

Hitchcock, John R., and Anne McMaster, eds. *The Metropolis: Proceedings of a Conference in Honour of Hans Blumenfeld*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1985. \$14.00

H. Peter Oberlander

Special Issue on the History of Canadian Housing Policy  
Volume 15, numéro 1, june 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018897ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018897ar>

[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

Oberlander, H. P. (1986). Compte rendu de [Hitchcock, John R., and Anne McMaster, eds. *The Metropolis: Proceedings of a Conference in Honour of Hans Blumenfeld*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1985. \$14.00]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 15(1), 92–94. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018897ar>

“Temperance,” and “Education”; and two chapters (bringing us around to the beginning somewhat) that represent a political response: “Anatomy of Political Reform” and “Private Capital and Public Resources.” A penultimate chapter on “Policing the City” provides an example of an institutionalized solution to the social problems of growth. A final chapter, “The People of a Loyalist City” is descriptive and anomalous. It could be more fully part of the text or in the appendix with the statistical tables on which it is based.

But bringing the argument back around to a solution in the political institution is only partial. The focus remains on social questions, and the political reform necessary to make the switch from labour to capital intensive solutions in this area. A more complete resolution would seem to require that local political reform be brought around to the economic analysis that begins the book.

There is no doubt that most nineteenth century cities, by the 1840s, sought political reform to deal with pressing social questions and a noisome urban landscape. But at the same time, they were seeking reform — corporate autonomy to borrow, to tax and to build infrastructure — to further the economic development of the place. It is on these economic issues that crucial intersections of process and structure occur. And they are evident in *Saint John*, in spite of the focus on social issues, but not fully developed.

Acheson spends much time on the city's political institutions, and quite rightly. For one thing they were unique. Saint John is perhaps the only example in British North America of eighteenth century incorporation, though the mayor and chief officers were appointed by the Crown, and the city could not tax property. But the city controlled much waterfront property, and, through grants of the “freedom of the city,” controlled access to the urban economy. And it could act; it could respond to change, social and other.

It is tempting to argue that Saint John's unique political situation gave it an economic edge: it was one reason it became the biggest city in the Maritimes. The city was implicated in economic growth.

It is equally tempting to argue that early incorporation, among other things, delayed local reform that was widespread elsewhere in the 1840s and gave rise at least to the independent commercial city in British North America. Saint John, according to Acheson, was reformed locally only in the 1850s, and that in this reform the powers of the Common Council were curtailed (p. 178).

In the post-1840s economy, Saint John was disadvantaged, particularly by its incapacity to mortgage urban property to build a common infrastructure.

Perhaps an argument can be made that the city's political institutions were so absorbed by the social problems of

growth, and so comprised the partial solutions to them, that the effort required to address impending economic problems was likewise partial and ineffective, as was, ultimately, political reform. In this sense, the study of Saint John begins perhaps too late (its models are better found in the literature on the eighteenth century city), and ends too soon. It is also perhaps too narrow. Social structure is a tremendously important point of access to the city, but has its limitations as a vehicle of explanation.

There is much in Acheson's study for many of the historical kingdoms, principalities, duchies, estates and tribes. Students of local governments, especially, can consult it for the first comprehensive study of Saint John's one-of-a-kind common council, and as one of the few studies of local government, anywhere, that links local government to the society it mediated. Social, economic and urban historians, as well, will find much of value here. An excursion into this volume will be amply repaid, for there is much of value here, and it is handled with diligence, with integrity and with regard for the received literature. More diligence by the editors might have reduced an excess of ‘typos’.

John H. Taylor  
Department of History  
Carleton University

---

Hitchcock, John R., and Anne McMaster, eds. *The Metropolis: Proceedings of a Conference in Honour of Hans Blumenfeld*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1985. \$14.00.

A Conference in honour of Hans Blumenfeld is indeed a landmark event! *The Metropolis* is a compendium of presentations at this Conference in 1983 and does the event full justice. Apart from a unique metropolitan view, it provides a welcome discussion of Hans Blumenfeld's lifelong concern with the structure and dynamics of metropolitan areas in the western world. The list of academics and professionals contributing to the Proceedings is distinguished and illuminating, and ranges from Brian Berry (Carnegie-Mellon), to Jeanne Wolfe (McGill), and from Dean Emeritus Al Rose (Toronto) to former Toronto Mayor John Sewell (now *Globe and Mail*).

The Proceedings are organised in four groups of papers: The Changing Metropolis, Transportation, Housing, and the Livable Urban Environment.

Len Gertler's paper in the first group elegantly addresses metropolitan governance, corporatism and the city, and in conclusion poses the question: “Do the governmental institutions of the contemporary metropolis have a capability to respond to the issues of our time?” One wishes one could

report an unequivocally positive answer. Even an optimist like Gertler responds by observing:

We strive to serve the public interest, but our perception is coloured by the power structure, that we serve. Nevertheless, some of us cherish the belief that the best of our democratic traditions are still alive, that this leaves some considerable room for manoeuvre, and that in our struggles for the "good city" one kind of contribution we can make is to enhance self- and others-awareness of the powerful constraints which are in the very fabric of the metropolis we would change — that is, if we catch the spirit of the Blumenfeld Blues.

In the second group of papers Ron Rice recalls Hans Blumenfeld's transportation course, taught in the Planning program at the University of Toronto, when he asked of his students:

1. What is the purpose and benefit of transportation?
2. What is the final product?
3. How does transportation affect accessibility, freedom of choice, increased contacts, interaction, land use?

In an expansive and thoroughly documented paper Rice begins to respond to these questions, and comes to the conclusion: "What is missing in this complex world of urban planning is really the process of *synthesis*, the opposite of 'analysis'." In his view and that of others who have been Blumenfeld's students it is the ability to synthesize knowledge, information, observation and sheer human instinct that has characterised Blumenfeld's contribution and impact on the axial relationship between planning and transportation.

In the group of housing papers Jeanne Wolfe presents current and future aspects of housing and again starts with a question posed by Hans many years ago: "What makes a house a home?" Many of the current housing issues were anticipated by Blumenfeld in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly the rapidly increasing demand for more but smaller units, based on declining family size, but increasing family formation. In a well-documented segment of the paper Wolfe deals with new approaches to social housing, particularly the rental non-profit co-operatives. She reminds us that the 1918 Dominion-Provincial Housing Act, and again the 1938 Housing Act entertained these ideas but without very many results. Co-operative projects, particularly under NHA Section 56.1, have rapidly increased recently and seem to fulfill an important social and economic need. New construction versus rehabilitation and gentrification are fully discussed as are such innovative ideas as community land trusts and local economic development. Wolfe concludes that the context of these innovations all lead to include the necessary control by their residents. This seems particularly important in older areas of Canadian cities where the concentration of the poor and disadvantaged are greatest. She characterises this approach as the Third Sector and indicates "that co-operative advocates know very well that the key to a co-

operative's success is the fully voluntary participation of its members." It seems essential to sensitize local people to this need and to sell them the Third Sector ideas without pressure.

Among the last group of papers, that of Kevin Lynch clearly is the most remarkable. With Lynch's untimely passing in April, 1984, it may well be the last complete document of this extraordinarily perceptive and sensitive analyst. Kevin and Hans had been involved in a long-term dialogue about what makes a good city. Somehow one hopes that the exchange of letters will enter into the current literature. It is clear from Lynch's paper that quality not quantity is the essence of the good city and that the criteria for evaluating the quality of urban environments are deeply embedded in the many essays that Hans has penned. Without detracting from the spatial or three-dimensional essence of quality, Lynch sides with Wolfe that people want to take control of their own residential space and thereby improve the quality of their environment. In fact he proposes to summarize this issue under three questions:

1. Who controls the housing?
2. Who controls the workplace?
3. Who controls the transportation system?

Who is doing the controlling and for whom clearly will determine the quality of the good city.

Lynch concludes by dealing with normative theory and Hans Blumenfeld's lifelong interest in this area. He says:

Normative theory must be developed as an integral part of any general theory of city form. I persist in the notion that this can actually be done, and that it will be useful. It will help us to analyse existing cities, and will help us to design them. Hans may continue to be skeptical, but I suggest that he laid much of the basis for the attempt. There lies my final defence.

If thinking ahead is the essence of planning, no one has demonstrated this skill with more consummate sagacity than Hans Blumenfeld, and he is still at it in his tenth decade! To anticipate the future on the basis of an analytical intuition is a particular skill, well demonstrated by Hans and now by a growing number of students and colleagues who pay tribute to him in *The Metropolis*.

An important part of the *Proceedings* is a thoroughly researched bibliography of Hans' writings. In reviewing this impressive and continuing output of observations, knowledge, analysis, and often prophetic prognosis, one is struck by the immense range of ideas over time. Hans Blumenfeld's first published document apparently was a student project at the Institute of Technology at Darmstadt, dealing with the relationship between 'Student and Apprentice' in 1919. The latest listing is an assessment of "The Golden Age of

Planning in Ontario 1966-75" [sic] published in *Plan Canada* in 1984. In between lie such extraordinary items as "The Origin of the Doric Peripteros: Some Puzzling Questions," written in 1938, or the widely read "A Neglected Factor in Estimating Housing Demand" published in 1944 in the *Land Economics Journal*; in between one can sample Hans' work in Russia, for example "Regional and City Planning in the Soviet Union," published in 1941 in *Task*, that marvellous 'little' but seminal magazine.

While the various papers and commentaries speak for themselves, the editors of the Proceedings and the resulting publication have demonstrated Hans Blumenfeld's love for *tema con variazione*, a musical form which allows the introduction of strongly held concepts subsequently enlarged and re-presented as variations on a theme but still supporting the original theme.

The last word belongs to Hans. In summing up the Conference and anticipating the Proceedings, he expresses his sincere gratitude and appreciation to his colleagues and peers, but then returns to his abiding central concern:

But what is of even more concern, with our acquired power over non-human nature is — can we live together? Can we live in harmony with each other? Albert Einstein warned us years ago when he said, "Our ability to control the atom has changed everything except man's thinking." We still think in terms of defence though we know that there is not and there will not be, despite any space phantasies, any defence ever against atomic warheads carried by intercontinental missiles. There is no defence. . . . We just have to understand that we can't increase our own security by making others insecure. Security can only be mutual and we have to reverse this deadly cycle of fear engendering armaments and armaments engendering more fear. . . . And if planning means anything it means seeing not only the immediate but the more distant consequences of action. If we understand the more distant consequences of our actions, both in our relation to non-human nature and to other humans, then we will understand that we can survive only by co-operation and trust.

H. Peter Oberlander  
School of Community & Regional Planning  
and Director  
Centre for Human Settlements  
University of British Columbia

---

Divay, Gérard et Gaudreau, Marcel. *La formation des espaces résidentiels*. Québec et Montréal: Presses de l'Université du Québec et l'INRS-Urbanisation, 1984. Pp. 262. Cartes couleur. Photographies. \$22.95.

Comment rendre compte du paysage résidentiel dans sa diversité, des tours aux unifamiliales, de la densité à l'éparpillement? Pourquoi l'expansion résidentielle a-t-elle revêtu une forme plutôt qu'une autre et comment en est-on arrivé à ces formes?

Telles sont des questions posées fort opportunément par G. Divay et M. Gaudreau dans leur ouvrage sur le «système de production de l'habitat urbain dans les années 70 au Québec» (sous-titre du livre). A l'heure où les modèles de développement ayant conduit à l'étalement urbain caractéristique de tant de banlieues nord-américaines sont fortement remis en question et où de nouvelles conceptions d'aménagement prennent déjà la relève, il est particulièrement important de comprendre les mécanismes de production de ces développements résidentiels tant décrits.

Les auteurs ne font pas pour autant oeuvre d'historiens, bien au contraire. Pour répondre à leurs questions, ils ont choisi une perspective synchronique et utilisent, entre-autres, les données recueillies lors d'une vaste enquête sur les nouveaux espaces résidentiels (NER) bâtis entre 1970 et 1976 dans les régions métropolitaines de Montréal et de Québec. Il s'agit plus précisément d'un échantillon de 43 petites zones résidentielles composées de 500 logements et plus.

La problématique théorique proposée par les auteurs pour structurer leur analyse se veut en rupture complète avec les perspectives traitant respectivement de l'espace résidentiel comme expression des préférences des consommateurs, comme traduction spatiale d'un mode de production ou encore comme extrant du système sectoriel de production du cadre bâti (chapitre 1).

Contrairement aux ambitions initiales du projet de recherche sur les NER, qui étaient de saisir l'articulation entre les différentes composantes du processus de formation des espaces résidentiels (de la production à la consommation), ils ont préféré isoler une de ces composantes, et centrer l'étude sur ces agents de la production du cadre bâti que sont les gouvernements et les promoteurs. Leur principale hypothèse de travail s'énonce comme suit «dans quelle mesure les logiques statutaires et positionnelles à l'oeuvre dans le système de production moulent-elles les caractéristiques et la mise en forme des nouveaux développements» (p. 58). En d'autres mots, les caractéristiques internes des agents (leurs rôles et fonctions) et leur place dans l'ensemble du processus de production des NER permettent-elles d'expliquer les configurations particulières prises par ces espaces résidentiels? L'analyse se déroule alors en deux temps. Dans les chapitres 2, 3 et 4 ils examinent la logique des acteurs après les avoir situés dans l'ensemble du système de production, et tentent de dégager les effets de cette logique sur le «produit». Il s'agit par exemple de voir l'influence exercée par le gouvernement fédéral sur la dispersion résidentielle et sur la diffusion de certains types d'habitat,