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Book Reviews

Curbing Traffic: The Human Case for Fewer Cars in Our Lives
by Melissa Bruntlett and Chris Bruntlett, Island Press, 2021, 218 pp.
ISBN 9781642831658

The Netherlands is globally renowned for its cycling culture and comprehensive bike infrastructure. Melissa and Chris Bruntlett find that the greater difference between the Netherlands and Canada is how the Dutch have reduced the dominance of cars in their society. This book raises recognition of the environmental, health, and social impacts of car dependent societies and shows the benefits of alternative ways of living.

Curbing Traffic chronicles the Bruntletts's experiences moving to Delft, the Netherlands in 2019 after many years living in Vancouver and Southwestern Ontario. It was in Vancouver that the authors discovered the potential power of cycling, leading them to start the creative agency Modacity and publish their 2018 book with Island Press, "Building the Cycling City: The Dutch Blueprint for Urban Vitality". This new book, with frequent comparisons to, and examples from Canada, moves beyond cycling to the entire urban environment.

The book weaves the qualitative experiences of Melissa, Chris, their two children, and Delft residents with academic research. The authors provide an evidence-based and impassioned plea to design cities for people. They see the COVID-19 pandemic as a transitional moment when the world (briefly) saw the benefits of car-light living including noise reduction and increased use of streets as public space. Most importantly, they point to the potential of making these changes quickly when there is public demand and political will.

The book is divided into 10 chapters, each examining benefits of a car-light city. The broad themes and experiences addressed are childhood, street design and social connection, social trust and empathy, feminism, noise issues, mental health, accessibility, socioeconomic factors, resilience, and aging. Each chapter addresses the theme with a focus on the work of a researcher from fields including geography, anthropology, urban planning, urban neuroscience, and civil engineering. A highlight is the research and poignant personal story of Bruce Appleyard, Associate Professor of City Planning and Urban Design at San Diego State University, and the centre of Chapter 2: The Connected City. Appleyard is the author of Liveable Streets 2.0 (2020), an update to the 1981 classic Liveable Streets written by his father, Donald Appleyard. Both victims of car accidents themselves, their works examines the impacts of sociability and liveability near heavy automobile traffic.

In each chapter the authors outline the dangers of car dependent societies. The use of the Netherlands as a framing tool is effective at reminding us that it is not an innate desire or cultural affinity for cycling that has created the Dutch car-light environment, but decades of policy and planning decisions that de-centre the automobile. Many of these policies, such as the conversion of Delft's Markt Square from parking lot to public space, were contentious and challenged in much the same way we see in Canada today. One of the strongest sections of the book is Chapter 7: The Accessible City. Proponents of car infrastructure often point to the need for convenient car access and parking for disabled people, but the Bruntletts show the importance of inclusive design and policy centring independence and individual mobility needs.

I believe this book would have been stronger if the concepts presented in Chapter 8: The Prosperous City were divided in two with a greater focus on the issues of inequality in a separate discussion ("The Just City»?). The

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Prosperous City attempts to combine an examination of inequality, social and economic mobility, spatial mismatch, costs of car ownership, and public transportation spending. While there is certainly overlap in these topics, I found a direct discussion of gentrification, racism, and classism lacking in this work.

This is a captivating book, made rich by stories and photos, but grounded in data and research. It shows the value of re-thinking cities as places designed for people. It would be a useful introduction for students in geography, planning, engineering, and other disciplines. It would also be an appropriate resource for anyone with a vested interest in designing more equitable and sustainable cities and addressing any of the specific chapter themes.

Reviewed by Cassandra Smith

Survival of the City: Living and Thriving in an Age of Isolation
by Edward L. Glaeser and David M. Cutler, New York: Penguin Press, 2021, 440 pp.

Cities are social environments with a great deal of interaction. People see and connect better in person; whether traveling to work, shopping, or eating at a restaurant, social interactions benefit everyone. Given that humans are social animals, social interactions are key to our emotional well-being. This all changed in early 2020 when COVID-19 restrictions became effective globally, including Canada and the United States: social distancing, masks, and work from home became the new norm almost overnight. Living in the pandemic age has produced numerous social challenges, one of which is a deep sense of isolation especially in once thriving cities. Two Harvard economists in their book *Survival of the City: Living and Thriving in an Age of Isolation* (2021) focus on public healthcare, affordable housing, and the criminal justice system amid COVID-19 epidemic. This book written by Edward Glaeser and David Cutler tackles several topics that they see as of critical importance for addressing urban failures that they argue will become even more critical in a post-COVID world. The authors, who follow different political ideologies, explore how cities around the world have dealt with disease, health, and other issues in the past and how they can deal with them in the future. Further, they discuss how cities might face an existential dilemma in a post-COVID world, while clearly acknowledging that "COVID-19 is unlikely to be a one-time event". The book also discusses the history of pandemics and how they have wiped out cities throughout civilization.

The authors argue that most problems in cities begin with insider/outsider prioritizing, which leads to inequities. The institutions tend to favor, for example, "the old over the young, homeowners over renters, insiders over outsiders". Despite this unequal burden cities pose, cities are required for social order since the alternative, according to the book, is «enclaves» formed by wealthy individuals if cities ever fail. Cities have so far not failed in their function, and it is therefore no surprise that cities attract both "rich and poor". In their pursuit to explain urban dynamics, the authors take a critical look at the government's role in ensuring that all citizens receive from the resources their tax dollars have paid for. If the governments collected and spent money wisely, they argue, it is possible to address many issues effectively, because cities have enormous structural advantages, such as vast variety of businesses and employment opportunities, that form the backbone of local economies across the world. According to the book, those better educated and with higher paying jobs are likely to be less committed to their expensive cities at the end of a pandemic, having discovered the benefits of being able to work from anywhere, compared to poor and less educated populations that continue to battle the pandemic from frontlines. Yet, majority of human migration even in a post-pandemic world will simply be from one city to another. The authors tackle various such issues that they believe are crucial to resolving the inadequacies of present urban management, including law enforcement, healthcare, education, and housing.

What works for the *Survival of the City* is that the authors do not stop at pointing fingers and opening readers' eyes to these problems. Instead, they offer tangible solutions: which is entirely what makes this book compelling to read. Some of the solutions discussed include opening cities to everyone, lowering rents, increasing vocational training opportunities, and making business permitting easier. Overall, authors argue for, in over three hundred pages, a need to eliminate red tape in order to provide a level playing field. The book has some limitations, one of which is that it spends too much time, and pages, focusing on a variety of issues, thereby complicating its message to some readers. Second, while the pandemic is still ongoing, the book draws conclusions from early trends. For example, the authors claim on page 105 that «even living near a city puts one at risk.» Several studies have now demonstrated that COVID cases may spread equally, if not more rapidly, in rural areas (Cuadros et al. 2021; Huang et al., 2021; Mueller

et al., 2021). Despite these shortcomings, the book is useful and can be used as a guide to help cities navigate public health crises. To their credit, the authors offer several recommendations from instituting a global task force to manage pandemics to investments in public health tools and addressing social vulnerability in cities. The clear takeaway from the book is that the most efficient way for future cities to thrive, especially in the US, is by strengthening the public sector.

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Reviewed by Arun Pallathadka
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Planning on the Edge: Vancouver and the Challenges of Reconciliation, Social Justice, and Sustainable Development

Gurstein, P. and Hutton, T. (eds). UBC Press, 2019

Ideally, readers of edited collections can expect a relatively coherent and consistent presentation of a school of ideas, particularly when the collection's authors sit within a single school. What is most compelling in the pages of Planning on the Edge, published by the pre-eminent School of Community and Regional Planning in British Columbia, are the inconsistencies and contradictions in perspectives offered about planning in the Vancouver region. Though largely unacknowledged in the book itself, this reveals the extent of dysfunction of planning ideas and practice in Vancouver at this time.

The book sets out with a premise that is patently false: to be the first book about Vancouver to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the urban region's multiple urban communities, on their way to becoming a metropolis. This region has benefitted from numerous books on this topic, from the 1976 Planning in a Human Way to the 2007 City Making in Paradise. Perhaps this framing was intended primarily to differentiate this book from Larry Beasley's Vancouverism, also published in 2019. Or perhaps, instead, the framing reveals one of the book's primary fissures, as Leonie Sandercock, in the final chapter, claims a different premise entirely for the book: "to integrate a theory of difference with a theory of social justice and the city" (297). This latter would indeed make for a new kind of book about Vancouver.

How is planning in Vancouver addressing the challenges of reconciliation? Chapter 1, written by Musqueam First Nation community leaders, offers intriguing new perspective on this question. The Musqueam perspective makes a strong case against most Vancouver model urban planning solutions, from interconnected walking trails that expose parks to too much foot traffic, to integrated hard infrastructure that kills the salmon runs and precludes the way that Musqueam prefer to live within natural systems, to the design of homes for nuclear families, at densities that do not allow them to expand with family growth. "Our way of planning was to leave things alone," says Howard Grant. He continues: "Vancouver's planning affected my way of life and our planning. It took away our ability to be, to remain interdependent [on one another within Musqueam] and more extended" (p.37). The Canadian planning concept that is acknowledged as the most culturally appropriate by Musqueam could not be farther from the Vancouver model: the cul-de sac.

This perspective represents no less than a bomb dropped on the notion of ecodensity, under which Vancouver continues to toil, but neither Hutton nor Senbel and Stevens, in their chapters, let this bomb stop them from promoting ecodensity for its purportedly self-evident positive implications for ecology, climate, social interaction

and culture. Sandercock, who has engaged for a decade with the challenge of reconciliation of Vancouverist and Musqueam planning, almost acknowledges the fundamental disconnect when she admits that Musqueam "have little to gain as a community" (p. 309) from involvement in decolonization of the planning profession. This contradiction hangs over the book, unresolved.

If the Vancouver planning profession can move past this cloud, Planning on the Edge presents other unresolved contradictions for prospective planners of the sustainable and socially just city. The authors run the gamut here on whether or not Vancouver is a leader in these respects, versus an abject failure. Moore, Sussmann and Rees provide a depressing assessment of doublespeak and lack of follow-through with respect to any of the City's sustainability goals and targets, where the most intensive and ambitious effort to create a single neighbourhood that could model sustainable living resulted in an 8% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). Senbel and Stevens, in extreme contrast, call the City of Vancouver "an early leader in … facilitating the kinds of development and land uses that lead to lower energy consumption" (p. 103), particularly at the neighbourhood scale. They directly contradict Moore et al, using a statistic without citation that the model sustainable neighbourhood in Southeast False Creek saw a GHG reduction of 50%. Neither chapter points to the regional trend, where a target to reduce GHG emissions by 45% by 2030 exists, but half-way to this target's end point, 1% region-wide GHG emissions reductions have been attained (http://www.metrovancouver.org/metro2040/environment/reduce-ghgs/ghg-emissions/Pages/default.aspx).

Senbel and Stevens put stock in the potential for energy reductions in the transportation sector due to the Vancouverist planning model, while acknowledging what they call the basic math that population growth must increase energy demand at home and work. The School's transportation expert, Larry Frank, contests this view in his chapter, making the case on the one hand that energy consumption and GHG reduction trends are worse in the transportation sector than in others, although absolute reductions in vehicle trips have been achieved in the downtown proper. Honey-Roses, in his chapter, challenges that Vancouver is a region of obscene water hogs and wasters, even when compared with Seattle and Portland. He raises the point that the region is devoid of demand-based or service-based water management, the way we have seen emerge in energy and transportation planning. Unfortunately, he says nothing about the watersheds themselves.

Senbel and Stevens also refer to the "glittering and elegant" built form of steel and glass skyscrapers in downtown cores as part of the sustainable design equation because this built form has made people willing to pay a premium to live in a high-density environment. Can we continue to pour concrete, place rebar, and install glass, and build new layers underneath, above, and through Vancouver, and call it responsible based on anybody's vision of a sustainable city, knowing where this has gotten us to date? Has the passage of time, the passage of Vision Vancouver, the passage of "revitalization without displacement," the passage of the Greenest City agenda, not made a mockery of what was once the Vancouver Achievement?

By declining to answer this question, one comes close to the conclusion that the authors are willfully telling whoppers in Planning on the Edge. Different authors state that Vancouver is full of "attractive communities comprising neighbourhoods remarkably free of ethnic strife" (p.67) and that "resentment against newcomers may occur … yet they almost never result in violence or outright exclusionary policies" (p.249). Another perspective that borders on cruel is the characterization of life in the Downtown East Side as improving, in Chapter 8, particularly with no mention of the opiod crisis that since 2016 has ravaged that neighbourhood above all others and the nearly equal tragedy of successive efforts to confront the human wreckage of this epidemic, to little avail. Instead, while the supply of residential real estate has consistently increased, the percentage of households in core housing need has remained essentially constant since 1991 at about 19% of all households. On top of this failure, a largely disproportionate number of these households are Indigenous people, who make up 40% of the homeless population (Sandercock puts the number at 31%, without explanation).

When it comes to diagnosing the reason for failed plans and policy in Vancouver, we are told that urban and suburban electorates have inherently opposing views (p.134). The authors do not acknowledge at all that this is an old-fashioned idea, put to rest by the rates of growth, densification, investment in rapid transit, and other markers of urbanization in policy and planning in many of the region's suburbs. Vancouver city-boosters who, a decade ago, could point to cost savings in transportation and other infrastructure that accompanied a higher housing cost to live in the city proper, have seen this urban advantage vanish. They do not note that, according to the region's dashboard for calculating the combined cost of housing and transportation, and cost of housing data from CMHC and REBGV, housing costs in the City of Vancouver have doubled in ten years. Transportation costs have increased region-wide, but they have not doubled. The days of any transportation cost advantages to living in Vancouver are over. To place

the blame for this on suburban politicians, or, as held in another chapter, on neighbours antagonistic to high rates of neighbourhood change, does not withstand the sniff test.

Not to suggest that this book is devoid of new data and ideas; the housing chapter by Gurstein and Yan offers both, including a proposed move toward tenure-neutral policy and taxation arrangements for both renters and owners. While this specific proposal is not elaborated, the trends in loss of middle class households region-wide, concomitant with growth in shares of people living with low income, suggest that such radically new policy formulations are needed.

Two chapters focus on the status of immigrants – 44-58% of the population according to different authors -- within planning for Vancouver, and note a decline in the attractiveness of the City of Vancouver for new immigrants compared to other municipalities. Feng and Leaf cover new policies affecting immigration trends, such as temporary foreign workers, international student, and family reunification policies are presented. Angeles and Shcherbyna discuss the dynamics of immigrant settlement and integration services in the region. This opens up ways of thinking about immigrant integration "grasstops" as well as "grassroots" support to empower and build the civic capacity of immigrants, while maintaining cultural difference.

The chapter by Chang and colleagues has strong words about the risk of a megathrust earthquake occurring in the next 50 years (11%), the fact that we are at greater risk of damage because we have no living memory of the emergency response that would be required – one can add now, a very different pace and nature of emergency response than has been mobilized for the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the majority of authors in Planning on the Edge, assessment and critique of planning efforts rests upon the backbone of Vancouver's "policy values" (p.57) or "municipal political culture" (p.223). It is on this basis that Vancouver's standing in reconciliation, sustainability and social justice are adjudicated here, and on this basis that numerous authors in the collection hand out congratulations even in the face of sorely inadequate or inscrutable performance. Sooner or later, the story goes, if we keep our trust in municipal and regional government who frame problems in optimistic, activist ways and make the right kinds of plans and promises, the inertia of harmful thinking and action will surely give way to the heroic power of thinking differently. All the while, planners fail to implement plan after plan, fail to collect and update data, fail to meet target after target, fail to engage effectively with publics as these publics change, fail to reconcile contradiction after contradiction. Just blink, it seems, and any of these authors will cease to be able to suspend their disbelief in Vancouver. The rest of us driven to be agents and advocates for a Vancouver that is able to reconcile anything within these contradictions would be well-advised to keep up with what the city is becoming, while planners watch.

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