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BOOK REVIEW

Terry Kading (ed).

No Straight Lines: Local Leadership and the Path from Government to Governance in Small Cities

Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2018.

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Much of the literature on the Canadian urban experience focuses on the familiar: the nation's large metropolitan centres. This book focuses on the under-studied, yet really important, small city experience. Millions of Canadians live in smaller urban centres; there are over 80 cities with populations between 50-500,000 scattered across the country.

Small cities must deal with problems that are similar to those experienced in large city-regions: homelessness, unemployment, dealing with growth pressures (or place decline) and the search for place—the need to belong somewhere, to have the opportunity to thrive and to live a life with purpose. Like our larger cities, small cities seek improved quality of life as a way to enhance health and well-being and, it must be said, as an increasingly important factor in local economic development. However, the objective presented here is not just quality of life, but equality of quality of life, meaning the opportunity for a community's residents—all of them—to achieve a healthy and fulfilling life in a just, equitable society.

This is an ambitious objective. These are complex and inter-connected challenges that require significant resources, capital (social and financial), and expertise—all of which can be in short supply in small cities, especially in local governments that are resource constrained, or restricted by narrow mandates—and in some cases, unimaginative or unresponsive leadership. In response to these challenges, the contributors to this book advocate greater self-reliance and community empowerment achieved through place- or community-based collaboration, effective leadership, and an emphasis on governance instead of government.

The book uses the small city of Kamloops, BC as a case study to explore whether, and how, social capital can be built and equality of quality of life achieved through this emphasis on collaboration and leadership. Each of the six chapters addresses a high-profile issue of concern to the community; collaboration is presented as a cross-cutting strategy for generating enhanced understanding, mutual learning, and action that meets specific needs. Contributors include faculty and researchers affiliated with Thompson Rivers University (which is based in Kamloops), and community-based social entrepreneurs.

The authors address a specific theme in each chapter—e.g. poverty, homelessness, access to healthy food, adult learning, and community-university research collaborations. In each case, we see how complex, inter-connected social and economic issues are successfully addressed through partnerships and collaboration. The book provides a frank assessment of what worked well (or otherwise) as people and institutions who, previously,

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often had little to do with each other learned to respect, admire and work together to common ends. The process of community-based decision-making and action in Kamloops is not presented as simple or straightforward; rather, it is presented as organic and dynamic, and it is always hard work.

In summary, this book provides really interesting and valuable insights into the realities of life in small cities—the challenges they face and the need for community-based solutions. The Kamloops, BC experience will be familiar to many small cities in Canada that are struggling with similar issues. However, the emphasis on equality of quality of life, the emphasis on community-based leadership, and on collaboration of all kinds could be novel for many communities. The title—“*No Straight Lines*”—reflects the complex and difficult nature of these challenges, and the need to think creatively, inclusively and broadly about solutions. This is a reminder—and acknowledgement—that there is usually no straight line between issues and solutions. It is a timely message for a rather demanding period in which we find ourselves.

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