

BOOK REVIEWS

Boudreau, Julie-Anne, Roger Keil and Douglas Young.

Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

247 pp.

ISBN: 9781442600935.

The authors of this book are far from shy about stating where they stand on efforts to elevate Toronto's prominence in the global city movement. In their words, "cities have become the political place where the dirty work of globalization is being done" (p. 23). Within the pages of *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism*, readers will find well-researched, wide-ranging accounts of how ideologically-driven policies, and altered structures of governance, affected the development and character of the city. Although the term neoliberalism is generally used to denote the period that began around 1980 with the governments of Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in Britain, the authors focus primarily on describing the implications and impacts of political shifts and events that occurred between the mid-1990s and the present.

The authors contribute to the literature in two notable ways. First, their informative and compelling narrative underscores the extent to which the fortunes of a global city such as Toronto are dependent on, and potentially vulnerable to, shifting political ideologies and regimes at the provincial and national levels. Second, they demonstrate how public policy formation and public investment decisions can be dramatically re-shaped by "ideas in good currency" propagated in the popular literature.

The fact that Toronto has functioned as a principal laboratory for applying economic development theories popularized by Richard Florida in his bestselling 2003 book, *The Rise of Creative Class*, makes *Changing Toronto* particularly timely, and potentially of interest to a broad readership. Indeed, given the extent to which Florida's ideas seemed to find a receptive home in Toronto, it seems far from accidental that he accepted a lucrative position at the University of Toronto's Prosperity Research Centre in 2007. Three of Florida's postulates are that: 1.) economic success and prosperity comes to cities that become and remain "competi-

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tive”; 2.) a city’s ability to become and stay “competitive” will be heavily affected by its ability to attract and retain members of “the creative class”; and 3.) where members of the creative class choose to live is heavily determined by quality of life considerations, including environmental quality, architectural and design quality, and a vital arts and cultural scene.

As the authors make clear, Florida’s “creative city hype” exerted considerable influence on policy-making affecting Toronto. For one thing, it encouraged significant public investments in art and culture, despite cutbacks in government spending in other areas having a more direct effect on general public welfare. A Cultural Plan was commissioned by the City council in May 2000, and two years later the federal and provincial governments announced that they were committing \$233 million toward seven cultural regeneration projects, including a new opera House and refurbishment of the Royal Ontario Museum. Celebrity architects were brought in to design major projects, because in a knowledge-based economy entrepreneurs and businesses can locate anywhere in the world. They write, “[b]eauty [has been] instrumentalized in the interests of building the image of a global city and, in turn, attracting footloose capital and knowledge workers, whom Torontonians are told are essential if the city is not to ‘fall behind’” (p. 110).

The extent to which official planning agencies and city planners supported the “growth machine” and advanced the global city agenda is persuasively documented. The authors note that the preparation of a new Official Plan, begun in 1999 and completed in 2005, introduced looser, more flexible development regulations that effectively did away with previous limitations on development density to make Toronto more attractive to investors. They further describe how planners were enlisted to “sell” Torontonians on the virtues of more intense development by arguing that such development can enhance the beauty and drama of the city. Meanwhile, Toronto’s growing population has become progressively more segregated and concentrated along economic, social and ethnic lines, and these settlement patterns have had an impact on the quality of life of large segments of the city’s population living in what they call the “In-between City,” or the extensive “undefined areas” between the fashionable downtown and waterfront and the booming edge cities on the metropolitan fringe. The contrast the book draws between the stigmatized “In-Between City”—where community issues languish on the urban policy agenda—and the glitzy veneer of the city’s “global city” PR image, could not be more stark.

Interest in *Changing Toronto* need not be confined to a Canadian readership. Given the highly fragmented, inefficient structures of local government typically found in American metropolitan regions, the book’s assessment of the pros and cons of the amalgamation of Toronto area governments that took place in 1998 should be of considerable interest to urban planners, planning educators and policy makers in the U.S. As a professor of urban planning, I admit to having

embraced the arguments made by American proponents of governmental consolidation such as Myron Orfield and David Rusk. I had been therefore predisposed to believe that the amalgamation in Toronto's case was a positive development in regional governance. Boudreau, Keil and Young make it clear, however, that the "top-down" approach to amalgamation employed by the Tories was aimed at pleasing their rural and exurban base by downloading costly social welfare and transit responsibilities to the city, while at the same time limiting the ability of local government to raise the funds necessary to meet the growing demands associated with Toronto's world city reality.

The writing style in *Changing Toronto* can be overly obscure and pedantic at times. For example, the following sentence on page 67 left me completely befuddled: "The set of demands of civil society in regards to urban politics, which is not only restricted to economic growth and the critique of it, is separated from urban development politics and reconstructed as a realm of secondary relevance to municipal governance." The repetitiveness with which the authors continually apply the label "neo-liberal" to whatever they are discussing also becomes a bit tiresome. Give the reader a bit of credit for getting the drift of the argument! Nevertheless, the compelling nature of the material throughout the book is well worth whatever effort it takes to wade through intermittent instances of convoluted speech and verbiage. *Changing Toronto* is an engaging and welcome addition to the international literature on global cities and global city regions.

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Gillette, Howard, Jr.

Civitas by Design: Building Better Communities from the Garden City to the New Urbanism. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

224 pp.

ISBN: 9780812242478.

In this valuable book, Gillette reviews attempts over the past century by architects, planners, and developers to create public spaces and residential environments that will change users' social behavior. Gillette traces the history of major movements in planning aimed at furthering social goals through physical design, and describes how some of the early ideas became degraded in practice.

Gillette recounts how, in the last half of the 19th century, progressives and other civic-minded people were concerned about the terrible living conditions of immigrants in New York City. Settlement House workers tried to improve

housing conditions for the poor through education, such as teaching habits of good hygiene, housekeeping, and citizenship. Designers, on the other hand, tried to improve housing conditions by improving the condition of the houses themselves: building at lower densities, introducing stricter building regulations, developing model tenements, and creating visible symbols of civic order and unity. They believed that these improvements would turn residents from crime and vice, and make them caring citizens. Gillette shows how the belief in social change through design dominated the agenda of the emerging planning profession.

Ebenezer Howard's Garden City proposal was intended not only to improve living conditions, but also to change the prevailing social arrangements through collective ownership of land. Income from increased property values would be used for the benefit of the entire community. However, collective ownership was not what financial backers had in mind, and perhaps that is why Howard changed the title of his book to *Garden Cities for Tomorrow* from *A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. The designers of the first garden city, Letchworth, believed that social reform could be achieved through physical form, including a unified composition and a clearly defined civic centre. This belief carried over to the United States and inspired the designs of Forest Hills Gardens (New York), Yorkship Village and Radburn (New Jersey), and Greenbelt (Maryland). It was the message behind the documentary film, *The City*, shown at the 1939 World's Fair.

Clarence Perry believed that by designing the neighbourhood as a discrete, small-town setting one could create "the kind of environment where vigorous health, rich social life, civic efficiency, and a progressive community consciousness would spontaneously develop and permanently flourish" (p. 65). Unfortunately, as Gillette explains, in its application the neighbourhood unit concept was stripped of social purpose and public amenities, and became the model for the suburbs. Similarly, developers of the early shopping centres believed that they were enriching the suburbs with centres of community and cultural activity. More recently, the New Urbanists believe that community can be furthered by means of higher density, clear boundaries, a connected street pattern, a civic centre, and a unified composition. Reacting to what they see as the facelessness and emptiness of the suburbs, they return to the small-town model of the Garden City, but with the additional goal of serving a diverse population. When combined with the ideas of Oscar Newman, who argued that if housing areas are designed as "the physical expression of a social fabric that defends itself" they will diminish criminal activity, New Urbanist principles find expression in the HOPE VI program, aimed at producing more community-minded citizens by replacing high-rise public housing with clusters of houses that have the look of neighbourhoods.

Today, communities like Radburn and Greenbelt survive as historical artifacts, apart from the mainstream, exceptions rather than the rule, their lessons re-

duced to formulas for the arrangement of buildings. The failure of New Urbanist approaches for reconstructing Gulf towns after Hurricane Katrina highlights the inadequacy of physical design by itself to cure social problems. James Rouse, in his work in Columbia and, later, in an urban neighbourhood, realized that to create social change one must address multiple needs, such as employment, health, education, and safety.

The central lesson I take away from the book is that design can contribute to social change, but design by itself it is neither necessary nor sufficient. Lessons from the past raise important questions for us today: Are the design disciplines as presently constituted too narrow to create community? Must we decide between generating community at the level of the neighbourhood (which would favor homogeneity) or of the larger society (which would favor mixed income)? Must design be directed at changing residents' attitudes (sense of community, pride,) or their behavior (participation, interaction, cooperation)? Gillette makes one ponder these and other questions. His book should be read by design professionals, and should be required reading for all students of urban design, architecture, and planning.

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Sancton, Andrew and Robert Young.

Foundations of Governance: Municipal Government in Canada's Provinces.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

544 pp.

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The impacts of local governance on land use, democratic processes, economic development, and access to services have only become more visible in recent years as the Canadian population becomes increasingly urban. In this edited volume, Andrew Sancton and Robert Young present an overview of municipal governments and their oft-politicized relationships with Canada's provincial governments. Themselves experts in local governance issues, Sancton and Young have assembled scholars from each province, and each covers essentials on the history and structure of municipal legislation in their respective provinces, municipal functions, demography, and municipal finances. The chapters follow a common template to simplify comparisons.

The book presents the complexities of provincial-municipal relationships and municipalities' transition from "creatures of the provinces" to "democratically elected, autonomous, responsible and accountable level[s] of government" (Smith

and Stewart, p. 289). The overall theme is that municipalities have been slowly but surely moving from the former to the latter, although the provinces still retain control and oversight. Some provincial governments seem willing to make the transition and give municipalities more autonomy, while others have been more reluctant. Provincial-municipal relationships are subject to shifting tensions related to the political party in power, the downloading of responsibilities to the municipalities, municipal government reform, and the decrease in transfer payments from the provinces.

Power dynamics play a key role in the book: David Siegel, in his chapter on Ontario, admits that municipalities generally dislike the provincial oversight of the Ontario Municipal Board, with a “major irritant” being that the Board usually decides in favour of proponents who want a change in the official plan or zoning by-law to undertake new development (Siegel, 40). Belley et al. acknowledge that, with five levels of governance in the Montreal and Quebec City agglomerations, local governance is “increasingly difficult to understand”; this fragmentation, they argue, has a major effect on how cities handle important issues such as social housing and transportation (Belley et al., 83).

Perhaps the most revealing section of each chapter concerns demography, and cumulatively these solidify Canada’s reputation as a sparsely-populated country with most people concentrated in a few large cities. The aging of the population is a particular challenge in smaller communities, since older residents “use less of the education system, need different types of recreation facilities, need public transit and expanded and affordable housing options” (Carter, 232). The lack of representation of some groups in local government is also an issue: In virtually every chapter, authors cite the very low percentage of female and visible minority mayors and councillors in Canadian municipalities. Some authors write extensively about municipal relationships with First Nations and Aboriginal governments while others do not. Notably, Tom Carter (Manitoba) and Patrick J. Smith and Kennedy Stewart (British Columbia) dwell on these relationships in the most detail.

Despite its political science focus, the book would be useful for urban planning students in Canada. Each chapter summarizes the legislation that enables towns and cities to create by-laws and official community plans and identifies the provincial bodies that oversee local and regional planning decisions. In some cases, such as Carter’s chapter on Manitoba, the authors explain planning legislation and frameworks in significant detail, underlining the importance of the Municipal Acts and city Charters in creating comprehensive growth management policies for urban centres. It becomes clear that major differences in municipal responsibilities (such as social services in the case of Ontario and education in Nova Scotia) create much higher expenditures for some municipalities.

While the editors have succeeded in compiling a primer in local governance, in some cases more clarity is needed. The chapter on Quebec municipal governance, for example, presents such a confounding explanation of the multiple and overlapping institutions, Acts, and jurisdictions that it is likely far too opaque for most readers. Some authors managed to summarize their province's local governance in a mere thirty pages (for British Columbia and Prince Edward Island), while others extended their explanations to almost seventy (in the case of Quebec and Alberta).

Overall, however, the editors have presented a complex overview of municipal institutions and provincial-municipal relationships that will be foundational for students and practitioners in political science, geography, urban planning, and economics.

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