

Hall, Thomas, ed. *Planning and Urban Growth in the Nordic Countries*. New York: Chapman & Hall, 1991. Pp. 271. Illustrations. \$79.50 (U.S.); \$99.50 (Canada)

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ceive places will equip city and country dwellers, planners, preservationists, and environmentalists to fix ailing spaces and create successful new ones.

Hiss illustrates this "sixth sense" by taking the reader through selected spaces—Grand Central Station, Times Square and Brooklyn's Prospect Park—and analyzing what makes them special. His narrative meanders delightfully through the streets of New York, citing art historians, psychologists, preservationists and architects who have also studied spaces. His analysis of what modern urbanites need to be healthy and happy in an urban environment, based on studies, readings and interviews with experts, leads him to conclude that, to thrive in an urban environment, we need to feel safe, see the sky, walk on grass and be offered a variety of views to lead us on.

Hiss is not a no-growth, no-change advocate. He realises that cities will evolve as needs change and that the post-industrial, service-oriented city will be very different than its predecessors. His concern is that the experience of place be preserved even as cities change. But how do we know whether or not a new building will enhance or diminish the urban experience? Hiss turns to the Environmental Simulation Laboratory in Berkeley, California for the answer to this question. Researchers at the "Sim Lab" construct one-sixteenth scale models of neighbourhoods and film the experience of driving or walking through them, using a camera lens on a periscope at eye level. Lights simulate the sun, so the impact of building shadows can be seen. The real utility of the "Sim Lab" is that buildings can be easily removed and new ones inserted and filmed, allowing the impact of a development on urban places to be measured. "Sim Lab" movies have not been widely pro-

duced, but have proved remarkably effective in the communities where they have been employed as a planning tool. For example, the San Francisco Department of City Planning produced a series of films over a six year period which were broadcast on TV in the city while a new official plan was being drafted. The films, which simulated the effects on sunlight and views of increased development, helped the passage of a plan which limits height, bulk and the actual number of new developments. It is success stories like this that make the book so appealing and so hopeful. Planners, preservationists, and urban activists can recognize the possibilities for translating these successes into their own.

In the second part of the book, "Encountering the Countryside," Hiss examines the management of the countryside and proposes solutions to the crisis facing the United States as a result of rapid suburbanization. Hiss presents his arguments, with a convincing, matter-of-fact charm, leading the reader to agree that experiencing unspoiled landscapes is crucial to our physical and mental well-being. This section leaves the reader feeling hopeful about our chances to preserve the working landscapes and wilderness areas of North America.

Hiss argues for a "landscape" or "regional" approach to planning that would treat cities and their hinterlands as a unit and make decisions that benefit both. He maintains that the completion of the interstate highway system has prompted the need for this new approach to planning because, for the first time, development pressure is being applied equally to urban, suburban and rural areas. He argues that if city dwellers had a better knowledge of the contribution of their region to their health as the supplier of food, water, recreational areas and unspoiled

greenspace, they would form a "partnership" with their countryside and fight to preserve it.

*The Experience of Place* is an optimistic book and provides a welcome respite from the constant stream of doom and gloom about the future of our cities and landscapes. Its elegant prose is a change for the dry planning studies and overly-serious analyses that to date have formed the basis of many studies of place. After reading Hiss we can know why we love certain places and why we feel such a sense of loss when they are violated.

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Hall, Thomas, ed. *Planning and Urban Growth in the Nordic Countries*. New York: Chapman & Hall, 1991. Pp. 271. Illustrations. \$79.50 (U.S.); \$99.50 (Canada).

When most North American urban researchers think of countries characterized by progressive and innovative urban planning, the nations of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and/or Sweden will likely come to mind. However, when I was preparing to teach urban studies in Denmark (1987) and to conduct research on Swedish pedestrian streets (1990), I was surprised to find very little English language literature on planning in these countries, aside from some work on well-known Swedish new towns. Hall's volume certainly would have been helpful to me, as it serves to fill a major void in the literature on urban planning history.

The purpose of the book is to provide a general overview of urban planning history in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden (Iceland is inexplicably left out). The essays emphasize the evolution of land

use planning (as opposed to social or economic planning) from 1850 to the present, although urban development patterns prior to 1850 are also briefly presented.

*Planning and Urban Growth in the Nordic Countries* is organized in a very clear and straightforward manner. It consists of six chapters: an introduction, a chapter on urban planning trends for each of the four countries, and a conclusion that discusses common features and patterns found in "Nordic planning." Each of the chapters addressing an individual nation is written by a specialist from that country. While there is some variation in emphasis from chapter to chapter, which is to be expected in a multi-authored volume, the topics covered in each chapter are remarkably consistent. The chapter on Denmark is representative. The authors, Bo Larsson and Ole Thomassen, focus on the largest urban centres (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg, and Odense) to help trace the evolution of Danish physical planning, emphasizing in particular city centre development, housing, transportation, and regional planning. Planning activities and legislation are placed in historical context as are general demographic and economic trends.

The authors identify several characteristics of Nordic planning that might surprise North American readers. First, the "progressive" reputation of northern European planning is a relatively recent phenomenon; the general acceptance of land use controls, for example, only occurred in the years following World War II, much later than in North American cities. Second, a strong anti-preservation attitude was prevalent in Nordic cities during much of the 20th century, an attitude that contradicts the widely-held notion regarding the importance of preservation throughout Europe. Third, regional planning in these countries, frequently used as textbook examples of innovative approaches to planning (i.e.,

Copenhagen's renowned Finger Plan), is generally perceived as being a failure. And finally, the high level of power and influence attributed to the private sector in the planning process goes against the commonly-held notion that, in nations governed by social democratic parties, public controls would dominate.

The positive attributes of this volume far outweigh the negative. However, a few problems do exist. The first concerns content. For the years 1950 to the present, which the book covered extensively, new development (i.e., suburban housing, new towns) is emphasized much more than is city centre redevelopment and preservation; for example, Hall and associates make virtually no mention of pedestrian streets, a widely-applied planning strategy, particularly in Swedish and Danish downtowns. A second problem lies in the format which, while straightforward and logically-organized, tends to be encyclopedic at times, detracting from its readability. And finally, the excessively high cost of this volume will limit its readership; few individuals could afford this book and, during an era of tight academic budgets, many libraries may balk at the price.

In conclusion, I would strongly recommend Hall's book, especially for institutional libraries affiliated with departments of urban history, urban studies, and/or city and regional planning. The volume fills a gap in the literature and should serve as a valuable reference book.

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**Mullins, William H.** *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Pp.ix, 176.

From this densely-written book, drawn from a detailed reading of local newspapers and civic archives, the following picture emerges. With the onset of high rates of unemployment in 1929, local relief work in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland was organized principally through private charities. Municipal governments responded by accelerating public work programs and by channelling funds through the community chest. As the Depression deepened, direct public relief was forthcoming, but local administrations soon found demand exceeded their fiscal capacity. By 1932, local communities were unable to cope without state or federal assistance.

This story is a useful one, but difficulties arise with Mullins' attempt to draw more ambitious conclusions. He promises insights into the nature of the Depression: was it different in the West?; did it produce a specific regional outlook?; did patterns of behaviour and thought change as the economic malaise persisted?; and, finally, did attitudes towards individualism, self-reliance and the work ethic undergo significant reappraisal? The answers to all of these questions are unconvincing for several reasons.

First, there simply is no contextual framework offered for case studies of four cities. Little use is made of the extensive literature on the Great Depression in the United States (for instance, no reference is made to the recent interpretations of the Hoover administration offered by William Barber and Michael Bernstein); as a result, local events are not placed in a wider setting. This occurs at some cost. Economic historians will be uncomfortable with the utilization of data on build-