H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Dorothee Brantz, Sonja Dümpelmann, eds. *Greening the City: Urban Landscapes in the Twentieth Century.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. vi + 246 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3114-2.

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Published on H-Urban (May, 2013)
Commissioned by Alexander Vari

New Perspectives on Nature and the Twentieth-Century City

In recent years, municipalities have become increasingly interested in urban "greening" initiatives and the related social and environmental benefits. "Greening" in this context generally connotes things such as an increase in plant life and "natural" spaces, implementation of environmentally sustainable and responsible practices, and efforts to improved quality of life for city residents. In a collection of essays titled *Greening the City: Urban Landscapes in the Twentieth Century*, contributing scholars explore "greening" in a much broader sense to encompass the fullness and complexity of the human-environment relationship and the place of nature (defined in different ways by the authors) in the modern city and in urban life.

In a well-crafted introduction to the volume, editors Dorothee Brantz and Sonja Dümpelmann articulate a conceptual and methodological framework for the tremendous diversity of topics and approaches that follow. "We believe," they write, "that the interconnectedness of the 'natural' and urban environment, of the 'natural' and built world, calls for scholarship that bridges a variety of disciplines like urban, … environmental, landscape, architectural, and planning history" (p. 8). Indeed, the contributions were selected from papers presented at a conference hosted by the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, and attended by scholars from European and North American institutions and research centers. Effectively a series of case studies, *Greening the City* has geographic and chronological breadth considering cities on both sides of the Atlantic from the late nineteenth century to the latter decades of the twentieth century. The essays are concise and tightly constructed; noteworthy as much for their individual scholarship as for their contribution to the work as a whole in that each author's careful research illuminates another facet of the complex and changing relationship between nature and the city, humans and the urban environment.

The book is divided into four sections, each of which explores a particular aspect of the political, social, and cultural construction of "natural" space in the city. However, as the editors point out and as many of the essays demonstrate, "nature," once constructed, acted as a force as well, shaping the experience of the city and a wide array of understandings about urban nature. Part 1, "Constructing Green Urban Spaces," explores the place of green space in comprehensive urban planning with essays by Sonia Hirt and Alfonso Valenzuela Aguilera, concerning Sofia, Bulgaria, and Mexico City, respectively. The two case studies focus on the affect of foreign urban planning ideologies on local urban development and concepts of the role of nature in the city. Hirt asserts that, in attempting to develop a large-scale plan for the city of Sofia, city planners "broadly followed international paradigms, and much like their colleagues abroad, struggled to define the proper union between city and nature, and city and region" (p. 31). Similarly, Valenzuela Aguilera notes that, in the early decades of the twentieth-century, urban planning in Mexico City reflected planning traditions in Europe and the United States, which included expansive green space development. Yet in both cases, planning efforts and the concept of the relationship between the city and nature, while drawing on outside influences, reflected the very particular political contexts and practical realities of the cities themselves–foreign models did not take root easily or without significant adaptation.

In part 2, "Nature and Urban Identity," the authors likewise address questions of urban planning and the relationship between nature and the city, yet with an emphasis on urban identities. Urban anthropologist Gary McDonogh demonstrates that political and cultural discourses concerning nature, disparate and at times contradictory, have worked to link city and nature inextricably in a complex Barcelonan identity. The discourses

of "nature" and that which is "native" and "natural" surrounding the design competition for the Schiller Park in Berlin in 1907, as analyzed by landscape architectural historian Stephanie Hennecke, appear to link nature to a decidedly conservative, nationalistic vision of urban identity despite the ostensibly progressive, modernist design of the park–what the author calls the park's "antimodern/modern design" (p. 91). In the final essay of this section, nature, urban identity, race, and class intersect in Lawrence Culver's study of the emerging American metropolis of Los Angeles. Designed to be city of recreation with easy access to local natural space, Los Angeles was promoted as a democratic utopia and "a place that merged city and nature" (p. 109). However, according to Culver, overt and more subtle discrimination combined with suburbanization resulted in leisure, particularly swimming, becoming increasingly accessible to white, middle-class Angelenos only, alienating most city residents from the very "nature" that defined the city.

Emphasizing both the actual and theoretical social function of green space in the city, the essays that comprise part 3, "The Function of Nature in the City," also consider the larger ecological and planning implications of that use. In the only comparative study in the book, authors Peter Clark, Salla Jokela, and Jarmo Saarikivi chronicle the changes in public sports areas in London and Helsinki, arguing that social and economic factors spurred the expansion of those areas in different ways in each city but with the similar result of an increase in urban green space. Aggressive landscape maintenance practices used to manage those spaces, particularly golf courses, resulted in a genuinely negative popular view of them as harmful to the environment and their number declined. However, the authors point out that recent ecological research challenges that perception, revealing that maintained sporting areas actually enhance biodiversity in the urban environment. In her essay, Konstanze Sylva Domhardt argues that public green space became an essential element in the mid-century shift from the conceptual "functional city" to the "humanized city" in the debates and planning theory developed by the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (p. 151). In a fully integrated city, and according to the recommendations of the congress, green space would serve a crucial planning and social function in the city–linking neighborhoods to each other, the city to the periphery, and individuals to community.

The final section of *Greening the City*, "Ecology and the Urban Environment," focuses on environmental history and the way in which the place of nature in the urban environment was contested throughout the twentieth century. Zachary J. S. Falck demonstrates that as American cities grew and changed, "uncontrolled nature" became increasingly intolerable to city officials and some residents, even as others sought to increase wild plants in cities. The legal battles and continued prohibition of weeds raised important questions about the reach of municipal authority and private property ownership rights, and according to Falck, ultimately "limited Americans' ability to rethink their relationships with the natural world as cities continued to change" (p. 175). With the economic downturn of the 1970s and urban decline, however, Jeffery Craig Sanders shows that a politicized counterculture of environmental activists emerged in Seattle, Washington, offering an alternative vision of the city and nature. They advocated reclaiming the city through decentralization and connecting the urban home and neighborhood to nature through private and community practices imbued with political purpose, such as backyard organic gardening and recycling. Popularization of this vision over time among middle-class urban dwellers resulted in public policy changes that laid the foundation for contemporary planning and environmental movements, but also disconnected the counterculture's vision from its political ethos. Contested natural space, construction and regulation over urban nature, urban planning, and political activism converge in Jens Lachmund's study of the impact of the work of Berlin's Institute of Ecology on the city's urban ecology and the policy decisions of city leaders. West Berlin's unique history as a walled city made access to nature for the purpose of scientific research critical to ecologists, who then successfully moved into the political arena as advisors in planning affairs. Their efforts worked to conserve nature through defining and preserving urban biotopes. Thus, in the case of contemporary Berlin, urban ecologists have largely mediated the complex relationship between the city and nature.

These scholars offer new perspectives and insights into the political, social, and cultural construction of urban nature and urbanites' relationship to it. The diversity of topics and approaches and the many intriguing intersections between the essays constitute a significant strength of this work. *Greening the City* succeeds as a showcase of new research into the "interconnectedness" of the built and natural environments in cities–the city and nature. It exhibits the fruitfulness of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of urban landscapes in general and green space in particular. The absence of consideration of non-Western twentieth-century urban environments, although noticeable, is less a weakness of the book than a suggestion that an even more global perspec-

tive might provide additional insights into nature and the city, urban planning, identity, the function of green space, and urban ecology. The book has much to offer specialists in the fields represented by the contributors, as well as those interested in the complex ways in which we perceive of and experience nature in the urban milieu.

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Citation: Richard Hopkins. Review of Brantz, Dorothee; Dümpelmann, Sonja, eds., *Greening the City: Urban Landscapes in the Twentieth Century*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. May, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=36488

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