity of the population: “power in Montreal remains concentrated in the hands of a social and ethnic elite”(p. 256); “the archetypal elected official [in Halifax] is 51 years old, university educated, White, Anglo-Saxon, male, [and]

Christian” (p.180); “The under-representation of women, First Nations, Metis, Franco-Manitobans, and the growing visible minority populations make it clear that the city’s political leadership fails to reflect much of Winnipeg’s diversity” (p. 256); and so on.

If the book’s strength lies in documenting the pattern of under-representation of demographic groups at all elected levels and in all major urban areas, its weakness is in explaining from the pluralist framework (in which the book is firmly rooted), why these representational deficits persist, some for as long as the history of Canadian liberal democracy. While many of the chapters locate important barriers to mirror representation in political institutions and assume that they can be overcome, too few chapters look for answers in a political class that continues to fashion or defend exclusionary representative institutions such as disproportionate electoral systems, the rationing of representation apparent in municipal amalgamations, election campaign and party finance rules that favour the wealthy and the defunding of effective proponents such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

Not enough is made of the repeated finding that representatives are well-educated and generally wealthy even when they come from an under-represented group. Often unmentioned is one of the greatest representational deficits: that of working class Canadians. Bird observes that in Hamilton “not a single representative was employed as a tradesman or industrial worker, despite this being the largest occupational group (27 percent) in the city” (p. 148).

The chapters on Ottawa and Halifax are the only two that investigate the struggles of under-represented groups to participate in the political process and the limited gains they have achieved. How these groups are able to organize to build their resources, overcome obstacles placed in their way, form coalitions to broaden their claims, and overcome the divisions that flow from their multiple identities will ultimately determine their success in achieving the presentation of their needs. The next book on this important topic should focus there.

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Foran, Max.

Expansive Discourses: Urban Sprawl in Calgary 1945 - 1978.

Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2009.

276 pp.

ISBN: 9781897425138.

Within the Canadian context, Calgary is a city that perhaps best exemplifies sprawl. Since the end of World War II it has spread outward in the form of suburbs composed primarily of single-family houses, all at a relatively low density. While not nearly as shocking as the sprawl found in many places in the United States, Calgary's has attracted criticism from a number of quarters for its excessive land consumption, destruction of farmland, increase in auto-dependency, lack of options in housing type, and overall sameness. *How* this has occurred is an important question, as it reveals much about the planning paradigms that have influenced city growth, and even more about ourselves and our culture that paved the way for these ideas and forms.

Max Foran, an historian and long-time educator, currently teaching at the University of Calgary, has painstakingly reconstructed the who, what, when, where and why of Calgary's suburban development during the period of 1945 - 1978. Author of many books and countless articles, Foran is at his best when recounting the deals that created the city. His research is impeccable, his love of the drama obvious, and he brings alive the sequence of events and processes that eventually became the pattern of development now taken for granted.

Although many readily point fingers at the development industry, Foran identifies that there were "five influencing factors in the suburbanization process," including the City of Calgary and the land development companies, but also the policies pursued by the provincial government and the Central (later Canada) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and, importantly, the home buyer.

Essentially, the decision by the City in 1953 to allow the private sector to finance and construct the emerging suburbs signified the beginning of what was to become a long-running era of design-by-default on the part of developers. Several development companies were poised to take advantage of this situation and were well equipped to plan and construct the neighbourhoods that were required by the booming and newly affluent population.

Foran organizes the book chronologically, with Part One covering the period between 1945-1963, documenting the origins of the patterns that would be established, and Part Two dealing with 1963-1978, describing the continued expansion of Calgary's suburbs through the processes of annexation. The relationships between the City and the development industry are also explored.

Calgary has always been friendly to the interests of developers, and is also a city with a history of rejecting progressive plans, from the Mawson Plan of 1914,

to the Urban Design Plan of 1978, to this year's Plan-It Calgary, which was eventually adopted in a watered-down version. Much of the opposition to the goals of the plan, which would have gone a long way towards combating patterns of sprawl, came from the development industry, which is now highly organized and institutionalized. It is unfortunate that the issues have become so polarized, and politicized, as it will likely take a major crisis to turn the situation around.

Although Foran has provided, as usual, a highly detailed accounting of the historical events leading to what we see today, the book may have benefitted by a few additions. First, it is frustrating that Foran stops at 1978. The greatest value of this book is likely in the lessons learned, and when it ends with events thirty years ago, it is too easy to avoid looking at today. The evidence is there, and just waiting to be elucidated, and hopefully Foran is busy on a second volume. Second, for a book that deals with physical urban form, there are far too few photographs and maps. It is so important to be able to see what the processes, decisions and policies produced in visual form. There are also several errors in the photo captions (for example, photos on pages 48 and 66 misidentify the directions), many of the photos are too general (for example, those of Fish Creek), and some do not have identifiers (for example, the cover photo is never located as Royal Oak in northwest Calgary). To be more useful, these details should be included.

Expansive Discourses is an important book. The audiences most likely to benefit include City officials and the development industry. Students and professionals in the environmental design disciplines would probably benefit from consideration of this book—alongside one that includes more graphics that illustrate the city's evolution, so that they could more completely understand the physical results of these many years of deals and decisions.

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Maginn, Paul J., Susan Thompson, and Matthew Tonto, Editors.

Qualitative Housing Analysis: An International Perspective, Studies in Qualitative Methodology volume 10. Bingley, UK: JAI Press, 2008.

289 pp.

ISBN: 9781846639906.

Qualitative Housing Analysis is a welcome addition to works on qualitative methods in housing studies, and in policy and planning more generally. Intending to undermine the domination of these fields by quantitative argumentation and

evidence-based policy making, the editors have assembled a set of papers that show the usefulness of a broad range of qualitative approaches and that also give good leads into the various reaches of the methods literature. Most of the chapters are designed to include authors' reflections on previous work, describing their research processes and explaining how these relate to their overall research programs.

In the opening chapter the three editors develop their vision of a 'pragmatic renaissance' for qualitative work, which was proposed in a previous volume in the series. Accumulating knowledge on various contexts and circumstances in policy formulation and implementation will enable qualitative analysts to "engage strategically in the debates that matter" (p. 5). This seems like a useful counter-strategy to the narrow pursuit of universally best practices. The editors argue for building a "sedimentary evidence base" (p. 20) through replication, standardization of methods and research questions, and quantification of results. They are aware that this may leave readers—and apparently some authors in this volume—feeling that attention to specifics, which drives qualitative work in post-positivist methodologies, is at risk.

Part I, Home and Homelessness, includes three chapters. Perkins, Thorns and Winstanley detail research processes, including face-to-face and telephone interviewing and document analysis, from a number of studies in New Zealand centred on prevailing cultural attitudes to home and planning. Martin and Kunnen report on studies of homelessness in Australia, outlining the strategies and principles guiding their practice. Robinson rejects categories that "contain homelessness within particular measurable parameters" (p. 95) and argues ardently for attention to emotional and corporeal experiences.

Part II, Researching Complex Housing Needs and Worlds, also consists of three chapters. Martin stresses the "importance of particularity" (p. 137), clearly showing how a study with existing residents in an area undergoing gentrification in Notting Hill was conceptualized and undertaken. Lyons adopts an essentially positivist framework, involving hypotheses, generalizations and an orientation towards systems rather than world views, in a study of post-tsunami housing interventions in Sri Lanka. Reflecting on studies with "Gypsy/Travellers" in the UK, Lomax gives innovative strategies for incorporating cultural knowledge and sensitivity to gender and age in peer-led research.

The four chapters of Part III are the most programmatic contributions of the volume. Adams *et al.* employ self-directed photography, sound walks and interviewing to "explore people's sensorial experiences and understandings of their local environments" (p. 185). Arthurson reviews literature on social mixing over the period 1990-2007, making the case that studies generally omit residents' day-to-day experiences and thus are unable to explain how purported benefits of social mix might actually come about. Blokland and volume editors Maginn and Thompson provide an overview of ethnography in their studies of non-participa-

tion in community development in Rotterdam and New Haven. As a methodology focused on “relational complexities and dynamics” (p. 232), Blokland *et al.* argue that ethnography can provide empirical strategies consistent with Patsy Healey’s institutionalism. Jourdan introduces work in grounded theory, in which theoretical statements are produced through induction within the study, rather than in any sense separately from empirical work. Jourdan shows that this orientation led to unexpected yet useful findings in examining public housing redevelopment in the USA (HOPE VI).

Part IV, Conclusions, consists of one chapter. Franklin reviews ethnographic work on housing since publishing an early programmatic piece in *Housing Studies* and, lamenting progress to date, calls for wider adoption through increased government funding.

It is a great strength of this volume that the contributors give a lot of insight into their research processes, thus enabling readers to evaluate the contributions of the various qualitative methods illustrated. It seems puzzling however, that the editors did not include a conclusion reflecting on the contents, though the chapters by Franklin and by Blokland *et al.* might suggest a subtext: ethnography is highlighted in the context of the editors’ call for standardization of methods. Other quibbles: there is no index, and the title conveys a greater international scope than the volume delivers. More substantively, important debates about philosophical orientations are underplayed and the more superficial issue of qualitative vs. quantitative approaches prevails. Nevertheless, this is a useful collection, supporting the broadening of methods in housing studies and wider policy work.

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Rotberg, Howard.

Exploring Vancouverism: The Political Culture of Canada’s Lotus Land.

Brantford, Vancouver: CanadianValuesPress, 2008.

210 pp.

ISBN: 9780973406511.

Exploring Vancouverism represents Howard Rotberg’s attempt to understand what he sees as the prevailing ideology and values of Vancouverites. Using Alfred Tennyson’s poem “The Lotus Eaters” as a metaphor for Vancouver’s culture, Rotberg portrays Vancouver as a city of greed, narcissism, and consumerism whose inhabitants exhibit an inauthentic progressivism that ignores issues of morality and social justice. In his view, Vancouverites lack “traditional Canadian values” such as “fairness and modesty” and are instead obsessed with protecting and pro-

moting Vancouver's image as a "global city." To promote this image, he argues that decision-makers in Vancouver spend millions of dollars bringing the Winter Olympic games to the city and planting trees in parks, money that, in his opinion, should be spent instead on affordable housing for young people and the working classes.

Rotberg presents affordable housing as an issue of social justice, and identifies multiple aspects of Vancouver policy and culture (legal or otherwise) that he believes are responsible for unnecessarily high housing costs. Two particular policies will be of interest to those involved in urban planning and policy, namely Vancouver's "developer pays" approach to financing new development, and the so-called "EcoDensity Charter" that is intended to promote environmental sustainability.

The "developer pays" approach to financing new development requires developers to pay for costs associated with providing certain types of amenities in conjunction with new development, such as parks and other facilities. Rotberg (himself a developer of affordable housing projects) argues that these costs are ultimately not paid by the developer, but are instead passed on to buyers of new residential units in the form of higher selling prices, thus making housing more expensive for newcomers. He believes that the cost of new development should be borne instead by existing (wealthy) Vancouver homeowners in the form of higher property taxes, thus helping to reduce the selling price of new homes.

Vancouver's "EcoDensity Charter" purports to incorporate environmental sustainability into all city planning decisions, and calls for increased development densities to further various sustainable development goals. In Rotberg's view, however, the EcoDensity Charter overlooks the difficulties young people face in entering the housing market. He contends that increased residential densities are insufficient to keep housing prices in check, noting that housing prices have continued to rise in recent years despite increased densities. He concludes that words such as "sustainability," "livability," and "affordability" are meaningless when used by Vancouver politicians, who (in his view) act as "shills" for real estate developers by promoting development patterns that do more to make developers (and existing property owners) wealthy than to help young people buy a home.

Overall, while the book is entertaining and potentially illuminating for those who look no deeper than Vancouver's natural beauty, it suffers from a general lack of convincing empirical evidence to support the various conclusions reached regarding Vancouver's problems and what causes them. Rotberg has a tendency to present statements as facts that would be more appropriately treated as research questions to be addressed in a more rigorous, objective fashion than is utilized in this book. While his conclusions are not necessarily incorrect, they are typically only a subset of all plausible conclusions, and he does not always succeed in convincing the reader that his conclusions are more plausible than the alternatives. As a result, the reader cannot reasonably conclude (for example) that Vancouver's

developers, politicians, and property owners are greedier than those of other cities, or that residents of other Canadian cities have stronger values relating to modesty and fairness.

But there is little question that Vancouver is an expensive city in which to purchase a home. One of the book's strengths is its eleven-point plan (drawing on both the author's experiences as a developer and insights gained from other cities) for promoting housing that is more affordable and ending what is, in the author's opinion, an outright "fraud on the young."

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