

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Cooper, Matthew and Margaret Critchlow Rodman. *New Neighbours. A Case Study of Cooperative Housing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Pp. xi, 326. Black and white photographs and illustrations. \$19.95 (paper)

Morris Saldov, PH.D.

Volume 21, Number 2, March 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016812ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016812ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Saldov, M. (1993). Review of [Cooper, Matthew and Margaret Critchlow Rodman. *New Neighbours. A Case Study of Cooperative Housing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Pp. xi, 326. Black and white photographs and illustrations. \$19.95 (paper)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(2), 135–136. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016812ar>

he transformed his fragile electoral base of 1977 into a governing coalition so successful that he was reelected in 1981 and 1985.

Although Mollenkopf recognizes that demographic change and post-industrial conditions made emergence of such a conservative coalition rather likely, he emphasizes the role of the Koch team in perceiving the possibilities and developing the appropriate electoral and governing strategies. Koch lost his campaign for reelection in 1989 partly because of corruption and partly because he carried his strategy too far, but Mollenkopf is impressed by the early success and believes the New York experience has relevance to the recent scholarly pluralist-structuralist debate over the nature of community power. Pluralists believe urban politics works through short-term coalitions that result from a process of bargaining among a multiplicity of interest groups. For them, no single group dominates New York politics; rather, the city functions through a "process of negotiation and mutual accommodation". As an alternative the structuralist opposition proposes a refined version of the older idea that socioeconomic elites are always the dominant element in city government.

The author likes the structuralists because they recognize the influence of "systemic cumulative political inequality" in local political affairs. He points out, however, that they have a tendency toward economic determinism which leads them to "trivialize politics". As a result they fail to explain "real and important variations in outcomes over time and across places." Concluding that neither of the current theories is fully satisfactory, Mollenkopf uses the experience of the Koch administration to suggest that the concept

of a "dominant political coalition" can provide a more inclusive theory that recognizes both socioeconomic factors and the significant role of political actors who use economic elites to achieve their own non-economic purposes. The important lesson here is that politics drives economics rather than the contrary as structuralists would have it.

Mollenkopf, a political scientist who served in the Koch administration, supports his interpretation by providing an abundance of tables and electoral maps. His use of modern quantitative techniques contributes to the persuasiveness of his argument. Historians, however, may come away dissatisfied. Although his approach suggests that human agency in the form of political actors is of crucial importance in shaping local politics, few flesh and blood humans appear in this account. The emphasis is on abstract forces or generalized interest groups. The named individuals fail to emerge as vital and interesting participants in the policymaking process. However, the author clearly has done what he set out to do and has produced a useful and often fascinating analysis that has both descriptive and theoretical value.

WILLIAM E. DERBY
Suny College, Geneseo, N.Y.

Cooper, Matthew and Margaret Critchlow Rodman. *New Neighbours. A Case Study of Cooperative Housing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Pp. xi, 326. Black and white photographs and illustrations. \$19.95 (paper).

New Neighbours represents a complex mix of qualitative and quantitative longitudinal research on two cooperative housing projects in downtown, waterfront Toronto (the Windward and the Harbourside Cooperatives). This book by urban

anthropologists Cooper and Critchlow Rodman, is an important contribution to the in-depth examination of quality of life issues for the disabled and the able-bodied. As well, *New Neighbours* explores the social implications of mixed income housing in co-ops. The authors completed their SSHRC funded three-year research project in the context of a city faced with chronic shortages of affordable housing. Increasing pressures by a federal Conservative government to reduce subsidies and to target assistance for needy households makes the examination of cooperatives particularly sensitive.

The early introduction of use/exchange theory in analyzing the benefits to communities served by cooperative housing helped to distinguish the social uses of coops from private investment sector housing which is used as a market commodity. An extensive set of references and bibliography adds to the credible level of scholarship provided in this book. It was not always clear however whether analysis of the cooperatives was derived from the data collected in the study or whether the observations made were expressed views of the authors.

The extent of detail provided in various quotes from the interviews gives the reader a level of contextual analysis that cannot be obtained from quantitative approaches alone. This is particularly true of reporting on the Windward Cooperative. This Cooperative provides a 'revolutionary' approach to the integration of able-bodied and disabled residents by having all units accessible and adapted, even though only a percentage are occupied by disabled members.

The examination of socio-economic mix in both the Windward and Harbourside Cooperatives adds to the growing literature and interest in social mix in social housing. The study presents a balanced

view of the many social benefits and costs to residents in this form of socially mixed housing. Conflicts between private and public interests, which can be expected in a society with a mixed socio-political economy, were explored in detail. These conflicts reveal the social disharmonies that can be aroused by the diverse social composition in cooperative housing. However, social distance was reportedly overcome by cooperative management and through joint participation in social functions. However, lack of systematic inquiry to isolate the impact of social mix seems to have led Cooper and Critchlow Rodman to a conclusion similar to that of many other authors writing on the topic—a faith in the value of integrated housing without much solid evidence about how it 'works'.

The discussion on member participation, democracy, control and empowerment is perhaps the most controversial section of the book and one which will interest many readers since these are the factors most often associated with living in cooperatives. Issues of relative deprivation, creaming, rub-off effects, sexism, stigma, privacy, management, unit allocation and residential choice are all dealt with in the context of member participation.

New Neighbours may have attempted far too much in one study. As a result it has dealt too lightly perhaps with historical accuracy. For example, the assertion that Regent Park North was developed by the municipal government (p.40) leaves the reader with the impression that there was no level of senior government involved, which is largely true as the City paid 83% of the cost. However, the Province of Ontario did contribute over \$1000 per unit and the federal government, through Section 12 of the *National Housing Act*, pertaining to slum clearance, paid about two and quarter

million dollars to assist the City of Toronto Housing Authority.

The book reads quite smoothly even though there are occasional lapses in editing. Despite its shortcomings, *New Neighbours* is one of the most in-depth studies of life in cooperative housing published to date. It is ironic that this book, that emphasized the need for government subsidies, was written at a time when the federal government was about to withdraw its support for new cooperative housing development. The many aspects of quality of life in cooperative housing studied by Cooper and Critchlow Rodman should contribute to a growing interest in conducting social audits on this integrated approach to the provision of subsidized housing.

MORRIS SALDOV, PH.D.
School Of Social Work
Memorial University

Wynn, Graeme and Oke, Timothy, eds.
Vancouver and its Region. Vancouver:
University of British Columbia Press,
1992. Pp. xvii, 333. Illustrations, figures,
tables. \$45.00 and \$29.95 (paper).

The editors of *Vancouver and its Region* have addressed the important challenge of presenting a broad geographical interpretation of their city and region. They have done so in a way that may stand as a model for their discipline and command the attention of readers with a serious interest in cities as places where human and physical environments are intimately interrelated. One of the editors' aims is to convince us of the mutual dependence of one on the other: urban climate reflects human use of the earth; the built environment cannot disregard the physical structure of the land on which it is constructed. Here we have a rare and successful interpretation of a city's development as seen through the eyes of a group of geographers—

climatologists, geomorphologists, biogeographers, economic geographers, urban and historical geographers among others—whose insights are skillfully melded into a highly readable and instructive collection of essays.

This is a work of interpretation. The editors have chosen to emphasize three themes; the remarkably rapid and dramatic changes in the cultural landscape of the region as European populations swept away the native cultures; the transformation of the land by human societies; and the "relevance" of this particular story to an appreciation of the sense of place as defined by its local identity and by its ties to the larger world beyond the local region. Eight substantive chapters comprise three that assess the biophysical environment, two devoted to historical human geography, two concerned with economic geography, and one treating contemporary social geography. The themes explored in the book are effectively illustrated with black and white photographs. A brief introductory photo essay admirably instructs the unfamiliar reader on the dramatic range of landscapes within so small a compass.

The best essays are those that stretch the reader's imagination and challenge conventional thinking. Reviewers will make their own choices, but for myself two chapters dealing with processes of historical change stand out. In his discussion of the Lower Mainland, 1820 to 1881, Cole Harris offers a fresh and invigorating perspective on native-white relations. He portrays the complex annual round of land and resource use by native peoples, and the limited disruption first brought to the local peoples by permanent white presence. However, when the full panoply of imperial purpose, and the modern technology that implemented it, came to bear on the region the results were different. With amazing speed and