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BOOK REVIEW

Christopher Walmsley and Terry Kading (Editors).

Small Cities, Big Issues: Reconceiving Community in a Neoliberal Era.

Athabasca University Press, 2018.

364 pages.

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The effects of neoliberal economic restructuring and government cutbacks to social programs have been widely documented in Canadian cities; however, the social outcomes of these trends are rarely discussed from the perspective of small urban communities. Walmsley's and Kading's (2018) edited book "Small Cities, Big Issues" is novel, precisely, because it relocates concerns for social issues that are highly visible in large urban centres to the small city scale. The book's main premise is that, while small cities tend to be imagined as inclusive and idyllic communities, the decline of traditional industries, coupled with cutbacks in social programs and discontinuity in federal and provincial affordable housing initiatives, have caused heightened social needs, inequities, and tensions in small municipalities. In turn, local governments face disparities in resources, and lack the technical capacity and expertise in social policy to properly address complex issues that are structural in nature and that were previously beyond their jurisdiction. Walmsley and Kading argue that municipal plans and policies tending to these issues have so far been insufficient at best and exclusionary at worst.

The book is organized in two main parts: the first one, "Displacement, Isolation and the Other" is the most interesting one, as it documents the experiences of marginalized groups, and how they are constructed as outsiders by local dominant groups in four small cities of British Columbia (B.C.): Kamloops, Kelowna, Nanaimo and Prince George. The case studies are poignant. They address how panhandlers, sex workers, LGBTQ people, drug users, women parolees, visible minorities, persons with intellectual disabilities, and aboriginal people have been stigmatized in the current climate of neoliberal governance. In most cases, these populations endure hostility from other residents and local governments through processes of othering. The resulting social fragmentation is only aggravated by discriminatory practices, municipal policies, and by-laws resulting in the criminalization, dispersal or removal of those considered to be undesirable based on economic and urban beautification arguments and the pressures of NIMBY groups.

The second part, titled "Building Community" aims to present constructive responses to issues faced in small communities. There are five chapters in this section. A chapter dedicated to emerging social planning practices in B.C. municipalities is followed by a critique of multiculturalism and a comparison of poverty reduction strategies in two cities. While most of the book up to this point talks about municipalities in B.C. the reader will be surprised to find a case that analyzes social cohesion in a Quebec municipality, and a chapter with general reflections on how small cities are defined in the United Kingdom, by Graham Day. In contrast to the fluidity of the first part, the contributions in the second section are somewhat disconnected from each other and from the central argument of the book. However, there are two key contributions in this section: the first one, is the analysis of social planning as an emergent field of practice, a relevant yet understudied subject that speaks to how social problems are framed in the

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small-city context (Chapter 8 by Walmsley and Kading); the second one, is the experience of New Westminster and Abbotsford in delivering poverty reduction programs amidst constrained budgets, which offers valuable examples and reflections for municipal practitioners (Chapter 10 by Harding and Jenkinson).

Finally, the editors provide a conclusion with some hopeful remarks on how small cities may be sustainable and realize their more progressive potential amidst social tensions in the current neoliberal moment. Their recommendations are well received: indeed, small cities will need strong leadership, first, vis-à-vis the federal and provincial governments to improve access to resources, and second, at the local level to promote stable employment, confront prejudice, welcome newcomers, and build social cohesion. More crucially, small cities will need a model of cross-sectoral collaboration built on meaningful and democratic participatory planning practice based on a deep commitment to values of solidarity and inclusion.

Overall, the book offers a unique window into small city issues and politics that will be of interest to practitioners and scholars alike. Instructors of courses in municipal politics, human geography, urban sociology and social planning will also find rich material in the case studies, particularly the ones contained in the first section of the book.

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