Urban History Review
Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Sutcliffe, Anthony. *Towards the Planned City: Germany, Britain, the United States and France, 1780-1914*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981. Pp. 230. Illustrations, index. £15.00 cloth; £6.50 paper

Gilbert A. Stelter

Volume 13, numéro 1, june 1984

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018150ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1018150ar

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 ce compte rendu

Stelter, G. A. (1984). Compte rendu de [Sutcliffe, Anthony. *Towards the Planned City: Germany, Britain, the United States and France, 1780-1914*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981. Pp. 230. Illustrations, index. £15.00 cloth; £6.50 paper]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, *13*(1), 64–67. https://doi.org/10.7202/1018150ar

Edited by Donna Hill, this booklet grew out of an oral history project, and it contains the reminiscences of Harry Gairey.

It must be noted at the outset that Harry Gairey is no ordinary Black Torontonian. Not only does his story span almost seven decades of life and activity in the city, but he also was in the forefront of some of the most important initiatives undertaken in the Black community. In some of these Gairey acted on his own, for example when he confronted the City Council because his son had been denied access to one of the neighbourhood's skating rinks. (As a result, the City passed an ordinance on January 14, 1947, forbidding discrimination in all recreation and amusement establishments licensed by the police commission). In other cases, he acted in concert with other Blacks, if not to tear down, at least to fracture the wall of racism that they encountered in their daily life. Out of this dedication to the cause of racial equality, a Toronto local of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters emerged in the 1940s, and a few years later a new organization, the Negro Citizenship Association, began its activities aimed at denouncing racial discrimination in Canadian immigration policies.

But Harry Gairey was also an immigrant from Jamaica, a young man who in the 1920s was fired up by Marcus Garvey's message; he was also a church goer, a husband, a father, and a neighbour to many non-Black Toronto residents. And this is where a well-produced 'life history' can become a rich source of historical understanding. It opens the door into the private sphere of a person's life, and allows the reader to gain a sense of synthesis of the whole experience of an historical actor.

Before the 1960s, Blacks made up a tiny portion of Toronto's population. But if racism has been one of the barriers preventing the city to attain a genuine cosmopolitan ethos, Harry Gairey seems to be one of those Blacks who, through a life of modesty and devotion, have helped lower the barrier. His vision of a cosmopolitan Toronto is not theoretical. He knows that the city has made major strides forward, but he also knows how easy it is to fall back and lose many of the gains that have been made. Here is how he addresses this question in his concluding remarks:

> "This morning I heard over the radio where they are giving the Pakistan people a very, very hard time, and it's distressing. Down on Gerrard Street, the reporter was interviewing these various people, asked a little fellow, ten-twelve years old, "Why don't you like the Pakistan people?" He said, "Well, they want to take over." "Where did you get that?" "I get it from my mother, my father, who tell me that they are dirty and they should go back to their own country."
>
> Oh, it bothers me so much, when you think that you're making a little gain, you have these senior people who should be telling the children that we are all brothers under the skin. "Why don't they go back to their own country?" Well, their forefathers were immigrants. You see my point? (p. 43).

Bruno Ramirez
Département d'histoire
Université de Montréal

NOTES

1. These include, Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F. Harney and Lydio F. Tomasi, eds., *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America* (Toronto, 1978); George E. Pozzetta, ed., *Pane e Lavoro: The Italian American Working Class* (Toronto, 1980); Robert F. Harney, ed., *Little Italies in North America* (Toronto, 1981); Michael Karni, ed., *The Finnish Diaspora*, 2 volumes (Toronto, 1981); Raymond Breton and Pierre Savard, eds., *The Quebec and Acadian Diaspora in North America* (Toronto, 1982).
2. Some aspects of Montreal's cosmopolitanism have been skillfully discussed by Paul-André Linteau in "La montée du cosmopolitisme montréalais," *Questions de culture* 2 (1982): 23-54.

Sutcliffe, Anthony. *Towards the Planned City: Germany, Britain, the United States and France, 1780-1914.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981. Pp. 230. Illustrations, index. £15.00 cloth; £6.50 paper.

Any explanation of public intervention in the urban environment involves a complex set of factors and this complexity is increased when an author attempts to describe these events in several political systems. *Towards the Planned City* is an impressive addition to a series consciously designed to tackle this problem by systematically examining major historical themes in a comparative setting.[1] Author Anthony Sutcliffe outlines the evolution of planning in Germany, Britain, the United States and France in successive chapters and analyses the international aspects of planning in the final two chapters. Few scholars in the world are as qualified as Sutcliffe to take on this task for his preparation includes extensive research and publication on the history of planning in France, Britain and Germany.[2] As well, he has developed close contacts with urban historian's abroad through the organization of conferences for the Planning History Group, through a number of lecture trips (including at least two to Canada), and through his coordination of the international bibliographical coverage annually in the *Urban History Yearbook*.

While the dates in the title might suggest that this volume is a general survey of urban planning from the late 18th century, Sutcliffe actually concentrates on developments during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Earlier forms of planning are not ignored — the author, after all, is an authority on mid-19th century Paris. But here he argues

that the *modern* notion of urban planning was "invented" from about 1890 when the idea of comprehensive planning was the result of the combination of specific intellectual conceptions and practical solutions to the problems of rapid urbanization and industrialization. The crucial location, he believes, was Germany, where a particularly creative amalgam occurred within a cultural milieu generally tolerant of government intervention.

To those of us whose main interests are North American cities, Sutcliffe's introductory material provides a useful reminder of the complexity that characterizes what is often simply generalized about as the "Western City." For example, he outlines two models of cities in the late 19th century — the so-called "Anglo-Saxon" city, actually the English and American, and the European type, the German and French — with distinctions based on the location and densities of population. Models of this sort mask a great deal of diversity, yet are useful for an understanding of the differing contexts within which planning took place. The Ango-Saxon city's residential density was relatively low, with its more prosperous population dispersing to the suburbs, while the European city was more concentrated with the elite remaining in the centre and the suburbs becoming industrially oriented. In European cities, multi-storey flats and apartments were more prevalent, even in peripheral districts. Basic differences in governmental systems also affected the nature and timing of urban planning. In Britain, and to a certain extent in France, city and town administrations were directly responsible to the central government, whereas in Germany and the United States, federal systems interspersed a tier of state governments which were the direct masters of the urban places.

The chapters on developments in each of the major countries give accounts that are familiar to planning historians, but Sutcliffe offers a fresh perspective by closely tying the story of planning to the context of the nature of a country's cities and a country's political structures. In each case he also describes the ideas and activities of the major planners and effectively evaluates the relative successes or failures of the movements they initiated. The strongest chapters in this part of the book are those on Germany and Britain, probably because there were more definite examples of planning to report. Sutcliffe pictures Germany as the unquestioned leader in this regard. He points to a long tradition of government intervention in the urban environment dating from the princely capitals of the 17th century and the later Prussian practise of planning town extensions by acquiring or limiting the use of private land in the common interest. These absolutist powers had passed into the hands of municipalities before the great urban boom of the second half of the 19th century. An example was James Hobrecht's huge development plan for Berlin (1862) which remained in effect for over fifty years and was widely emulated in other German places. Another factor in Germany's preeminence in this field was the role of a professional urban civil service with key positions such as *Bürgermeister* having a long tenure and remaining relatively free from politics. Long before North American cities appointed city managers to coordinate their planning activities, German officials such as Frankfurt's Franz Adickes pushed through Germany's first set of differential building regulations, dividing Frankfurt into an inner and an outer building zone. In a theoretical sense, Germany's move beyond town extension planning of the Berlin type toward the planning of entire towns was the result of writers such as Joseph Stübben whose *Der Städtebau* (1890) became the standard manual for comprehensive planning. Sutcliffe's estimation of the role of reform leaders is somewhat similar to that in a recent essay by Lutz Niethammer, in that reformers (some of whom were also bureaucrats) represented a middle ground between the propertied interests and the alienated masses.[3] But Stucliffe ascribes more positive motives to the reformers and believes that they accomplished more than does Niethammer. He concludes that while the expanding municipal activity coincided with the increased popularity of the Social Democrats, most of the growth of environmental control was "the product of an incremental process of technological and administrative evolution rather than of political conflict" (p. 36).

The necessity for public intervention in this town-building process seemed less urgent in Britain than in Germany during the 19th century. But a growing belief that man's well being was determined by his environment had led to a concern for public health and an enhanced awareness of the poor quality of much of Britain's working class housing. These views coincided with a general tendency to urban decentralization by the middle classes. The suburban solution also seemed possible for workers in the two great private demonstration projects of the late 19th century — the model factory towns built by William Lever (Port Sunlight) and George Cadbury (Bournville) — and some municipal councils took up the notion of subsidizing suburban working class housing. The most significant British contribution was Ebenezar Howard's well publicized garden city idea which combined the decentralization movement with earlier utopian ideals and eventually produced an example of fully-fledged comprehensive planning, the garden city of Letchworth. But more influential in terms of actual practise was the importation of a more limited concept of planning, the German idea of town extension which provided a strategy for planning the suburbs first taken up by Birmingham's Council and later embodied in the national Town Planning Act of 1909. The housing section of this act was designed to secure more worker's housing, mainly by voluntary bodies, while the town planning portion was confined to the organization of peripheral areas of urban places. The existing areas of cities were not affected and earlier proposals for municipally owned land were almost completely ignored. Canadian planning historians who hold up this act as the great example of successful planning and assume the Canadian experience fell far short of it may well have to reconsider their evaluation of the character of the British legislation.

The British results in planning, nevertheless, were far more advanced than anything that could be achieved in the United States. To Sutcliffe, American planning presented a paradox: beautiful, ambitious plans which were either poorly put into effect or ignored entirely. An important American contribution to urban planning was the park, which made city planners out of landscape architects. But America's great contribution to this period was the City Beautiful movement with all of its strengths and weaknesses. Sutcliffe details Daniel Burnham's San Francisco and Chicago plans which were, in Burnham's words, plans fully able "to fire men's blood." Burnham planned on a grand scale, with civic centres a feature, but his plans resembled other American schemes of the time in that they did nothing to provide housing and made little effort to control the use of private land. The kind of planning which was imported from Germany, zoning, was distorted in application to become the opposite of planning by protecting the property values of the more prosperous. Other aspects of planning such as the public support for housing remained anathema. The result, Sutcliffe concludes, is that American planning remained largely a collection of ideas with no real administrative basis in the states or cities.

France could produce even fewer legislative results before the First World War as urban planning had failed to make much headway as a movement. Part of the reason may have been that industrialization had not hit as strongly or as quickly; it was due to the fact that the tradition which produced the massive urban reconstruction projects of the 1850s and 1860s was still in force. But Sutcliffe, who is a leading authority on this period of French urban history, questions the notion that the Haussmann tradition provided a strong base for planning.[4] He points to a malaise in urban environmental policy, for politically France remained rurally dominated with an electoral system which overrepresented the countryside. The result was little progress toward area slum clearance and rehousing. In the early 20th century, a campaign by the Parisian intelligentisa for modern planning which included drawing on foreign experience ran into a wall of indifference. The deteriorating suburbs were ignored. The elite either enjoyed the urban atmosphere of the city centre or retreated to villas far from the city. Unlike the thinking in Britain or America, the good city was seen in terms of concentration, not dispersal.

Perhaps the most original contribution Sutcliffe makes to our understanding of the evolution of modern planning is his discussion of planning as an international movement. While planning ultimately depends on political and administrative action within the setting of an individual nation state, much of the impetus for planning ideas and practices came from international cross-fertilization. Sutcliffe examines the way in which ideas were communicated across borders by congresses and exhibitions, the influence of cosmopolitan individuals, and the persuasive force of particularly successful practises. In this regard each country had something to offer, although Britain and Germany led in benefitting from contact with each other. The Germans contributed the concept of *Städtebau* as a comprehensive organizing principle for cities; also significant were the British garden suburbs, French monumental grandeur and elegance, and the American park system and civic centres. Of the international figures, the greatest was Patrick Geddes who dreamt of planning as the key to a new world order. Other important internationalists included Thomas Adams whose career spanned three countries and whose interests ran the gamut of this creative period. His sojourn in Canada (1914-1921) was a good example of the three ways Sutcliffe says that planning ideas spread: through artistic influence in terms of design, through innovation — diffusion (either technical or institutional), and through the persuasion of extraordinary individuals. We may be rather sensitive about the extent to which Canada borrowed ideas and practises from the international movement, but a reading of Sutcliffe's account will make us realize that even the most highly developed countries in the world did the same thing during this period without feeling inferior about doing it.

The definition of planning that seems to emerge from this book is simply that planning involves the state's intervention for the common good against the rights and interests of private property. The reason for the relatively dramatic increase in intervention during this period can be summed up by what Sutcliffe has called a structural argument — that public intervention will tend to be used to close the gap between the *actual* and the *desired* performance of the urban environment.[5] In this regard, Sutcliffe believes that the "urban variable" — the city as an independent, generating force — played a central role in moving Britain, for example, toward a highly interventionist state system.[6] How then does one account for the failure of planning as a movement? The coming of World War One is such an obvious reason that perhaps nothing much needs to be said about it. But from Sutcliffe's account one realizes what the break-up of the especially fruitful British-German relationship meant for the future of the international movement. The other major reason why the movement can be considered a failure is because urban planning had been involved in a bundle of larger reforms and when these declined, so did the idealistic character of planning. What we've seen happen in Canada was part of a larger international trend as planning became institutionalized and the creature of private propertied interests with urban efficiency as its stated goal.

With this volume, Sutcliffe has emerged as the most important interpreter of the evolutions of modern planning. He has effectively used his predecessors in the field and gone considerably beyond them. In many respects he writes in the tradition of the British historian of planning, William Ashworth, in that his work is set firmly in the political, economic and social context of a society.[7] But in going beyond the coverage of one national experience his work could be compared to that of great architectural historian's like Leonardo

Benevolo although he doesn't limit himself to the ideas of great visionaries or changes in design.[8] The result is that *Towards the Planned City* will become the new standard work in the field.

Gilbert A. Stelter
Department of History
University of Guelph

NOTES

1. The series, entitled "Comparative Studies in Social and Economic History," is published by Basil Blackwell and edited by J.R. Kellett. An earlier volume in the series will also be of interest to Canadian historians of urban government: Derek Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (1979), which deals with municipal reform in Liverpool, Leeds, Birmingham and several smaller cities such as Leicester.
2. Some of Sutcliffe's earlier publications include *The Autumn of Central Paris, The Defeat of Town Planning, 1850-1970* (London: Edward Arnold, 1970); *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working Class Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1974); *Birmingham, 1939-1970,* with R.J. Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); "Environmental Control and Planning in European Capitals, 1850-1914: London, Paris and Berlin," in *Growth and Transformation of the Modern City,* ed. Ingrid Hammerström and Thomas Hall (Stockholm: Swedish Council for Building Research, 1979); "The Street in the Structure and Life of the City: Reflections on Nineteenth-Century London and Paris," with François Bédarida, in *Modern Industrial Cities: History, Policy, and Survival,* ed. Bruce Stave (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981). For a discussion by Sutcliffe of his own work see Bruce Stave, "A Conversation with Anthony R. Sutcliffe; Urban History in Britain," *Journal of Urban History* 7 (May 1981): 335-79.
3. Neithammer, "Some Elements of the Housing Reform Debate in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Or, On the Making of a New Paradigm of Social Control," in Stave, *Modern Industrial Cities,* 129-164.
4. For more details, see Sutcliffe's "Architecture and Civic Design in Nineteenth Century Paris," in Hammerström and Hall, *Growth and Transformation of the Modern City,* 89-100.
5. Sutcliffe, "The Growth of Public Intervention in the British Urban Environment during the Nineteenth Century: A Structural Approach," *Papers on Planning and Design,* No. 24 (Toronto: Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Toronto, 1980).
6. Sutcliffe, "In Search of the Urban Variable: Britain in the Later Nineteenth Century," in *The Pursuit of Urban History,* ed. Derek Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (London: Edward Arnold, 1983).
7. Ashworth, *The Genesis of Modern British Town Planning: A Study in Economic and Social History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954).
8. Benevelo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967).

Rosof, Patricia *et al,* ed., "Urban History: Reviews of Recent Research" in *Trends in History,* Volume 1, Number 1, Fall 1981. New York: The Haworth Press and the Institute for Research in History, 1981. Pp. 97. $40.00 (U.S.).

Trends in History, a thematic journal published by the Institute for Research in History and the Haworth Press, deserves a salute from urban historians for compiling five essays on the state of urban history in Europe and the United States. Sharing a conviction that urban history presents "one of the most active and innovative fields of historical research," all contributors write with clear and direct prose about the historiographic issues of the moment. As alert enthusiasts, the authors cover some of the more recent publications in their respective articles on the late medieval and early modern city, French cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, urban history in Great Britain in the 1970s, selected themes in American urban history (power, society, and artifact), and perspectives on the history of urban planning. The fact that one object is to present "a review of current periodical literature" leads to a number of references that might well have escaped the attention of instructors, researchers and writers.

For North American specialists, Deborah Gardner's refreshing analysis has the virtue of departing from the now well-trod paths of Bruce Stave and Theodore Hershberg. Her attention to colonial literature and to the considerable recent growth of interest in housing are just two reasons why her article should be read by all who lecture about the cities of this continent. Eugene Ladner Birch's survey of the history of urban planning presents a lucid account of several controversies about planning history that stem from questions about the degree of influence exercised by planners. With the benefit of more study, do planners still deserve the early criticisms levelled by Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs and Robert Caro? Birch's brief account is not concerned with resolving such matters, let alone staking out a position. Still, he wants it known that planning history must continue to move along some traditional historical avenues: "it would be useful, for example, to know more about the lives and work of the most influential planners and to have a better idea of how planning has been funded." In Canada, we are fortunate to have a recent stimulus to such writing in the form of the planning for a special issue of *Environment* (anticipated publication in late 1985) dedicated to "Canadian histories in environmental design, planning and urbanism."

Philip B. Uninsky and Charles A. Tamason introduce North American urbanists to the considerable volume of both the meticulous and the sweeping French studies, choosing to concentrate on areas where there have been conceptual breakthroughs: demography, economy and proletarianization, and municipal administration. At the conclusion of his report on Great Britain, Stanley Buder presents the one real note of concern in the volume. Echoing rumblings often found in American literature during the last ten years, Buder warns about the need to prevent urban history from slipping back to what it had been when urban biographers and Arthur Schlesinger Sr. had launched the field. As simply a container for a great variety of activities, urban history might