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Book Reviews

Urban Sprawl: Causes, Consequences, & Policy Responses

Edited by Gregory D. Squires
(Urban Institute Press, 2002)

Reviewed by Lan Deng

Is urban sprawl, the low-density, auto-oriented, exclusionary new development on the fringe of settled areas, a disturbing phenomenon that needs governmental attention? No, some economists may argue, since urban sprawl (and suburbanization in general) has been in process since the nineteenth century and is now international in scope. Sprawl is driven by three fundamental economic forces: a growing population, rising incomes, and falling transportation costs. Therefore, some assert that the current development pattern of U.S. metropolitan areas is a result of consumers' free choices and cannot be faulted as socially undesirable (see, for example, Black 1997 and Gordon and Richardson 1998).

However, reality isn't so straightforward. A clear message has is conveyed in *Urban Sprawl: Causes, Consequences & Policy Responses*, edited by Gregory D. Squires, that urban sprawl is neither shaped by pure market mechanisms nor the free choice of every U.S. resident, as many of them don't have the capacity to choose. Therefore, this book argues that it would be both morally wrong and economically inefficient to let this trend continue. Nevertheless, judging the legitimacy of urban sprawl is not the end of this work. As a book that is not just satisfying academic curiosities, it also proceeds to discuss alternative remedies to urban sprawl, their political possibilities, and the struggle of some pioneer states in adopting them. By providing important policy guidance, this is also a valuable book for urban practitioners.

In examining the causes of urban sprawl, few people could deny the significant impacts of U.S. government policies, although their magnitudes may be debatable compared with the aforementioned fundamental economic forces. There are policy failures as well as market failures in the history of urban development. Considering the federal government's contributions, such as favorable tax policies on home mortgages and subsidized infrastructure investment, it's not surprising that H. V. Savitch could argue in this book that "[m]ore often than not, Washington has been an exuberant sponsor, though at

times it has proceeded with greater caution (Chapter 6, p. 146).” In addition, thanks to the “voting with your feet” behavior prevailing under a fragmented government structure, many local governments have been motivated to pave the way for the sprawl machine by building homogeneous communities and subsidizing tax surplus developments in greenfield areas.

Urban sprawl not only reduces open space and agricultural land, but also severely influences the efficiency and fairness of urban production and consumption processes. Four essays have been collected in this book (chapters 2-5) to discuss these issues. While acknowledging its environmental impacts and infrastructure costs to local governments, what makes this book unique is how it links urban sprawl with inner city decline, the concentration of poverty, and the persistence of racial inequality. Paul Jargowky states that “sprawl is related to poverty and inequality mainly because sprawl creates a greater degree of separation between the income classes” (Chapter 3, p. 51). Sprawl has not just fragmented urban space but has also fragmented American society. For low income and racial minority populations, the lost development opportunities are across generations.

As urban sprawl goes on, more and more people are paying the price. According to Gregory Squires, “even many of the apparent winners in the process of sprawl and uneven development, however, are starting to experience severe costs. Families of inner-ring suburbs who thought they had escaped the woes of the city now find that they incur some of the same costs as development spins further outward” (Chapter 1, p. 13). The anti-sprawl coalition has broadened and some state and local governments have been able to take actions to rein in the unlimited sprawl. Five chapters in this book are devoted to examining these actions, including the well-established urban growth boundary in Portland, Oregon, the tax revenue sharing system in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the incentive based smart growth initiatives in Maryland, as well as some embryonic regional cooperative efforts in Atlanta and Chicago where sprawl has been long-standing and endemic. These essays are nicely written and illustrate well the power and politics in the sprawl debate, as every action being taken to curb sprawl would inevitably require some reforming of existing metropolitan institutions. However, despite the high political momentum of growth control in Oregon and Maryland, the general picture depicted in this book is still bleak: the resistance remains strong and the effectiveness of these government actions is still under debate.

What makes reform so hard? The last, but also the most important chapter in my view, provides us with an answer. By reviewing public choice theory, Jeffrey Heing points out that the resistance to anti-sprawl measures and metropolitan reforms not only comes from “those with a direct and material stake in fighting specific proposals,” but also “is rooted in adherence to ideas and theories that defend fragmentation and localism as the cornerstones of democracy, free markets and individual enterprise” (Chapter 12, p. 333). To metropolitan reformers, both theoretical and empirical challenges are big, but the price of not fighting is even higher. As a result, a muddling through approach is suggested by Heing. He advocates a “shift from directly challenging existing institutions to finding ways to exploit and redirect the power of institutions to define interests” (Chapter 12, p. 333). This is not only the most practical approach, but might also be the only choice. Let’s hope that in the process of compromise, the demands of the underprivileged and politically unorganized do not get lost.

References

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Asset Building and Community Development

Gary Paul Green and Anna Heines
(Sage Publications, 2002)

Reviewed by Jane Rongerude

As a theoretically ambiguous sub-area of the discipline of planning, community development can be approached in three ways: through community studies, poverty theory, or theories of development. Each of these approaches raises issues important to the task of theorizing community development, such as the meaning and value of community, the causes of poverty and inequality, the potential

of state intervention and regulation, the limits of public interest, and, fundamentally, the meaning of citizenship and place. They help us ask who we are, how we live together, and why the places where we live provide us with meaning, identity, and sometimes opportunity. Sadly, most texts on the subject take a fourth approach, bypassing theoretical discussions for insular stories of successful neighborhood struggles and step-by-step prescriptions for locally based interventions. As a result, it is much easier to find information about how to do community development than it is to learn what exactly community development is or why it should be practiced at all.

Gary Paul Green and Anna Heines's book, *Asset Building and Community Development* follows in the fourth tradition. In the Preface, the authors introduce their intention for the book:

"There are numerous examples where residents have improved their quality of life by providing affordable housing, job training, and financing for local businesses. Yet there continues to be skepticism about the ability of communities to overcome problems of concentrated poverty in the inner city, underdevelopment in rural areas, and social isolation in many of our communities today. In this book, we examine the promise, and limits, of community development."

Green and Haines promise to show how community-based, non-governmental efforts can change the quality of life of local residents. Their approach is general, optimistic, and easily digested. It is not limited to low-income communities or urban communities. It is not based on market dynamics or government interventions. Instead, the approach is based on the belief that interventions such as microdevelopment enterprise programs or neighborhood strategic planning can help build community assets, in turn materially improving the quality of life for residents. Community development is about people engaging locally in the practices of democracy. The promise is that skills learned vis-à-vis this engagement will transfer "to other walks of life."

The book is divided into three sections. The first provides a brief history of community development in the United States and its organizational context. It also sets the basic definitions upon which the rest of the text is built, including community, development, and community development. Part two examines five forms of community

capital: human, social, physical, financial, and environmental. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the limits of individual or state efforts to improve community capital in this area, moves through an overview of the theory in this area, and ends with key actors, institutions, and strategies. The third section addresses topics that are more sweeping and more timely: community sustainability, international community development and globalization, emerging uses of technology and the future of community development.

Like many introductory texts, the ideas are simplified and controversy is omitted. Phrases such as “community residents need space to permit social interaction” and “The United States relies very heavily on a market approach to matching workers to jobs” abound. These phrases are too simplistic to be controversial or even very interesting. In an effort to provide an introduction to the broad range of topics associated with community development, much of the substance is removed. For example, the authors take less than a page to cover the question of whether the regional or local scale is most appropriate for practicing economic development. Their conclusion is that regional strategies are not a replacement for local strategies, but that “they represent a recognition of the linkages between communities and their regions.” One would expect that an approach based on local participation would favor local strategies over regional ones, but this conclusion has little substance to challenge and, providing these recognitions are important, even less to operationalize.

Graphically, the book is well-laid out and easy to follow. Illustrative case studies or graphic representations of core ideas are emphasized in individual text boxes. Every chapter ends with key concepts, questions, exercises, references and additional suggested readings that include relevant websites. The references are thorough and include the most important texts for each topic. However, be warned that the material in this text is especially basic. For example, in the physical capital chapter, a box titled “Information Sources” lists ten bullet points which include local libraries, building inspector and commissions, planning departments, the US Bureau of the Census, and private data providers. The list is so general that “Books” or “Websites” could have been included as bullet points. In addition, the material is broad and not specific to any one locality. After learning that local libraries or private data providers are potential sources of information, it is up to the reader to identify individual institutions.

Asset Building and Community Development is an introductory text for the student or practitioner new to the community development field. Community development is presented here much as it exists in the literature: broad, vague, optimistic, and with a little something for everyone. Everything from the five forms of capital to the history of the Social Security Act to indicators for sustainable development are included. The thorough bibliographies at the end of each section as well as the summaries of debates for each topic make this book a useful reference tool for more experienced students and practitioners. However, those anxious to engage in a much needed discourse about the meaning and purpose of community development will not find what they are looking for in this book; and those looking for theory that challenges the loose assumptions and tepid promises of the status quo will have to wait. That work remains undone.

The Prospect of Cities

John Friedmann

(University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

Reviewed by Gerardo Sandoval

“The City is Dead.” - John Friedmann.

John Friedmann’s ambitious work, *The Prospects of Cities*, argues for a new normative view of city development. Although there are implicit dangers in normative theories, Friedmann’s call for the “good city” inspires a utopian thinking in which planning theorists and practitioners can build the foundations and root their discipline in the structural transformation of cities. Theorizing about planning has this inherent tension between theory and practice built into its intellectual foundations, and Friedmann plays with this tension as he formulates his normative theory and at the same time discusses his personal development as both a planning practitioner and theorist. *The Prospects of Cities* is a controversial book as many planners will contest the normative theory developed by Friedmann and, in many respects, this is the point of Friedmann’s efforts.

Before postulating his proposal of “The Good City,” Friedmann discusses the current shape of cities and the dire problems

they are facing. His analysis critiques the current processes of economic development (especially in developing countries) and of transnational migration, arguing for the reformulation of the concept of citizenship. Being one of the founders of UCLA's planning program, it is not surprising that Friedmann begins with the account of the City-Region as the current spatial representation of political, economic and cultural power. He argues that cities are dead and that City-Regions serve as hubs, linked and interconnected to a global mosaic of transnational capital flows of labor, communication systems, and cultural images. He critiques the present conditions of the economic development process, yet acknowledges opportunities for developing countries to benefit in this global mosaic of production flows. Friedmann advises developing countries to reach out to global capital flows while concurrently developing their endogenous resource complexes: human, social, cultural, intellectual and environmental resources. He presents the "Eurocities Network" — an intercity network that is both competitive and collaborative and which has gained much success linking more than 60 European cities with populations over 250,000 — as an example of an economic development strategy available for developing countries.

Friedmann continues his analysis of current geopolitical pressures on cities by placing transnational migration and the re-conception of citizenship at the forefront of urban theory. This is a timely discussion. Transnational migration places new constraints on cities which need to be substantially researched and debated. Friedmann does not treat this issue in a superficial manner but uses Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to portray the complex cultural challenges that face migrants when coming to a large city from predominantly rural environments. The transnationalization of City-Regions directly challenges conventional notions of citizenship construction and, in fact, Friedmann sees these contradictions in citizenship as an opportunity to develop what he calls "insurgent citizenship." Insurgent citizenship is "a form of active participation in social movements or as we may also call them, communities of political discourse and practice, that aim at either, or both, the defense of existing democratic principles and rights and the crimping of new rights that, if enacted, would lead to an expansion of the spaces of democracy, regardless of where these struggles take place." Insurgent democracy is central, because it provides the political agency to bring The Good City into both planning theory and practice.

Friedmann's normative theory of The Good City, is conceptualized in four parts: 1) Theoretically, the importance of a common good is advocated. 2) Human Flourishing is a fundamental human right, being that "every human being has the right, by nature, to the full development of their innate intellectual, physical, and spiritual capabilities in the context of their communities." 3) Multipli/city is a primary good, that is "an autonomous civil life substantially free from direct supervision and control of the state." Finally, 4) Good Governance. The material basis of "The Good City" is developed through the last two concepts: Multipli/city and Good Governance. In order to reach Friedmann's concept of Multipli/city, a solid material base needs to be developed. Friedmann advocates four pillars: socially adequate housing, affordable health care, adequately remunerated work, and adequate social provision, which working together will promote a self-organized civil society that encourages a flourishing civil life. Finally, Friedmann develops a more substantive account of City-Region governance as: inspired political leadership, public accountability, transparency, and the right to information, inclusiveness, responsiveness, and last, nonviolent conflict management. The Good City, therefore, represents a normative theory of city development which is grounded in political will and directly challenges many of the structural barriers in which planning theory and practice is currently trapped.

Friedmann, being both a planning theorist and practitioner understands the importance of grounding this normative theory with political agency and directly linking its components to planning process and outcome. His effort is commended as he nicely builds a thread that links many of the planning problems cities are currently facing. However, there was ambiguity regarding the institutionalization of his normative theory. Many questions were left unanswered regarding the relationship between institutions and a self-organized civil society, which was a central point to both his concepts of Multipli/city and insurgent citizenship. For example, What is the role that the planner plays in relation to a self-organized civil society? The planner seems to not play a strong role in this theory, because as an agent, her role or contribution is difficult to pin down. Also, the concept of insurgent citizenship, although providing political agency and the power to influence the pillars that would lead to The Good City, is not adequately developed. What will the struggle look like and who will participate? Again, these concepts place planners in difficult

situations because insurgent citizenship, being a social movement, critiques the very institutions through which most planners gain their legitimacy.

Despite these criticisms, Friedmann's *The Prospect of Cities* is a superb and exceptional piece. Friedmann provides a normative theory of urban development that adheres to principles of equity and goes beyond typical basic needs infrastructure development to one based on social, political, economic, and cultural needs. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is Friedmann's account of his personal development as a planning practitioner, researcher, and theorist. He places this account at the end of the book, almost as an epilogue. However, this account should be in the front. Friedmann's fifty years of thinking, researching, and applying his skills to influencing planning is extremely helpful in better understanding his theories and why he advocates for a drastic change in urban development. His life clearly shows the tensions he experienced dealing with planning praxis. His personal experience nicely matches the tension in the field of planning between theory and practice and provides a clear context of Friedmann's thinking for the remainder of the book. Hence, this mix of personal account and scholarly research makes *The Prospect of Cities* a timely work that should have a lasting impact on both planning theory and practice.