



The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III: 1840–1950. Edited by Martin Daunton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000. ISBN 0-521-41707-4. 944 pages.

By the 1850s Britain was already an urbanised country: about 50 per cent of the British population lived in towns, and a hundred years later the proportion was over 80 per cent. Finland today only has about 67 per cent of its population living in towns, and in 1800 the proportion was only six per cent. Thus, for the Finnish reader the Urban History of Britain, volume 3, offers a different perspective on the process of urbanisation.

The third volume of the Cambridge Urban History of Britain contains almost 900 pages of detailed analysis about British history. This paper is not a critical review of this book, but rather a brief, summary of its contents. Thus, this review hardly scratches the surface of the its contents and does not do full justice to the several authors of the volume. One can warmly recommend the 60 page introduction and the seven page epilogue by the editor, Martin Daunton, which summarises nicely the contents of the book.

The time period of the named volume is the most interesting one: 1840–1950 was the era of urban industrialisation – or urbanisation of the high-industrial period. The volume uses the most recent theoretical and analytical literature, thus the selected bibliography and footnotes are informative to anyone interested in the urbanisation process or British history as whole.

The third volume of the Cambridge Urban History of Britain is divided into five separate parts. In the first part, *Circulations*, the articles underline the importance of cities as centres of networks, both within and between towns. The second part, *Governance*, deals with the issues related to the growing importance of the local municipality during the era of liberal politics. The third part, *Constructions*, stresses the huge investments made in British towns during the modern period. Not only the public investments (such as hospitals, schools, and libraries) were massive, but also the investments in housing (rising living standards) and various other economic activities. In the fourth section, *Getting and Spending*, consumption is the central theme, including incomes (through industrialisation), population growth (fertility and mortality patterns), and consumerism. The fifth part is concerned with the image of town in the visual arts.

In the following these five parts of the volume are introduced with some further details. Some concluding remarks are presented at the end of this review.

Networks

In the first part of the book the authors concentrate on the circulation of resources within the urban system. The circulation of goods through better infrastructures was extremely important, including canals, coastal shipping, turnpikes, and especially, railroads. "Cities are systems within systems of cities", as Lynn Lee describes these networks. Transport is not only important within the networks between the towns but also for the internal needs of the city, as shown in the article by John Armstrong.

Also the circulation of people, namely migration, as presented in the article by David Feldman was important. In some towns, like Manchester and Glasgow, over 75 per cent of the population over the age of 20 were born elsewhere during the 1850s. Also the patterns of migration changed during the period: from migration to the industrial cities to the suburbs a hundred years later.

Also interesting is the flow of information and capital. This evolved through better infrastructure (telegraph, telephone) and the development of the business practises and companies themselves (from local to domestic or even to international players). At the beginning of the period locality was characteristic for the business practises, but at the end the business networks were tied up with the capital town. Thus, London gained more importance.

Furthermore, Britain and especially London was the centre of the international networks of transport, information, and capital. This is, however, not stressed enough in the volume. London was the centre of economic activity; it was also the largest town in the world at the beginning of the period, and still the largest one in Europe at the end of the period, as stressed in the article by Richard Dennis. London was also the centre of the British domestic urban network.

Towns as Political Entities

The central idea of the second section of the volume is, according to the introduction, to show "the extent to which the central government should allow local authorities autonomy, and how far they should be controlled". The political urban life is analysed with a deep theoretical orientation; the articles include notes on the new political economy and the public choice school. The main question is: how to modernise a town, by whom and who got the benefits. Pressure groups had – according to the article by Barry Doyle – an enormous impact on the activities of municipalities.

The growing importance of municipality and local governance is the most interesting and even paradoxical feature of the age of liberalism, as Daunton puts it, it was the time when "it was easier to agree to disagree". The period from the mid-19th to mid-20th century was the time of the rising domestic liberalism, as shown in the articles by John Davis and Marguerite Dupree. But, it is interesting to see how governmental liberalism was actually far away from the local practises, called in the articles as "gas and water socialism". The public organisations were needed to fill the gaps of the private or voluntary organisations. Therefore, municipal services became both

more extensive and more inclusive, as Robert Millward shows. Of course, there were huge differences between different towns, whether the services were offered as private or as public goods.

The role of the urban municipality changed; during the previous periods the local government, namely town council, was to maintain order and preserve property (as it was in Scandinavia also) – but now (at the end of the 19th century) it also provided services to the citizens (services) that they could not undertake themselves), and performed duties in the interests of the society. It can be argued – after reading the articles by John Davis and Marguerite Dupree – that the development of civic society and the welfare state begun within the cities. This even changed the social structures within the towns, as pointed out in the article by R. J. Morris. During this time period the "English system" was built up, namely the system where the central government was dependent upon local authorities.

Urban Area as a Construction Site

In the third part of the volume the theoretical background lies on the urban ecology and in the theories of the urban spatial structure. The human activity is stressed in behind the changes in the urban space – namely, the relationship between the people and the places. These theoretical tools are introduced in the article by Colin Pooley.

In the 1950s a British town looked much different than it had looked a hundred years before. The urban area was at the time (and still is) a huge construction site; there is always something to be built up somewhere – if there is not, it is the most obvious sign that the town is in trouble. The reason for the huge constructions can be found from the changing structures in economy. First, the demographic change was a precondition to the constructions, namely the growing population in towns. Secondly, the technological change that allowed the changes within the constructions and demographics – especially transportation. Thirdly, it was the time of division of work and home – large industrial plants were build up as well as the housing density changed. The articles in this part of the book also take into account the residential space of the towns as the public and private spaces, including e.g. streets, parks, workplaces, and shops.

During this time period the standards of living changed a lot through higher quality of housing. Of course, there were still problems due to the poor quality of housing, high mortality rates in certain areas and so on, though it was getting better all the time.

The authors have also notified the importance of landownership and rising values of the urban space. This includes the land, housing, and the industrial estates. The landlord-tenant relationship is an essential feature in urban societies. The problems of controlling fair rents and mortgages were partly the reasons which led to a massive program of council house building by local councils after the First World War with the financial aid provided by the central government. This is, of course, an extremely important part in the development of the welfare state. The proportion of private rent diminished, and the private ownership as well as the public ownership rose.

The constructions were not only limited to housing, also a growing range of public buildings such as hospitals, schools, churches and so

on were built in increasing numbers. Even the new architecture of "power and authority" was introduced in these buildings.

The planning system is an interesting part of the story. It is sometimes argued that the reforms in the cities and especially in the city centres were done from above, which (according to Margaret Thatcher) "cut the heart out of the cities". However, Abigail Beach and Nick Tiratsoo manage to show in their article that the picture was not so black-and-white. City centres were transformed by commercial development. Railway stations provided more vitality to the centres, bringing with them hotels, new local traffic networks such as trams and busses. Stores, shops, special business premises, and joint-stock banks were located in the city centres. Even more specialised services were also provided in the smaller towns, including lawyers, engineers, and brokers.

The Economy

The urban economy moved towards specialisation. According to the fourth chapter of the volume, industrial capitalism was the ruling force in the northern parts of Britain, while in the south the commercial and service economy was more significant. During this time period the cities were dynamic economic entities – as they still are. Not only traditional industries (such as textiles, coal, iron and steel, and shipbuilding) flourished, but also a wide variety of other economic activities, including small industries.

The mortality and fertility patterns, as described by Simon Szreter and Anne Hardy, as well as the capabilities of the cities to supply labour (the article by David Gillbert and Humphrey Southall) were extremely important for economic growth. The economic structure of the towns changed during this period. At first, British towns were a kind of self-serving system, with their own financial institutions (banks and insurance companies), local industrial enterprises and even local oriented commercial firms. However, this pattern changed during this period. Especially important were the mergers between British banks, which led to the growing importance of the City of London.

Within the cities there were a lot of personal networks, economic clusters, involved with expertise from several lines of businesses. Thus, cities had, as Daunton puts it "information-based human capital", a lot of business professionals who co-operated both formally and especially informally. Cities were "the information superhighways of the 19th century", as David Reeder and Richard Rodger stresses. Personal networks were in British case especially important: trust between the people and personal reputation (especially in small business) were essential.

The changing patterns of consumption, as described by John K. Walton, are also worth to mention. Falling prices left money also to other activities, such as entertainment, and sports, as stressed by Douglas Reid.

The Images of the Town

The urban entity was also an image, a smell, and sound. During the period the cleansing of the cities occurred, the light to the darkness was introduced, and at the same time the problem of pollution and noise was noted by the public opinion. In the fifth part of the volume, Caroline Arcsott studies in the representation of the city in the visual arts: how cities were seen in arts in a positive light, as sources of invention and harmony. For example, in the arts the central role of the railway station is stressed, which celebrates the hectic city centres.

Conclusions

The third volume of the Cambridge Urban History of Britain brings new ideas to the research of modern town. The issues are related to economic development. Thus, the theories are mostly those of economic history. The theoretical background lies especially in the new political economy, new institutional economics, the public choice school (collective action) and in wide variety of urban studies and theories

The other, perhaps surprising but justified, feature is that the book deals equally with several British towns. London is handled in the volume only as a part of the British urban system, not as the case or model or the overwhelming and dominating centre, which it of course partly was, but partly was not. There are a lot of similarities, but also differences between the towns – like in mortality rates, and in the distribution of welfare. Therefore, the volume shows that the comparative perspective is essential. The volume also points out that it is not only big cities that matter; smaller ones can also tell us a lot, perhaps the same story, perhaps a bit different one. The smallest towns are analysed separately in the article by Stephen Royle.

The third surprising and unexpected feature is the quantity on which the role played by the business is recognized in the volume; especially the interaction between the business and society. This is important not only to understand the urban communities during the modern period, but also in order to understand towns and cities in our times.

The fourth important feature is the structural change in the British towns. The paradoxical feature is that Britain urbanised and towns lost their individual autonomy at the same time. Consolidation of banks, firms and other enterprises removed financial and industrial control from the smaller towns to the capital. The growing importance of central government changed the role played by the towns. On the other hand, as described in several articles, during the time period cities accumulated social capital, created conditions for collective action and even created conditions for the powerful external economic.

Was a British town during the modern age a success story? At least living conditions improved, as well as welfare. The 20th century was a time of decline in political, social and economic importance of the different towns, even the time of loss of the urban autonomy. After the 1950s the urban variable lost its force, as Dauntton describes in his epilogue. Today Britain is an urban nation, and separate urban history is, thus, not realistic – or is it? Towns and cities still matter, as Dauntton writes in his introduction.

In order to find out whether the British model was an average or best practise, we must undertake international comparisons. The development of British towns and cities can serve as a model for urbanizing countries of the world, even today. There is a lot to learn from these lessons – if one is willing to learn. Cities are crucial to economic growth, stability and welfare, as Daunton stresses.

Therefore, this volume provides us tools for further, comparative research. It is usually pointed out that one cannot compare different countries – at least not the historical development of different countries – because they are so different that the comparisons are impossible. However, this is actually exactly the reason why we have to compare different countries and histories in order to find out, why they are and were so different, and why they developed so differently.

Therefore, the Cambridge Urban History of Britain is not only a British story. It is a good basis for international comparisons, hopefully, in the near future. As a kind of "toolkit" for studies in different countries volume 3 serves well.

* * *

Suomenkielinen tiivistelmä / Abstract in Finnish

Martin Dauntonin toimittaman *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*in osa III esittelee yli 900 sivullaan brittiläistä kaupunkihistoriaa erittäin kiinnostavana urbaanin teollistumisen aikakautena 1840–1850. Teoksen viisi päälukua lähestyvät kaupunkihistoriaa kukin omasta näkökulmastaan: kaupunkeja erilaisten verkostojen keskuksina, paikallishallinnon kehitystä suhteessa keskusvaltaan, kaupunkeja taloudellisten investointien kohteina, kulutuksen keskuksina sekä kaupungin kuvaa taiteissa. Erityisesti taloudelliseen kehitykseen liittyviin kysymyksiin kiinnitetään paljon huomiota, mistä johtuen myös taloushistorialliset teorit ovat teoksen artikkeleissa keskeisessä asemassa. Myös liiketoiminnan ja muun yhteiskunnan välistä vuorovaikutusta korostetaan yllättävänkin paljon. Ote on kautta linjan vertaileva: pääkaupungin asemaa ei korosteta liikaa, vaan Lontoo nähdään varsin hedelmällisenä tavalla myös kaupunkina kaupunkien joukossa. Teos tarjoaakin runsaasti hyviä työkaluja laajempaan kansainväliseen vertailuun.

(Finnish abstract by Pekka Hirvonen)

Reviewed by Jari Ojala, who is a docent in economic history at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

ENNEN JANYT
Historian tietosanomat

