

BOOK REVIEWS

Neumann, Tracy

Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America

Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016

270 pages

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In her first book, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America*, Tracy Neumann explores the role of policymakers and business elites in the emergence of postindustrial societies. She provides a detailed account of the trials and tribulations of two Rust Belt cities (Hamilton, ON and Pittsburgh, PA) and their respective campaigns toward postindustrialism. Neumann eschews contemporary narratives advocating that postindustrial transformations of national economies and old manufacturing centers were inevitable due to the decline of basic industry. Instead of viewing postindustrial transformation as a product of natural business cycles and neutral market forces, she argues that “growth coalitions composed of local political and business elites set out to actively create postindustrial places.” As a work of urban history, the book relies upon in depth knowledge and carefully chosen quotes to expose the intricacies of the postindustrial transition rather than a construct an explicit argument. *Remaking the Rust Belt* is well written and demonstrates Neumann’s thorough understanding of the two cities, the public and private actors and the wider processes at play.

Generally speaking, the book follows the chronological evolution of the two cities. From the roots of postindustrialism through to the new geography of downtown and the shifts in spaces of production and consumption, Neumann traces relative successes and failures of the changing physical, socioeconomic and cultural landscape. The chapters are organized thematically, rather than by geography. This approach is particularly effective as the continual comparative analysis of the two cities stays at the forefront of the narrative. In doing so, the formal and informal differences between the two cities are clearly established.

The majority of urban scholarship on the Rust Belt presents it as a strictly American phenomenon—a declining geographic area stretching from New York to Chicago. Neumann expands the Rust Belt region across the northern border of the United States to include Canadian manufacturing centers. Despite different outcomes, *Remaking the Rust Belt* convincingly argues that in both Canada and the United States “a consensus emerged among policymakers across partisan and political boundaries that public incentives for private-sector economic and urban redevelopment projects were not just one way but, instead, the only way to confront urban problems.” In response to declining public resources, “city officials made harsh calculations about whose needs they would no longer meet, rather than seeking to better the needs of all residents.” Neumann’s inclusion of a wide range of actors (politicians, public, unions, business elites, etc.) and their perceptions of whether policy should benefit real or potential residents is well articulated throughout the book (especially in the final chapter *Cities for Whom?*). Neumann argues that although cities striving towards postindustrialism may have laid the foundation for neoliberal urbanism, “their complicity was the unintentional outcome of limited resources and an inability to see beyond postindustrialism as a planning model.”

Remaking the Rust Belt makes an important contribution to the urban literature by offering a transnational comparison of postindustrial Rust Belt cities. Neumann clearly demonstrates the distinction between planning and policymaking in the two institutional contexts—which, historically, the local actors themselves often underestimated. The sixth chapter, *Marketing Postindustrialism*, deserves special attention. The emergence and impact of municipal promotion was particularly fascinating. The discussion of the influence of Pittsburgh’s marketing campaigns throughout the industrialized world accentuated many of the themes established throughout the book.

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Overall, this is a well-written, thoroughly researched and well-rounded book. I would strongly recommend it to urban historians interested in the Rust Belt region, as well as anyone interested in the evolution (and co-evolution) of the two cities. Lastly, the book is a great resource for anyone looking to understand Pittsburgh's "success" and the applicability of their postindustrial model in other locations.

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