

Book Reviews

Community Participation and the Spatial Order of the City, David Ley, ed. B.C. Geographical Series, No. 19. Vancouver, B.C.: Tantalus Research Limited.

In recent years we have been inundated with highly generalized exhortations to decentralize the processes of government in the urban area. This little book is a welcome change from prescriptions of this order, in that it represents a serious effort to look at some implications and consequences associated with the "power to the community group thesis." It consists of eight essays, ably introduced and edited by one of the contributors, David Ley. Not all of them are equally successful — they seldom are in collections of this sort — but they have been well selected to reflect a wide range of perspectives. The editor has sought, successfully, to diffuse simplistic notions of what governing an urban polity is all about — while making no secret of his sympathy with the decentralizing trend. (He is inclined to describe its obverse as authoritarian.) Overall the collection relays much useful information and some genuine insights.

The widely differing views of the urban community which may be held by the varied social classes in it are emphasized in the first paper by Alan Hobkirk, who examines the perspectives of two widely separated single-family residential areas in Vancouver. John Bottomley and Deryck Holdsworth develop a related theme as they draw attention to the manner in which in Vancouver (and elsewhere) conflicts over land use reflect widely differing conceptions of the nature of the city. Both of these papers contain some useful reminders that the perspectives of academic observers may easily becloud their understanding of the community which is the object of their attention.

One of the more interesting papers in this book is Leonard Smith's fascinating study of the metamorphosis over the last two decades of St. Léonard, the Montreal suburb. His treatment of the educational dispute which has made this area so well known, and of the demographic energy,

as he calls it, of the expanding minority within it, are illuminating. In another tightly written account, J. T. Lemon reviews Toronto City's experience with citizen participation, especially as it has centred on the transportation and physical development issues. He ends up convinced that a more dialectical if not completely decentralized system is both desirable and emerging.

Clearly Walter G. and David F. Hardwick have some reservations about the participative process. In their short paper, which returns the reader to the Vancouver scene, its changing political agenda since 1945, and the responses of elected representatives and the bureaucracy to these changes, they emerge as enthusiasts for consultation — if it is not carried too far. Myra Breitbart and Richard Pert, on the other hand, after reviewing the evolution of the advocacy concept, and providing an interesting critique of some results — such as the BAEQ experiment in Quebec — have few reservations. They come out for more, and more on-going and broadly orchestrated, participation. Whether the end product of advocacy ought to be the growth of class consciousness and the development of revolutionary class-based political power, as they suggest, and whether such a derivation need be labelled socialist (as they suggest), are conclusions which readers (including socialists) will have to re-think for themselves.

This reviewer found more helpful Mr. Ley's reflections on the manner in which community groups and their leadership inevitably become enmeshed in urban politics, including the process of co-optation, and on the manner in which the phenomenon of idolatry, as he calls it, deflects them (as others) from these primary goals. The last paper by John Seley is not easy reading, and is made vulnerable in a sense via its posited assumptions (p. 109) of the likely consequences of coming up with a paradigm of community-based planning. Still Mr. Seley deserves credit for his attempt to relate Dahrendorf's conflict theory to the urban scene. Few social scientists are prepared to tackle serious attempts even at mid-range theory.

Readers should not expect to find all of the complexities evoked by our experiences with citizen participation raised here. The political scientist, in particular, notes that the role of the general purpose representative in the democratic process (the subject of some incisive latter-day writing by E. H. Haefele, for instance), is hardly touched upon. Nor is the question of the policy issue which has great local significance but a wide "problem-shed" dealt with. Perhaps Mr. Ley and his collaborators can

follow up on these and other dimensions of grass-roots democracy in studies to come.

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Vancouver, by Walter Hardwick. Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1974. 223 pp., illus., \$5.95.

Vancouver is a case study in urban geography, an outline of the past, present, and future growth trends of the metropolis, a review of twentieth century planning policies, and a planner-politician's credo. Hardwick, besides leading a research team which has thoroughly investigated the urban geography of Vancouver in the decade since 1964, was also a city alderman from 1968 to 1974. Product of this rare combination of academic and local politician, *Vancouver* provides important insights for the reader and is a vehicle for the *personalismo* of the author. This is not a modest book.

Despite colloquialisms, the occasional unhappy expression (e.g. mallocation), and the use of catchy phrases, this is an excellent case study for students of urban geography, planning and politics. For the former group especially, *Vancouver* provides an admirable specific against concepts derived from conventional texts. Even in modern Canadian texts, concepts and models of urban structure and process are still strongly rooted in research based on the American experience. Hardwick suggests that the unthinking application of American models to the Canadian urban scene is not only intellectually irresponsible but may also result in the application of inappropriate planning solutions. Grasping the local problem requires local research and perhaps local theory. Even the discovery that a major time lag exists between the operation of similar processes in United States and Canadian cities may have important repercussions in the planning sphere.

Besides its merits as an academic antidote, *Vancouver* could also serve as an informative handbook for concerned citizens and prospective immigrants. Its firm grounding in the historical antecedents of present conditions and its strong commitment to a planned urban future make it required reading for all those who seek to shape the future metropolis.

The overwhelming fact of metropolitan growth, from a population of 125,000 in 1911 to nearly one million and a quarter in 1973, is first demonstrated, together with the radical changes which have taken place