



The Metropolitan Revolution: How Cities and Metros Are Fixing Our Broken Politics and Fragile Economy.

Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley.
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In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the Great Recession, the conventional paradigms of political leadership in the U.S. have been increasingly challenged. America's post-New Deal hierarchical policymaking pyramid with the Federal government at the top, followed by State governments setting the direction and leading innovation in the public and private sectors seem increasingly mired in partisan rancor and incapable of responding to new challenges.

Facing a contraction of Federal and State leadership, city and regional leaders are filling the void. Across the country, a growing number of public and private sector leaders are designing and implementing home grown solutions to the obstacles they face. Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley, a widely respected team of urban affairs analysts from the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution, have compiled the stories and experiences from some of the most successful U.S. cities and regions in this book. Their revolution is a remaking of government leadership roles. In the simplest language, as expressed on the book jacket, local leaders "are reshaping our economy and fixing our broken political system".

While *The Metropolitan Revolution* has been widely heralded by political columnists and policy geeks, what relevance does it have for the readers of this journal? The answer is two-fold. First, the book's case studies and analyses provide unique insights into new strategies and creative partnerships centered around local actions that confront urban and regional struggles. In most cases, these local challenges have macro-scale origins, yet the Federal or State governments are unable or unwilling to address the impacts. Some of the innovative policies involve community-university partnerships. But, where these collaborations are absent, this book offers insights and discussion around how engaged scholarship and university partners can offer added value for local policy solutions. So, in a sense, *The Metropolitan Revolution* is a workbook for engagement practitioners showing new ways to join local partners to create the next round of revolutionary strategies.

A second lesson for community engaged partners is the multi-scalar lens which shapes the initiatives in this book. The environmentalist maxim: "Think Globally, Act Locally" is an essential principal. Whether the challenges are economic or social, occurring at a neighborhood or regional level, innovative approaches are linked to higher levels through a web of global places, public and private organizations, and trends. In our work as community engagement professionals, we need to be grounded in the global future that is shaping our communities and our work. This book offers a map guiding an understanding of global metropolitan trends for the 21st century.

The introductory treatise of *The Metropolitan Revolution* advances a primer on the economic and demographic trends that have positioned American cities and metropolitan regions as the dominant drivers of the United States' modern global leadership. Consider, at the present time, America's 100 largest metros are home to two-thirds of the U.S. population and generate 75 percent of America's GDP. They are the centers of economic and technological innovation that position the United States as the global leader. Yet, they occupy only 12 percent of our land area. Following on, Katz and Bradley carefully examine the societal trends and challenges that have led to the current economic conundrum, wherein the United States' economic and technological leadership and domestic quality of life are increasingly constrained by ineffective Federal and State policy-making.

The next four chapters present detailed problem-solving case studies. They are drawn from widely differing places and confront vastly different policy challenges. Chapter 2, New York City: Innovation and the Next Economy, describes a bold public-private effort to strategically diversify the city's economy toward applied science and engineering. A non-profit corporation, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) guided the process. New York City universities were deeply involved and acknowledged as key partners from the outset. Ultimately, NYCEDC concluded that the optimal plan was to augment the existing technology clusters, and through a partnership with existing universities, build a new applied science graduate school. With public funds and private funding, two different graduate campuses with domestic and international university collaborators were launched.

Chapter 3 tells Denver's story. The largest urban metropolitan area in the Mountain West, Denver's challenge was regional governance. How does a growing metro with a patchwork of local governments come together to create sustainable growth? Regionalism and inter-local government infrastructure planning are topics that confound political scientists and planners. Government efficiency and economic competitiveness are appealing arguments for municipal and regional government functions. But, mistrust and rivalries are more often overwhelming counter points. Local leaders in Denver and the surrounding Denver-Aurora metropolitan area found the path to build public support for a Greater Denver perspective. It wasn't easy. It took 30 years to work out the tension between individual community needs versus shared concerns. Ultimately, new regional sales taxes were approved by voters, intergovernmental cooperation between local governments was put in place, and strong backing from the business and civic leaders enabled metropolitan Denver leaders to build critical regional infrastructure, including a new light rail system, to accommodate new growth across the region.

In contrast to positive economic trajectories, Chapter 4, Northeast Ohio, is part of the American Rust Belt, a region of older industrial metros that has been losing jobs and population since the 1970's. By the turn of the century, Northeast Ohio was confronting a "quiet crisis." City and regional leaders were unfocused, reacting to a stream of incremental crises; business and economic developers were slow to realize that traditional manufacturing jobs had been lost or permanently changed; and, regional universities and medical centers were disengaged from the regional drift downward. A call to action was sorely needed. In response, a group of regional foundations formed the Fund for Our Economic Future. The Fund raised \$60 million and led the kickoff of a series of actions to gauge the region's assets, challenges, and priorities. An extensive citizen engagement process (Voices and Choices) catalyzed a clear vision for recalibrating the Northeast Ohio economy, while also addressing economic inclusion and the quality of life needs for new immigrants and groups who were left behind by the economic decline. Universities and medical systems were active participants, helping to identify opportunities for new economic development clusters. While efforts to reverse the region's decline are still a work in progress, the Fund has helped build networks of community leaders that have catalyzed dramatic new economic actions.

Chapter 5, Houston: El Civics, shifts attention toward confronting the social and demographic challenges of immigration. Houston has been an immigrant gateway since the 1950's. But, the rate of immigrant and refugee settlement has become more impactful. In the midst of rapid demographic change, Houston has developed a neighborhood-based reception center model for immigrants and low-income native Houstonians. Within Houston and the surrounding Harris County, Neighborhood Centers Inc. (NCI), a non-profit service provider, offers economic, youth, citizen/immigrant, health, education and community connection services at 60 sites. NCI uses the appreciative inquiry approach developed by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) to design its community programs. This method relies on the community residents to discover the vision, skills, and assets of the neighborhood residents. The aim is to build neighborhood resource centers that work for the community, not to try to "fix" problems. To support its array of services and enhanced programming, NCI has enlisted a large network of supporting

organizations. There are 33 separate partnerships and nine strategic alliances. The latter provide funding and/or deliver services. The Houston Community College system, for example, provides ESL training and support.

Following the discussion of revolutionary cities and regions, the second part of the book presents a review of the global contexts that are shaping economic and geo-political realities in the new century. Organized around the theme of global megatrends, lessons from successful places displaying strategic connections to international partners are showcased. For community engaged scholars and practitioners, the emergence of innovative districts as a new economic development tool is especially relevant. Examples are drawn from disparate geographies – Boston, Research Triangle (North Carolina), Barcelona, and Detroit. In each case, the key drivers for innovative districts are linked to unique local conditions that foster cutting-edge change and creativity. Strong university partnerships are also fundamental. Indeed, depending on local community needs, partner universities offered specialized contributions to build and sustain these hubs of economic activity and growth.

The Metropolitan Revolution is a provocative and instructional read. It invites scholars and practitioners of community engagement to explore new types of partnerships and enlist in the growing revolution to redirect the framework for America's urban and regional growth. We need not be reluctant participants. The academy offers unique technical and intellectual expertise, as well as the principles of community engagement. Indeed, for those Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement colleges and universities (<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org>), there is an essential imperative to join this 21st century American revolution.

References

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