

Reviews/Comptes rendus

The Changing Role of Rural Communities in an Urbanizing World: Saskatchewan 1961-1990. J.C. Stabler, M.R. Olfert and M. Fulton. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1992, 64 pages.

Restructuring Rural Saskatchewan: The Challenge of the 1990s. J.C. Stabler and M.R. Olfert. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1992, 87 pages.

Kansas is flat but Saskatchewan is flattered: in this pair of books it is proposed as a place so near the anisotropic ideal that Central Place Theory becomes real upon it. After a summary of that theory's features (in identical second chapters) it is used to describe the decreasing numbers and increasing spacings of minor urban places in Saskatchewan during the last three decades (first volume), and to sort through spatial details of, and future prospects for, places caught up in such a process (second volume).

These books extend the work of Hodge for the 1941-61 period, done without the benefit of today's computer power; mainly they add details and demonstrations to the general conclusions he was able to reach even then (Hodge 1965). While Stabler and Olfert re-use six of Hodge's seven settlement size class names, they emphasize that their classification methods are not the same as his. One is left to wonder whether these classes might be so robust as to emerge from every sort of systematic analysis.

The first volume uses two starting assumptions:

- that changes in technology have driven the changes in Saskatchewan's urban settlement patterns since the 1940s, particularly its transportation and agricultural branches; but also
- that commodity marketing policy, particularly the quota system for grains, has been a parallel 'forcing factor'.

The second volume remarks that the resulting decline of rural centres of settlement was an "unintended consequence of ... changes that where necessary or beneficial ... on their own merits". A list of such changes follows -- from

substitution of capital for labour to high interest rates. All in all, a nice illustration of the ugly surprises that result when a society and economy operate as though their segments and sectors were independent.

Implicit in this sort of stage-setting is the assertion that no other factors are worth considering. Full marks to Stabler and colleagues for putting their assumptions front and centre, but one immediately wonders: why so few? That demographic factors are given so small a place is especially surprising when Stabler was co-author of a study titled *Intraregional Migration Patterns in Saskatchewan* (Stabler and Beck 1974), a work that is not in either book's list of references.

While it is true enough that both migration and fertility can be shown to be strongly tied to economic conditions that are, in turn, connected to technology and policy, still it seems odd that relations between population and Central Place Theory are not given more emphasis. 'Threshold', as "the minimum level of population and income required to support a particular activity", is mentioned only in terms of its role in excluding high-threshold functions from smaller settlements. Given a spatial distribution of rural population as nearly uniform as that in Saskatchewan, however, an estimated area may be associated with a given threshold population number. 'Range', as "the maximum area that the activity in question can serve from a particular place", likewise may be read in terms of population. Instead, it is only mentioned in connection with the distances rural people are reported to drive for goods, services and employment.

Stabler and Olfert comment that "rural dwellers also appear willing to drive greater distances to shop and work at the beginning of the 1990s than was the case even ten years ago". One could equally well remark on the increasing distance that consumers *must* go as services and jobs retreat into ever larger centres. Saskatchewan's enormous per capita annual expenditure on road construction, resurfacing and snow clearing surely must aid the process, too.

Where the area implied by range greatly exceeds that implied by threshold, central goods and services become mobile in 'periodic markets' (Skinner 1964). The reverse mismatch seems to typify Saskatchewan: perhaps its theoretical consequence *ought* to be the up-hierarchy concentration that Stabler and his co-authors document in these two studies, but no comment to that effect appears.

This pair of slim volumes offer a clearly written and persuasive summary of the spatial results of current demographic and economic changes in Saskatchewan. They do not offer a full-throttle road test of central place theory, neither as theory nor as a planning tool.

References

- Hodge, G. 1965. "The Prediction of Trade Centre Viability in the Great Plains", *Papers of the Regional Science Association*, 15: 15-28.
- Skinner, G.W. 1964. "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24: 3-44.
- Stabler, J.C. and R.G. Beck. 1974. *Intraregional Migration Patterns in Saskatchewan*. University of Saskatchewan, Extension Division Publication no. 243.

Michael R. Wilson
Department of Geography
University of Saskatchewan

Community Economic Development: In Search of Empowerment and Alternatives. Eric Shragge, ed. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993, 141 pages.

As Eric Shragge points out in the Preface to *Community Economic Development: In Search of Empowerment and Alternatives* this "...book is not a cross-section of CED, but it represents an orientation to practice which is linked to earlier community organization practices of the 1960s and 1970s" (p. iii). Such an interpretation of CED, goes beyond the perspective of seeing CED simply as local economic development, and emphasises the needs of marginalized low income members of society. This approach reflects the Social Work discipline within which this volume originates (Shragge is with the School of Social Work at McGill University). The collection of essays offers valuable insights from the perspective of practice, concerning the strengths and limitations of such approaches.

The Preface and first chapter by Shragge are especially useful in establishing a context and coherent focus for the subsequent case studies. In addition to the main themes of empowerment and alternative strategies, two issues: the relationship between the State and CED organizations; and, the role of CED practice as part of a strategy of wider social change; are identified as problems that are implicit in the essays but not developed.

The chapters are all written by individuals who have had practical experience in alternative CED ventures, primarily in Quebec. Chapter Two however, by Nozick on "Five Principles of Sustainable Community Development" is not a case study and presents a somewhat uneasy change of focus and style. While the association between CED and sustainable development is evident, and the articulation of the principles and examples are pertinent, the eclectic dis-

discussion, global examples and the paucity of references seem to detract from the focus set in the preceding sections.

Of the six case study chapters, four discuss CED initiatives in Montréal mainly those associated with the Centre d'innovation en développement économique locale du Grande Plateau (CIDEL). This organization was established to find innovative ways to address poverty at the local level. Mendell and Evoy critically examine the ways of democratizing capital and document the development of a community loan association. Following along this theme of access to capital, the subsequent chapter by McMurtry examines CIDEL's loan circle program, which in this locality has focused on bringing women into the workforce. A later chapter by Norton also examines the CED initiatives associated with a specific group of marginalized group of women in Montreal - those of South Asian origin, who with the help of CIDEL, started a worker cooperative. The chapter by Fontan looks at the evolving degree of citizen representation associated with a variety of economic and social development programmes in Pointe St-Charles.

Of the two case studies from outside Montreal, the chapter by Ninacs looks at the Bois-Francs, an area in southern Quebec around Victoriaville. He critically examines the Bois-Francs communitarian movement focusing on the ideological evolution from its socio-political activist roots in the late 1960s to the broader coalition of grassroots community based organizations that exists today. The final case study by Stinson -- and the only one from outside Quebec -- documents a CED initiative in an Ottawa neighbourhood designed to address long-standing unemployment and dependency and build a sense of community.

Throughout the essays, the tensions between the local community and the State are clearly evident. While empowerment in the form of local development of initiatives and citizen participation in organizational and management roles clearly mark advances in community development during recent years, financial dependency on the State is still the rule rather than the exception. Such dependency often compromises the ideological goals of CED agencies who seek not only advances in job creation but also improvements in social well-being. Innovative and alternative programmes often are forced to revert to more traditionally acceptable forms in order to acquire funding.

The authors seek to critically evaluate the CED programmes and initiatives they present although as the editor notes these processes are on-going and thus the longer term impacts cannot be evaluated. The problems of assessing quantitative versus qualitative outcomes is a further issue which again highlights the local community versus State tension. This is summed up in the following quotation from McMurtry, which also illustrates the nature of the social goals of CED discussed in these essays:

" ...if only one of five participants is able to create a viable business, the other four participants' businesses will be seen only as failed effortsthe funders' system of accounting success is not concerned with social indicators

of successimproved skill, a higher quality of life, increased confidence, the ability to assert one's rights and affirm one's sense of self within a positive and supportive environment" (pp. 70-71).

As a book of primarily case studies, each chapter within the book can be read independently, indeed, many chapters lead into the discussion of practice with a conceptual or philosophical introduction which is useful. Overall, the papers are well-written, although as with any edited volume, the style and tone of each chapter reflects that of the individual author. The referencing however tends to be uneven, with some authors including only a few endnotes whereas others provide more extensive bibliographies -- likely a reflection of the contributor mix of academics and practitioners. The discussion of French language publications is useful as this information is not easily accessible to the anglophone reader.

The focus on Quebec presents a few challenges to the broader audience. While in Chapter One, Shragge's discussion of the politics of CED does set community practice in a Quebec context and in Chapter Six, Ninacs briefly elaborates on the distinctive political and cultural situation in Quebec since the 1960s, the implications of this distinct context to CED practices compared to those in other Canadian provinces is not clear. Context aside, discussion of the concepts of empowerment and alternative strategies and the case studies examples raise critical questions concerning the role of CED in effecting social change and the relationship between local communities and central governments. *Community Economic Development: In Search of Empowerment and Alternatives* is a welcome addition to the CED literature with an appeal to both students and practitioners.

Alison M. Gill
Department of Geography
Simon Fraser University