

Broich, John. *London: Water and the Making of the Modern City*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013. 214 Pp.

The nineteenth century saw a rapid growth of water works infrastructure in large towns and cities in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. Many water-works started as private ventures with a clear movement towards municipal ownership and operation by the latter part of the century. *London: Water and the Making of the Modern City* starts with an overview of this movement towards water modernization throughout Britain with references to similar trends in the US (New York) and Europe (Paris). The rest of the book focuses on the question: Why did London's government fail to embrace this international trend towards water modernization and take control of the city's water supply? (p.xii)

John Broich follows those nineteenth century advocates of water modernization for whom water supplied continuously, at high-pressure, filtered, ideally soft and from outside the watershed, and under municipal ownership and operation is necessary for a modern city. (pp. 19-25) New York's Croton aqueduct or Liverpool's Vyrnwy scheme provide models of large-scale municipal investment designed to ensure an "inexhaustible sufficiency" of water guaranteeing public health, provision for the poor, fire-hydrants at pressure, and guaranteeing their city's future prosperity. (p. 29) By comparison, London was a laggard. The absence of municipal government slowed the process of modernization in the metropolis.

This book relates the history of the public conversation over water modernization in newspapers, journals, government reports, Royal Commissions, and Parliamentary debates. Focusing on water as a tool of social reform, it emphasizes the role that water played in the movement towards municipal government across Britain as much as the part played by municipal governments in upgrading water infrastructure. Water

provision was not just a technical matter, but a core part of the “urban ecosystem.” (p.82) Yet, as Broich notes, “[s]tudents of the Victorian urban revolution have underestimated the importance of water in town councils’ strategies for building and sustaining the new liberal city.” (p. 66) London’s water remained privately provided until the beginning of the twentieth century, yet it played a signal role in the London County Council’s goal of expanding municipal government for the metropolis.

Early efforts to establish municipal ownership of London’s water supply encountered obstacles to change. Despite Royal Commission recommendations for alternative sources and greater oversight of London’s water supply as early as 1828, politically connected water companies, the high upfront cost of moving to alternative sources, and the absence of unified municipal government meant recommendations were not enacted. By 1889, however, Parliament’s earlier resistance to municipal government for London had waned, and the initial plans of the London County Council (LCC) to take over responsibility for London’s water supply garnered strong cross-party support. (p.84) Yet when Progressive and Fabian elements subsequently became dominant within the LCC, the Conservatives in Parliament turned against LCC control of the city’s water supply, fearing this would enable a more radical revolution in London governance. For the Fabians “water rates were just another form of rent.” (p. 73) They objected to rental income, viewing it as unearned, a result of increasing demand for a resource in limited supply, and as perpetuating social inequality. In 1852, London’s water companies switched from rates negotiated with customers and connected to volume of water used, to water rates tied to property values. As the rental value of properties in London increased so did the water rates, increasing profits independent of an improvement in service or expansion of supply. The LCC’s Fabian members objected to this increase in unearned income and sought to use these water rates to radically transform London (p.81). Once Parliament understood the LCC’s goal, it deemed it a step too far and resisted water modernization as a route to local governmental and institutional reform. Despite “water famines” in east London - a result of droughts in 1895, 1896, and 1898 - that led to complaints against the water companies, in 1898 the LCC failed to secure support to take over the water companies. Conservatives

in Parliament threw their support behind the Staines scheme, relying on water from the Thames, as an alternative to the LCC's plan to bring water to London from Wales. In 1899, the Royal Commission on Water Supply recommended the creation of a non-profit administrative agency as an alternative to the LCC. In 1902, Parliament passed the Metropolis Water Act and in 1904 the Metropolitan Water Board (MWB) took over the responsibility for London's water supply.

*London: Water and the Making of the Modern City* is a history of London's urban ecosystem in which the image of the private water companies is almost universally negative. While this reflects the public conversation during periods of crisis, it fails to do justice to the positive actions taken by the water companies. It also treats them as unified, despite acknowledging the "difference of opinion among the eight companies." (p.113) London's water companies are considered a failure; they had once been the model of success. While British cities looked to New York as a model during the late 1800s, Gerard T. Koeppel notes in his work *Water for Gotham* that early advocates of the Croton in New York referenced London's New River as an example of "good quality water."

While complaints against the MWB are attributed to "the difficulty in expanding the water system's infrastructure at a pace to keep up with demand" (p. 154), the possibility that the water companies faced some of the same challenges is not considered.

*London: Water and the Making of the Modern City* somewhat downplays the challenges of upgrading London's water infrastructure, but it successfully answers the question it set out to address: why London was different. In doing so, Broich provides a rich, detailed, and well-documented history of the political economy of London water supply and municipal governance. As we face the possibility that London's water supply ecosystem may be "unsustainable, that components of it will collapse and be replaced," this book provides a welcome addition to our understanding of the role of the political and social debates in shaping London's water history.

Nicola Tynan  
Dickinson College

United States

**Works Cited**

Koepfel, Gerard T. *Water for Gotham: A History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Lepenies, Philipp. *Die Macht der einen Zahl: Eine politische Geschichte des Bruttoinlandsprodukts*. [The Power of One Number: A Political History of Gross Domestic Product.] Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013. 186 Pp.

Die Macht der Einen Zahl by Philipp Lepenies is a short history of gross domestic product (GDP) and its predecessors as measures of economic development and as measures of development in general. The book was published in the long running “Edition Suhrkamp” series of literary and theoretical essays. The fact that both economics and economic policy discussions often swirl obsessively around GDP figures has generated lots of heated debate and led to attempts to find better ways to compare and conceptualize economic and social development in different countries. Lepenies begins with this debate, and his work leads one to think that had the 20th century western history been more peaceful, the ways to measure the level of national economic development might have been more focused in the income enjoyed by individuals and families in the spirit of Simon Kuznets instead of focusing on production and value added in general. Yet, Lepenies's focus is in how GDP, a statistical construct still unknown before the Second World War, has managed to gain such a central position in economics and policy discussions.

For those not initiated to the subject, it may come as a surprise how young modern national accounting is and how new proper tools to compare economic development in different countries are. Less surprising might be that, as so often in technological development, the major crises of history – world wars and economic recessions – are interwoven to the development of the field. Considering the