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## Review of *The Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities* by Larry S. Bourne and David F. Ley

Abraham Akkerman  
*University of Saskatchewan*

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**The Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities.** Larry S. Bourne and David F. Ley, ed. Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993. Maps and references. vii + 486 pp. \$29.95 paper.

Over the years reviewers have grown weary of edited volumes. Some recent compendia of geographic research on social change seem to have only confirmed this skeptical attitude. The present book, however, is an exception. The articles were specifically commissioned by the editors according to a well-structured division into nineteen chapters within four major parts. The editors have been careful to focus on clearly defined issues, thus avoiding the trap of misdirection into which some other edited material on this subject has fallen recently. As a result, the book succeeds, overall, in a comprehensive identification of factors and effects relating to the spatial aspects of contemporary social change in Canada's cities.

A short review cannot possibly do justice to this book. The following focuses on selected aspects of the book, with an attempt for some constructive criticism. The first part of the book, *Patterns*, has four chapters that review the social and demographic configuration of people, households and neighborhoods, and the growth and distribution of population, within the Canadian city. Demography emerges here as the major discipline in both analysis and social policy-making. But shouldn't objectivity of measurement in demography or social ecology, so well exemplified in Chapter 3, be balanced by some personified notions? For example, what is the meaning of the notion "my neighbor," and why is there alienation in cities?

Some other spatial aspects of urban change are also insufficiently addressed. Singled out should be the inquiry into spatio-temporal characteristics of urban behavior that takes place in most of Part Two, *Context* (and in Chapter 5, in Part One). The usual geographer's emphasis on migration is no surprise here. Yet, commuting, the primordial notion of contemporary urban mobility, is discussed only sketchily. It is, however, refreshing to see in this part of the book an intellectual posture willing to settle for a *description* of a phenomenon, rather than a claim, common among social scientists, for *explanation*. The subject of migration and mobility, with which attempts at explanation are usually associated, is substituted by an observation, no less

informative, that *describes* population redistribution (Chapter 6, in particular). This is not only an intellectually honest approach but also a methodological contribution, and one is only to hope that rigorous attempts at description will precede attempts at explanation in other studies of urban geography.

Another useful methodological suggestion is that "[the] household should be a key unit of analysis" (p. 173). Unfortunately, most of the analytical debate on urban change in the book refers to individuals rather than households. But this is often dictated by necessity, such as the nature of available data, or by the need to identify other units of analysis, such as neighborhoods or ethnic groups. Part Three, *Places*, illustrates the spatial aspects of ethnicity and social stratification, using just such units of analysis. One example, the review of social trends among the Jews of Toronto at the turn of the century, provides a touching historical footnote to catastrophic events that were to occur elsewhere.

Given the scope of the book, it was a little disappointing not to see a chapter dedicated to prairie cities. The differences in social standards and attitudes between urban communities in the Canadian prairies and those elsewhere surely warrant some attention. The spirit of cooperation, for example, has not been lost even in larger prairie cities today. This, as well as the relatively low crime rate in prairie communities would have made for an interesting discussion, in Part Four, on well-being and public policy.

Yet, in the aftermath of the recent federal elections, Part Four is perhaps the most stimulating. The conventional wisdom in this country views Quebec separatism as reflection of a conflict between two ethno-lingual groups. Such an interpretation is rooted in the historicity of the Canadian provinces. But the provinces, often demarcated by arbitrary boundaries, are a relic of Canada's rural society and very limited communication of a century ago. With 80% of the Canadian population today in cities, could the political debate in this country shift from competing regional interests to a discourse between cities?

**Abraham Akkerman**, *Department of Geography, University of Saskatchewan.*