Document généré le 18 avr. 2024 22:37

**Urban History Review**
**Revue d'histoire urbaine**

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

# Urban Development in Canada

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Numéro 1-74, june 1974

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019665ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1019665ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)
1918-5138 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Careless, J. M. S. (1974). Urban Development in Canada. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (1-74), 9–14. https://doi.org/10.7202/1019665ar

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The following two papers were prepared for "A Debate on the Character of Canadian Urban Development" held June 5, 1974, at the annual meetings of the Canadian Historical Association at the University of Toronto. Chairman-commentator was Fernand Ouellet of the Department of History, Carleton University. The presentations were followed by a lively debate which we hope will be a continuing one. The editors welcome the submission of comments on the papers.

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA

It will come as no surprise that my approach to urban development in Canada may be labelled metropolitanism. That really makes me both less and more than an urban historian--but more or less an urban historian anyway. On the one hand, many major themes in urban history do not come into a metropolitan analysis, except in a subsidiary way. On the other, much of its concern lies outside the city, and in the area of the hinterland. For a metropolitan approach essentially seeks to relate town and country, or better, to study the complex of reciprocal relationships between the concentrated population centre and the extended community beyond it. Any "reciprocal" surely should suggest that both sides need equal billing.

Put another way, the metropolitan concern is not *primarily* how "the city" affects those within it--its internal patterns, processes and problems--but how "the city" affects and is affected by those outside it. Naturally, I recognize that this formulation could set up an unreal division--and I don't want that, any more than to impose a rigid dichotomy as between urban and rural. Nevertheless, in point of priority regarding work to be done, since no one (and no approach) can cover everything, I would contend that it is both reasonable and practical to consider metropolitanism as "exo-urban" history, in distinction from "intra-urban" history; even though one knows there will be overlaps.

This is to say that "intra-urban" historical study might obviously deal with land use, spatial relations, occupational patterns, social mobility, class and political organization, and much more, inside a city (or cities, if a comparative approach be followed). But "exo-urban" study

would be more concerned with how a city or cities had affected land use, occupational patterns, social and political organization and so on, outside and beyond the city--from the in-close umland or urban field to the farthest reaches of the hinterland that appertains. And, at the same time, such exo-urban study might no less concern itself with how hinterland resources, markets, investment opportunities, and potentialities for being serviced and directed, also influenced the development of urban centres selected for examination. Admittedly, this last would bring us back to consider developments within the city, from its actual physical growth, to the shaping of its power elite, its occupational patterns, political structure, etc.--but, the point is, these would be dealt with in the primary context of exo-urban influences and concerns. There may be overlap here, indeed; yet it is very much a matter of stress, and of angles chosen in regard to whether the material to be dealt with is being handled from an exo-urban point of view.

In any case, one may note that the exo-urban approach has been well exemplified already in Canada, as long ago as 1955 in Jacob Spelt's pioneering work, *The Urban Development in South Central Ontario*, and subsequently has been carried on by him, Donald Kerr and others, in relating external, metropolitan factors to the internal growth of major centres like Toronto. It could be added that Kerr particularly came to make explicit application of the concepts of metropolitanism in this regard--a fact I scarcely look upon with disfavour.

One might hold that a metropolitan or exo-urban approach is no more than the study of urban systems long pursued by urban and historical geographies. It is so--in part. It is quite conceivable, and far from unusual, to treat the interrelations of cities, to analyze urban hierarchies, to study "threshold" or "gateway" concepts in regard to their developing or declining roles in a network of urban places. Yet this is not the whole story--because, again, it can leave out all or much of the hinterland side of the question. To repeat, metropolitanism involves not just the treatment of cities but of the countryside with which they interact.

This is most simply conceived as the study of the interplay between the concentrated, specialized and relatively complex communities

termed urban and the extended, diffused, and relatively less complex communities found in the hinterland areas. At one extreme in this scheme of relations lies the great city, the metropolis, the most concentrated, specialized and complex sort of urban community. At the other, in the history of Canada, lies the frontier, the least occupied, specialized and complicated kind of socio-areal unit: or, in other words, a hinterland society in an initial (or perhaps arrested) stage of development. In between, in both time and space, we can find agricultural, fishing, lumbering, ranching and other hinterland communities; and hamlet, village and lesser-town or city urban centres. Yet all enter into the societal complex of relations, and all undergo historic processes of change and shifting significance, of growth and decline--for "development" does not necessarily connote a one-way path of progress.

This whole picture is, of course, an abstracted schematization of the metropolis-hinterland relationships which does not cover specific, actual cases in their wide variety, but it still provides a frame and scale, ranging from the highest and most "citified" level of urban places to the most "countrified" level, if you like, of Canadian society--the frontier--which represents the lowest intensity of human occupation and the least alteration of the original physical environment; always apologizing to the Indians who had already notably altered it. Yet we European interlopers have to start somewhere.

One can carry the schematization further, for what it is worth, by providing a kind of typology of stages for frontiers, through which they evolved in Canadian history to become mature hinterlands--though once more they might halt in growth or even regress, as resources were used up or higher development proved too costly. These stages, economically based, would be conceived as follows. First, the superficial extractive frontier--involving the least investment of men, technology and capital and thus the lowest level of occupancy and societal development--which could comprehend the economic and social organization of the transient fishery, of the fur-trading frontier, the square timber, the open-range cattle, and the placer mining frontiers. Second, there would follow a committed extractive stage, covering such aspects as staple agriculture, settled, in-shore fishing, sawn-lumber making, stock-breeding and drift

and shaft mining. The third--and of course all these stages run into each other--might then cover the growing addition of processing; for example, flour-milling, tanning, canning (whether of salmon, meat or fruit) box and shingle mills or cabinet making, pulp and paper, and in mining, some degree of refining and smelting. Fourth--unless the alternative was stagnation or abandonment--would come the regenerative stage, by which time the frontier era has really passed. That is to say, the basis of hinterland activity now no longer rests solely on its original resource exploitation, but includes many local service activities and often industrial production as well, which might involve bringing goods and materials in from outside for processing and reprocessing.

All these stages of hinterland growth involve concommitant urban development, both within and without the territory under consideration. I say "concommitant" deliberately, to avoid pre-judging how far this urban development might be ascribed to the growth of the hinterland itself, and how far the latter might be held to be the result of the entrepreneurial, investment, organizaing and directing powers of the urban centres themselves. In any event, the ruling consideration for the present is the reciprocal nature of the relations between the two great aspects of the development process. As the hinterland evinced new complexity and scope, so did the urban side of the equation--though this does not infer any constant state of harmony between them. For example, the first, superficial extractive, stage might produce a few colonial garrison towns (perhaps often for largely political-strategic motives of control) but the more significant urban growth still lay far outside the hinterland, in distant metropolitan centres that were generally transatlantic. The second stage of committed extraction witnessed a notable blossoming of small urban communities, and the rise of older, well situated towns to prominent commercial roles in their own surroundings, but not necessarily to metropolitan stature. The third, with the spread of processing, saw incipient manufacturing centres appear; but now the leading towns advanced towards wide areal dominance, thanks to their strategic functions in the sizable transport system that the burgeoning hinterlands required; to their financial roles as well, in regard to mounting investment in processing activities, and to their own built-in advantages as industrial

locations, as these activities enlarged. Finally, the regenerative stage displayed not only an over-complicating urban network throughout the relevant hinterland, but also, the confirmation of a few major places across Canada as regional metropolises; that is, as pre-eminent focal points for broad regions, whose aspirations and interests had thus been largely organized about them.

Let me repeat, this is merely a schematization, a way of looking at and simplifying a highly diverse historical process, and it may do little more than assert obvious generalities which still may not closely fit various particular cases. Yet it should, none the less, suggest two things. First, it should underline the contention I have emphasized: that exo-urban history, at least, must be seen as involving much more than the urban community or a system of urban communities alone. One may look outward from the city; but what lies beyond must effectively be related to it. Second, one should see that the other side of urbanization in Canada is regionalization. Too often they are dealt with as separate--even alternate, or almost hostile--themes. Yet actually they are two sides of the coin; or rather, they constitute an on-going symbiotic relationship. This the metropolitan-hinterland concept should make clear. There are no discrete opposites here, but interconnecting parts of a societal system--and what may stand as "metropolitan" in one regional context may be seen in a hinterland relationship in another, broader, national or international frame.

The fact is, "regional" historians seem unnecessarily to fear the "centralist" approach of metropolitanism--yet, if there is such a tendency to a centralist viewpoint, I would willingly condemn it the "metropolitan fallacy" (and any useful concept needs a fallacy sooner or later). But another fact is, that urban historians who rightly--indeed, by definition--centre on the city are in danger of thinking that cities can be totally abstracted from the life of the larger community. Not just for convenience of study, which certainly they can, but as if they represent such a special form of life style that attributes beyond them are of little consequence. It would be a shame if such a fast-developing new field in Canada should fall into this sin of indifference, if not arrogance--and I do hope that

I am overstating the case. Still, I see something interesting in the course of American historiographical development, which, as usual, we largely follow: often to our profit, but not always. Once the land of the frontierists, of Turner and his successors, it now appears that the republic, in its historiography, has swung more and more wholeheartedly to the urbanists--though that very division between the country and the town, unless it is only my perception, represents an unfortunately restrictive pursuit of ineffectual efficiency. It would be odd if Canada, where historians have till recently worked hard to show the limits of frontierism, should instead recall its historical meanings and relate them more fully to current research in urban history. It might be odd; but it would be good! Again Canada would be avoiding American excesses and proving the value of the sensible middle way. But as usual, only Canadians would know, and would have to enjoy their characteristic limited satisfaction at being better, though unrecognized.

J.M.S. Careless

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## CANADIAN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In a paper presented at the World Congress of Sociology in 1966 I argued that while the ecological structure of the Canadian society appeared urban, the society as such remained still essentially rural. The point there that was made was that the large influx of population into urban centres from disadvantaged rural areas had led to the creation on the periphery of the urban community of a society in which the population, in outlook, way of life, aspirations and values was no different from the population back in rural areas. The industrial communities of Northern Ontario and Quebec were offered as an example of where within the confines of the company town a highly urban type of society developed but where, outside these confines, there had grown up large sprawling shacktown type areas housing a population which had moved