

Bird, Richard and Slack, Enid. *Urban Public Finance in Canada. Scarborough: Butterworths, 1983. Pp. 142. Tables and graphs. \$12.95*

Katherine A. Graham

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ou encore de tenter d'établir un lien entre le style de gestion des municipalités (règlementaire ou compréhensif) et les types d'aménagements réalisés (individualisés ou uniformes). De ces trois chapitres, le plus intéressant est certainement celui consacré aux promoteurs, même si le portrait qu'en donnent les auteurs ne surprendra guère le lecteur. La promotion résidentielle au Québec s'avère en effet dominée par de nombreux constructeurs de taille modeste et le rôle qu'y jouent les concepteurs techniques (architectes, urbanistes) et les institutions financières n'apparaît guère déterminant quant à la forme prise par les projets.

La deuxième partie de l'ouvrage est encore plus intéressante. C'est aussi celle où transpirent les limites de la démarche tentées par Divay et Gaudreau. Après avoir examiné successivement les logiques des gouvernements et des promoteurs et leur influence respective, les auteurs partent du «produit» pour appréhender le jeu des influences qui s'exercent dans la mise en forme de l'espace résidentiel au niveau métropolitain puis au niveau micro-local.

Or il s'avère bien vite que le facteur explicatif qui ressort avec le plus de force ne concerne pas le système de production (du moins au sens où l'entendent les auteurs) mais bien la consommation; les caractéristiques des aménagements résidentiels étant bien souvent fonction du statut social des clientèles visées (p. 297). On peut donc s'interroger sur la pertinence d'avoir isolé le système de production du système de la consommation dans l'explication des formes, l'étalement urbain pouvant, par exemple, être analysé comme un processus de redistribution des groupes dans l'espace. Bien plus, la pertinence de la problématique élaborée par les auteurs en s'inspirant plus ou moins des travaux de J. Rémy peut être elle aussi questionnée, car les logiques positionnelles ne semblent pas être très discriminantes. Les qualités d'un développement résidentiel tiennent souvent moins aux caractéristiques internes des agents économiques et publics qu'aux stratégies particulières déployées par ceux-ci pour toucher un profil donné de consommateur.

Mais surtout, ce qui n'apparaît pas clairement, en fin de compte, c'est ce qu'on veut expliquer. La description des espaces résidentiels et de leur diversité est reléguée à la fin de l'ouvrage. Pour en faire ressortir certaines caractéristiques, de brèves comparaisons (ex.: avec Toronto) sont esquissées. La notion de forme urbaine utilisée ici reste dans l'ensemble fort ambiguë; type de développement, configuration architecturale ou spatiale, morphologie urbaine, occupation du sol, etc.? Cette lacune est regrettable surtout pour un public intéressé par les questions d'histoire urbaine. Si l'on n'y prend garde, les architectes dépasseront bien vite les sociologues dans ce domaine

La source des faiblesses de cet ouvrage réside peut-être dans son statut. En effet ce texte fait partie des publications produites dans le cadre d'un vaste programme de recherche sur les NER, entrepris en 1979 par l'INRS-Urbanisation. Il

fait suite à la publication de rapports de recherches qui sont, dans un sens, plus riches en données et en précisions méthodologiques que le livre de Divay et Gaudreau. Il précède la parution de plusieurs ouvrages confectionnés par d'autres chercheurs notamment sur le volet des consommateurs. Il est donc présenté comme une première synthèse, inscrite «dans une perspective générale d'analyse sur la formation des espaces résidentiels». A ce titre, il constitue sans nul doute un livre de référence pour tous ceux qu'intéresse la production du logement au Québec, et ce, même si la lecture n'en est guère aisée (le style du chapitre I est rébarbatif, les tableaux sont pour la plupart incompréhensibles et les illustrations sont de piètre qualité).

Un deuxième ouvrage vient de paraître dans cette série sur les NER — «les coûts d'habitat: un critère d'urbanisme?» — et l'on attend avec impatience les suivants.

Annick Germain
Institut d'urbanisme
Université de Montréal

Bird, Richard and Slack, Enid. *Urban Public Finance in Canada*. Scarborough: Butterworths, 1983. Pp. 142. Tables and graphs. \$12.95.

Richard Bird and Enid Slack have made a useful contribution to the study of local government in Canada. This recent publication, which is intended primarily to serve the needs of college and university students with little background in economics, clearly summarizes the basic characteristics of contemporary urban public finance in Canada.

The book assumes more than little background in economics on the part of its readers; it assumes little background in local government. It begins with a summary of the basic characteristics of local government in Canada. To students of local government with a non-economic background in the subject, this introduction may seem a bit cursory. Nonetheless, it does cover enough of the essentials for a total neophyte to put what follows in some sort of context.

In the remainder of the volume, the authors largely concern themselves with exploring the basic characteristics of the urban public finance system in Canada. One chapter deals with the growth and current pattern of local expenditures in Canada. Another deals with the existing "own source" revenues that Canadian local governments have at their disposal. Not surprisingly, this chapter focuses primarily on the property tax, reviewing, in workman-like fashion, the arguments for and against the property tax and some of the classical problems in its administration. Alternative independent sources of local government revenue are also

discussed. The authors place particular emphasis on the pricing of urban services, asserting that most urban services in Canada are currently underpriced and outlining a number of possible approaches to what they see as more appropriate user charges for various urban services. An entire chapter is devoted to the pricing of urban services. The final chapter, dealing specifically with the financial situation of Canadian municipalities, concerns provincial-municipal transfers. It outlines very clearly the basic theoretical context within which our provincial-municipal transfer system operates, the importance of grants to Canadian municipalities, and the possible impact of intergovernmental transfers on local fiscal behaviour. The only shortcoming of this chapter on intergovernmental transfers is that it is rather silent on the role of the federal government in local government finance. Although the federal government is often a silent partner in the intergovernmental transfer system affecting municipalities, it is an important one. This lack of attention to the historic and current role of the federal government is rather surprising, given the authors' concluding argument.

As already indicated, these sections of *Urban Public Finance in Canada* are very clearly written and represent a successful attempt by the authors to clarify the financial situation of urban governments in Canada rather than engulf the reader in economic jargon. For this reason alone, the book is a useful primer.

The book's main weaknesses emerge in the more theoretical sections. An early chapter deals with the urban public economy and sets out some basic theoretical concepts and arguments about urban public finance, such as the theory of urban public goods and the Tiebout hypothesis. Like the rest of the book, this chapter is very clearly written. But it presents these important theoretical concepts in a rather off-hand manner and does not explore fully the possible implications of their application to different types of urban municipality (for example a rapidly growing suburb versus a stable or declining centre city) or for different classes of people living in our urban centres. The final chapter is also theoretical in that it sets out the authors' own views concerning a needed "new approach" to urban finance in Canada. In a sense, this chapter is the most disappointing of the entire book because, as the authors themselves admit, their prescriptions for the future are so general, focusing on a clarion call for a re-examination of the nation's total governmental system with analysis of urban finances as part of that examination. This reader would have liked two urban economists of the calibre of Bird and Slack push their thinking beyond this level of generality. Perhaps that will be the focus of their next volume on urban public finance in Canada. In the meantime, this book does make a useful contribution.

Katherine A. Graham
School of Public Administration
Carleton University

Reasons, Chuck, ed. *Stampede City: Power and Politics in the West*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984. \$12.95 (paper).

These nine essays were written to document the social changes experienced through Calgary's boom of the late 1970s and to establish who benefitted from the apparent prosperity. "Although politicians and businessmen repeatedly told us how great the boom times were, we and many other Calgarians were living through a decline in the quality of living in the city" (Preface, p.1). As this suggests, this collection does not celebrate the great achievements of daring and skillful entrepreneurs. Perhaps those have received their due from Peter Newman or Douglas House. Instead, *Stampede City* presents questionable successes and certified failures as the dominant theme of the boom years.

Prominent topics are Dome petroleum's financial crisis, the city planners' failure to win political support, and the development industry's success at the same game. The role of Calgary's newspapers, radio and TV as "Corporate cheerleaders," is described by Michael Shapcott, a Calgary journalist through the boom. The Stampede, and the 1988 Winter Olympics, are discussed in separate, similarly sceptical, essays. Colin Campbell, on the Stampede, and Reasons, on the Olympics, describe these as projects devised and managed by the rich and the powerful for their own benefit. Manipulation of the political process appears to be the preferred instrument. In extreme contrast, western separatism, as analysed by Don Ray, is shown to be a largely unsuccessful protest movement of small business, whether oil, agriculture or real estate, against big government, big business, Quebec and Ontario. All are seen by the separatist in conspiracy to dominate and exploit the West. The movement had its greatest triumphs, small though they were, when its targets could be personified by Pierre Trudeau.

The final essay, "Casualties of Progress," (by Reasons and Emily Drzymala) provides a concluding summary of the injured bystanders: foreclosed homeowners, victims of construction accidents (the Alberta figures are appalling), discrimination against racial minorities, the unemployed, and the victims of stress and crime. On the positive side it notes also signs of organized resistance, by labour, inner city communities, and the Calgary Disarmament Coalition. The chapter, and the book, close with a report of the 1984 Miss Universe Pageant fiasco and a brief comment on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. In an effort to entice the Pageant, organizers — The Calgary Tourist and Convention Bureau — committed the city to an \$155,000 advance. The organizers failed, lost the money and left everyone involved, from the mayor down, the object of ridicule, this at a time when the boom had bust and the city was making sweeping cuts in staff and services.

Despite the stated intent of the authors, the result of their efforts is hardly a systematic and balanced analysis, nor does it deliver adequate documentation of rapid social change.