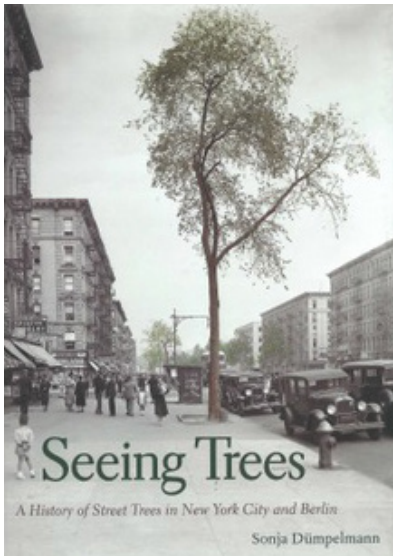


# Seeing Trees

## A History of Street Trees in New York City and Berlin

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Can urban trees be controversial? In *Seeing Trees*, winner of the John Brinckerhoff Jackson Book Prize, professor of landscape history Sonja Dümpelmann presents a thoroughly researched history of the trees of New York City and Berlin in the late 19th and 20th centuries, bringing to light their historical function in the urban environment. In this book, street trees, as well as diverging interest groups, play key roles in constructing a narrative for their city, as citizens advocate for a greener environment.

The publication is divided into two main parts, each with four chapters dedicated to the unique history of each metropolis. The chapters concerning New York City highlight how public and private activism sought to change the landscape of a city with few trees to its name. In the second half, Berlin's trees are discussed, with a focus on the replanting efforts during the post-World War II era and the ideological differences between the Eastern and Western sectors' street tree planning strategies. Common to both parts is society's "rediscovery" of trees for their atmospheric and climate mitigating value, along with organized efforts to educate the greater public about appreciation and preservation. The book's 318 pages cover a broad spectrum of topics, such as the advent of urban forestry, the beginnings of systematic planning processes, and advocacy movements stemming from aesthetic considerations and public health concerns. Although distinct histories set both cities apart, the book underscores commonalities between the two; however, the author does not seek so much a comparison of the two cities, but rather juxtaposes their varied approaches and advancements to the urban canopy.

The stories surrounding the trees make for compelling reading, for engrained in them are clues to a city's identity. Indeed, to read *Seeing Trees* is to delve into highly detailed stories on public and private engagement that have incrementally shaped civic consciousness on trees. A far cry from a mere overview, the book immerses the reader in the changing significance of trees over the last centuries and the intricacies of the various fashions and developments that have impacted the cities' urban canopies. Sonja Dümpelmann acts as a curator, guiding the reader through the lens of historical events in a richly told saga. The meticulous selection of historical plans, photographs, and illustrations, complemented by an extensive bibliography, reflect the author's studied work, while the writing style, though formal, is clear and concise.

The book makes a convincing alternative case from the more traditional approach of „nature versus culture“ dichotomy. Instead, Dümpelmann portrays street trees as an integral part of the urban fabric. Professionals in forestry, urban development, and landscape architecture, as well as readers with a strong interest in the history of the urban landscape, will find this book enlightening as we move towards resilient cities of tomorrow.