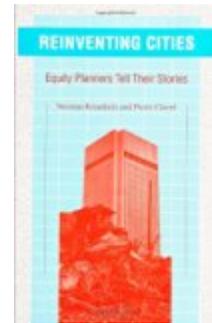


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Norman Krumholz, Pierre Clavel. *Reinventing Cities: Equity Planners Tell Their Stories*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. xvi + 253 pp. \$74.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56639-209-9; \$31.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-56639-210-5.

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City planning is often thought of as a fairly dull occupation, where faceless bureaucrats toil in the obscurity they prefer. Planning is viewed as a politically “neutral,” technical affair, where planners merely carry out policies ordained from elsewhere. *Reinventing Cities: Equity Planners Tell Their Stories* presents a radically different view of planning. In *Reinventing Cities*, twelve planners present very personal accounts of how they actively sought to use their positions to advance the interests of low-income, working class, and/or non-White people in their cities. While there are a number of valuable books on equity planning work in individual cities, such as Burlington (Vermont), Cleveland, and Chicago, *Reinventing Cities* is the only current overview of local practice. [1] Not only planners and would-be planners, but anyone interested in what city governments can achieve, should read this book.

Reinventing Cities consists primarily of interviews with equity planners (broadly defined) from nine cities. The cities range geographically from Boston to San Diego, in size from Chicago to Santa Monica, which has less than 100,000 residents. Northeastern, Midwestern, and Western cities are represented, but there are no examples from the South. (However, Krumholz and Clavel do not claim that the book is comprehensive, asserting—no doubt correctly—that there are many more planners also doing equity planning.) Each interview is preceded by a “snapshot” of the city—a helpful introduction to the city’s demographic characteristics and recent political history. The chapters conclude with mini-bibliographies about a key issue the planner worked on (e.g. neighborhood economic development).

These interview chapters are bracketed by an initial

chapter by Clavel tracing the roots of equity planning as a professional activity and a final chapter summarizing “lessons learned” from the interviews. Krumholz – as the equity-minded former Planning Director of Cleveland (under Mayor Kucinich) and Clavel, a planning professor who has long studied equity planning – have ideal backgrounds to write about this subject. The roles and activities of the “planners” interviewed are equally various. For example, Margaret Strachan from Portland (Oregon) was an elected city commissioner, who guided the Central City Plan – a comprehensive plan for the area – to approval. Rick Cohen was Planning Director of Jersey City, who concentrated on gaining “linkage” funds for low income housing from the large commercial projects being developed on the city’s Manhattan facing riverfront. Robert Mier was Chicago Mayor Harold Washington’s appointed Commissioner of Economic Development, who sought to make a variety of projects more beneficial to low income and Black Chicagoans. The planners’ work generally took place between roughly 1982 and 1992, although Dale Bertsch’s unparalleled efforts to place low income housing in Dayton’s suburbs date back as far as the late 1960’s.

The diversity of the planners’ activities is a strength of the book, because it indicates that planners can pursue equity goals in a variety of ways. Equity planning emerges as an orientation to many kinds of work, not an artificially delineated “subfield” of planning. The interviews give a vivid sense of the progress and pitfalls of equity planning. Dale Bertsch – proposing an ultimately approved plan to scatter low income housing to Dayton’s suburbs – describes a hellish (emphasis original) summer of 54 generally hostile public meetings, some of them attended by people with guns. Rick Cohen notes that

the next City administration fired him and quickly undid many of his initiatives, even sending housing linkage fees he had collected back to developers! The lack of federal support for local initiatives was also an ever-present constraint. Nonetheless, Kari Moe notes that in Chicago they were able to do the first neighborhood-oriented capital improvements bond in 25 years, and to focus on neighborhood industrial retention, maintaining jobs for working class residents. Strachan got Portland's Central City Plan to treat SROs (residential hotels) as a low-cost housing resource rather than a blight to be eliminated.

The planners also describe the strategies they used to attain their goals, such as building supportive coalitions both inside City Hall and in the community, winning over key business leaders, and developing participatory planning processes (although citizen participants did not always support the planners' goals). They also discuss the personal history that led them onto the atypical "career path" of equity planning. Their career paths are not smooth—only two of the twelve planners interviewed are still doing the job they discuss in the book.

One weakness of the book is the format in which the interviews are presented. They are published simply as a text, broken up by subheads, but with no questions noted. The planners interviewed do use language that suggests they were "speaking," but it would be useful to know what questions they were asked, and what questions they were not asked.

Because *Reinventing Cities* covers so much ground, the book's "case studies" are its chief value, rather than

any general theory of equity planning. Krumholz's concluding chapter does gamely seek to identify some common themes. He notes the importance of building supportive coalitions for policy innovations. Equity planners must be persistent, and must find ways to capture public attention for their proposals—whether through formal Plan documents, public presentations, or work with local media. Krumholz spotlights the centrality of race as an issue for equity planners, a fact which emerged with particular starkness in black-white confrontations in Chicago. Finally Krumholz offers suggestions as to how both planning schools and "mainstream" planners can improve their practice. Nonetheless, as he notes, every city has its own particular circumstances, but he hopes the book will offer new ideas to city planners everywhere.

Too often, the federal government is seen as the sole locus of public policy innovation. But in an era where the federal government has—ever more insistently—refused to aid cities or their needy populations, city governments have increasingly been forced to develop their own solutions as best they can. *Reinventing Cities* is one of the best books to date on how they have done so.

[1] One somewhat parallel book is *Fire in the Hearth: The Radical Politics of Place in America*, ed. Mike Davis, Steven Hiatt and three others (Verso: New York and London, 1990). This collection of fourteen articles focuses on the political issues in and socioeconomic background for radical local politics in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

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