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**Yannick Marec, Ed.**, *Villes en crise? Les politiques municipales face aux pathologies urbaines (fin XVIIIe-- fin XXe siècle)*. CREAPHIS, 2005. 760 pps ; 32€ (pb); ISBN 2-913610-49-8.

Review by Stephen W. Sawyer, University of Chicago.

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This work offers the rare and valuable quality of providing as many answers as it raises questions. Continuing in the vein of a previous collection of essays (papers gathered from a conference held at the University of Angers), published under the title *Le Social dans la ville en France et en Europe 1750-1914*, which explored the history of urban social policy,<sup>[1]</sup> the current volume is a collection of articles originally presented during a conference held in Rouen on urban crises and local government responses to urban "pathologies." The vast number of contributions (66 essays), the variety of subjects treated, as well as the introductions to each section and the notes at the end of each article offer a solid overview of the questions being pursued in the area of municipal governance and the regulation of urban crises. This book is a tremendous resource for those interested in municipal administrations and urban history in France and the modern world.

The collective enterprise gives new relevance to specific and local studies that would suffer from a lack of comparison if published separately in individual journals. Alongside many of today's major French urban historians, there are also young researchers whose work benefits from the editorial efforts which draw larger conclusions by bringing them together with articles on different, and sometimes very different, subjects. Finally, the speeches of political and administrative officials reprinted in the final section evidence the collection's ambition for an engagement with the challenges facing urban communities in France and elsewhere today.

The scope, covering over 200 years, five general themes and eleven sub-themes is slightly vertiginous, but well-organized. An introduction to the work by Yannick Marec draws out the book's major themes. There are then useful introductions to each chapter which orient the reader towards the major issues at hand and substantially lighten the burden of those who wish to discover the vast references and information contained within the book's almost 800 pages.

The five dominant themes are organized thematically and frame the driving questions: "Urban Disorders and Forms of Regulation"; "Responses"; "Poverty, Insecurity and Public Welfare"; "Urban Social Policy and Experiences in the 19th and 20th centuries"; "Urban Politics." The first four cover wide geographic and chronological periods, while the fifth focuses especially on the late twentieth century and concludes with presentations on the part of contemporary political and elected officials.

The first theme draws out the question of urban pathologies, which is also the subtitle of the work. It begins with a rethinking of the path-breaking work by Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et Classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, and a reconsideration of the relationship between crime and urban space.<sup>[2]</sup> The five articles in this chapter attest to Chevalier's contributions as much as the work which remains to be done in thinking about the relationship between cities and crime. Marec concludes that the relationship between crime and urban environments can hardly be taken for granted and must be framed within specific periods of urban growth and adaptation. The second chapter of the first section, entitled "Municipal Governance and Its Partners," offers insightful perspectives on the relationship between national and municipal policy as well as the ubiquity and necessity of partnerships in effective governance on the local level.

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The second section consists of three chapters focusing on “responses” to urban crises. This section is perhaps the most vast, offering insights ranging from the case of Lyon and Paris in the mid-nineteenth century to Indian reactions to Western conceptions of the urban environment. But the section is rendered, once again, more readable by the introductions which open each chapter. The three chapters within the section focus on population politics, questions of hygiene and municipal policy in the domain of education, cultural activities, and sports. In this context, there is a special emphasis on the relationship between urban representations or the forms of conceptualization within the urban environment and the actions taken by the local administrations—for the municipal authorities and their partners to act, it was necessary, first of all, to know and to understand the urban environment. The articles in this portion of the work consider both these representations, the ways in which the society could know and understand itself, and the responses which were pursued in their wake. Most notably, the articles on Paris by Florence Bourillon and Efi Markou, as well Cristina Accornero’s contribution on reforms in Turin at the beginning of the twentieth century, offer a clear demonstration of the relationship between urban representations and municipal intervention.

The third section contains two chapters on poverty and the politics of welfare on the municipal level. Once again, the section draws from a wide range of cases, from the Revolution in Normandy to the impact of the Michelin factory on the region of Clermont Ferrand in the twentieth century. The first chapter focuses specifically on the impact of liberalism in welfare policy. While the cases in this chapter seem particularly diffuse and local, the introduction by Guy Lemarchand offers an insightful synthesis by proposing an evolution in three phases: 1780 to 1820, 1820 to 1850-80, 1850 to 1900. This chapter is perhaps one of the best examples of the fruitful results and more global perspectives which can be gathered from what might appear, at first glance, rather disparate cases. The second chapter in this section focuses on the actors and beneficiaries of municipal welfare policies. Covering Rennes, St. Etienne, Strasbourg, Poitiers, and Clermont-Ferrand, the chapter offers a particularly complete perspective on the geographical variety of approaches to welfare.

The fourth section on urban social policy is divided into two chapters which are organized chronologically. The first chapter on the nineteenth century includes an article by Raymonde Monnier on a subject which has received relatively little consideration in the historiography of the Revolution, the actual administrative policies of the Paris commune. The examples evoked by Monnier, petitions and patriotic festivals, offer a strong case for the ways in which popular politics made new and different demands on an administrative apparatus. Her conclusion, however, that 1793 marks a radical rupture with the administration of the Old Regime might be open to debate in the face of a broader timeline. Even if the Parisian municipal administration was forced to innovate in its attempts to meet the needs of its newly declared citizens, it appears that over the long term (i.e. 1780 - 1830), there were as many continuities as there were differences in terms of financing and defining the limits of municipal power. The revolution in day-to-day municipal administration seems to owe as much to the physiocratic principles of public utility and laissez-faire social organization which was seeping into Parisian municipal governance in the 1780s as the arrival of mass politics in the capital—an argument which is supported in the introduction to the chapter on the role of liberalism in municipal welfare policy in the third section of the work. The second chapter in the section on the twentieth century offers, as Olivier Dumoulin clearly states in the introduction, proof of the city-wide objectives in municipal policy. Throughout the twentieth century and despite geographical and ideological differences, the primary ambition of municipal governments, he suggests, was to account for and correct what were perceived as disfunctionings in the urban organism as a whole.

The final section brings together two chapters. The first focuses on municipal policies of the last forty years, while the second provides presentations given by elected officials. These final contributions, along with Marec’s conclusions, offer another feather in the cap of this vast and ambitious work. While the links between the various articles are sometimes difficult to establish, the book’s value and importance

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for those interested in modern urban history is uncontested. There is, indeed, something for everyone. Moreover, in the wake of urban violence and what might be, without exaggeration, understood as an urban and suburban crisis in France today, this work is a resource for rethinking the approaches to urban issues over the last 200 years. The question mark which punctuates the title attests not only to the challenges, successes and failures of municipal administrative and urban policy, but also to the full complexity and prismatic quality of the issues at hand.

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### **Autour des politiques urbaines**

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#### Débat : Les élus et les problèmes de la ville

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- Pierre Bourguignon, député-maire de Sotteville-lès-Rouen, président de l'association Ville et Banlieue
- Dr. Richard Picot, Représentant du Conseil Général de Seine-Maritime
- Guy Durieux, adjoint au maire de la ville de Canteleu

#### Conclusion

- Yannick Marec

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#### NOTES

[1] Jacques-Guy Petit, Yannick Marec, eds. *Le Social dans la ville en France et en Europe 1750-1914* (Paris: les Ed. de L'Atelier/Ed. ouvrières, 1996).

[2] Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et Classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1984).

Stephen W. Sawyer  
University of Chicago  
Stephen.sawyer@ens.fr

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