

Sunbelt/Frostbelt: Public Policies and Market Forces in Metropolitan Development, edited by Janet Rothenberg Pack. 2005. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. 232 + viii. ISBN 0-8157-6810-9, \$24.95

The unrelenting march of the nation's suburbs into the rural hinterlands has attracted increasing attention from the newsmedia over the past decade concerned that the nation's stock of land, resources, and environmental amenities is rapidly dwindling while America's megapolitan behemoths are becoming virtually unlivable.

At 35,000 square miles and growing, the Los Angeles metropolitan area is probably the most notorious. It is now bigger than fifty-nine nation-states and has more residents than over one hundred. The birthplace of the nation's love affair with the automobile and incubator of a vast system of modern expressways has matured into an area that introduced the words "smog," "road rage," and "drive-by shootings" into the American idiom.

Los Angeles is not alone. Every U.S. metropolitan area has had its urban sprawl experience. Some are worse than others but no place has been immune. Growing, dynamic, sunbelt cities such as Los Angeles are the most visible examples, but even relatively stagnant, frostbelt cities such as Pittsburgh seen profound changes. Some cities have fared better than others because of unique geographical features and good planning that have ameliorated some of the worst aspects of growth. But, every region seems to be grappling with the same problems: how to curtail the destructive social and environmental effects of sprawl, revitalize underutilized urban spaces such as brownfields, and promote equitable spatial development at a time when market forces and public policies seem often to militate against them.

Urban and regional economists are no strangers to this topic. They helped define the analytical framework for explaining urban sprawl. Indeed, it has been a central and enduring theme of urban economics ever since William Alonso introduced the urban monocentric model by modifying the von Thunen agricultural land rent model. In a flat, featureless plane where residential land is a positive good, the growth of the urban periphery could be explained by lower

transportation costs and increasing resident incomes. Consequently, urban boundaries will expand as long as income increases and transportation costs continue to decrease.

The contributors to *Sunbelt/Frostbelt* understand this intellectual history as well as the growing public anxiety over urban sprawl. The book combines sound scholarship with well-written narrative that is at once understandable and sensible. It is oriented to a broad audience of casual students of public policy but is packed with enough new insights to prove useful to specialists too, though many of the most interesting findings are buried in the copious footnotes that reference more detailed analytical reports and studies.

The book consists of six chapters, including an introductory overview section written by the book's editor (Janet Rothenberg Pack) and five chapters written by different authors that center around the growth and development experiences of five different metropolitan areas (Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Pittsburgh). The rapid suburbanization experienced by these case studies is described as the being the result of a complex mosaic of factors including national, state, and local public policies as well as market forces that have contributed to increasing income, greater car ownership, and globalization. Metropolitan comparisons are made easier because the authors of each chapter adopt a compositional template that addresses issues such as local historical patterns of growth and development, government policies that have contributed to sprawl, problems that accompany sprawl, and policies to stem the negative impacts of this growth and development. Although the authors come from diverse backgrounds spanning economics, urban planning, geography, and ethnic studies, they agree that certain public policies are at the root of the problem.

Chicago's experience, detailed in the lead case study chapter by Wiewel, Pershy, and Schaffer "Chicago: Metropolitan Decentralization," provides a benchmark case study inasmuch as it represents "classic sprawl." Its urban boundaries have expanded in something that approximates a flat, featureless plane with fewer natural barriers such as mountains, water bodies, or public lands than other case studies. Furthermore, higher income residents have migrated from the urban core seeking the larger lots in a more bucolic setting which has led to very low density development patterns. Philadelphia (in Gyorko and Summers "Philadelphia:

Spatial Economic Disparities”) appears to have had similar experiences though the spatial disparities seem to be more glaring and the local fiscal inequities more challenging. Both studies highlight the distorting role of federal policies in shaping sprawl, in particular the home mortgage deduction, highway investments, inequitable state fiscal policies with respect to appropriation of education expenditures, and local land use planning deficiencies. The authors argue that these policies have inadvertently created large subsidies for suburban residents and encouraged sprawl at the expense of urban core residents and their economic welfare.

Wolch, Joassart-Marcellini, Pastor, and Dreier (“Los Angeles: Region by Design”) favor sociological argument over economic modeling. They emphasize the role of ethnicity and class in shaping the urban landscape. Los Angeles’s experience departs from the classic sprawl described earlier—population density has been increasing (in what the authors term “dense sprawl”)—and even more so in terms of the variety of socioeconomic disparities. The authors argue that the root of these socioeconomic disparities is a lack of affordable housing, an inadequate public transit system, labor market mismatches, and local government fiscal inequalities. While the authors recognize the same distortionary effects of federal policies described in other chapters, they criticize growth management policies for their role in segregating income classes and articulate a much more radical public policy agenda than found elsewhere in the book including comprehensive anti-poverty policies (e.g., living wage policies, universal health coverage, and affordable housing programs) and sustainable development planning.

Phoenix provides, perhaps, the best case study of balanced growth and development (Phoenix: Dealing with Fast Growth: Arizona State University Research Team). This has occurred against a unique combination of factors: relatively new rapid growth (Phoenix tripled in size between 1970 and 2000 and was the nation’s fastest growing metro area), preservation of the city core, an underdeveloped interstate highway system, and natural barriers to sprawl presented by natural topography, federal parkland, military bases, and native American reservations. However, alone among the case studies, the city is upheld as a model for a series of proactive local growth management policies that have prevented more deleterious outcomes.

Although some potential problems exist on the horizon—in particular growing socioeconomic disparities between Hispanics and whites and water resource pressures--the authors are confident that proper planning can continue to work in the metropolitan area's favor.

Pittsburgh illustrates that sprawl can exist where population growth pressures are absent (Gleeson and Paytas "Pittsburgh: Economic restructuring and regional development patterns, 1880-2000"). Highway investment has played a much smaller role in spatial development patterns than elsewhere. So, it provides a laboratory of sorts for examining the effects of other public policies, in particular the role of the home mortgage deduction and regional planning and metropolitan policy coordination problems. Pittsburgh continues to confront the problems associated with economic deindustrialization and developing an effective economic revitalization strategy. However, the authors see improved growth management and regional planning as a way to make the area more economically competitive as well as to help limit sprawl.

Sunbelt/Frostbelt provides a very good description of the urban sprawl experiences of a diverse set of metropolitan case studies. The editor's introductory synthesis organizes the book by identifying common problems and solutions. Public policy is a big part of the urban sprawl problem and reforms must take into account the distortionary effects of existing policies as well as introduce new approaches. These reforms include a "reconsideration of current housing tax policies," changes in state and federal aid distributions, poverty policies for low/moderate income people, and growth management policies that discourage development of existing greenfields.

Still, there are areas where the authors barely and never tread. First, one never really gains a good sense of national historical suburban growth trends from this book. Suburban growth slowed during the 1990s and urban density has generally increased as inner suburbs have filled in. Is it possible that market forces will help slow the suburbanization process that it helped to create? Second, a variety of other explanatory variables such as changing demographics (age, ethnicity, immigration), economics (growth of the information economy, energy costs), and consumer tastes may be making urban living a more attractive prospect but they are never really addressed. Third, the case studies do not include among them some remarkable metropolitan areas such as New York where gentrification appears to be progressing

rapidly or Pacific Northwest cities such as Seattle and Portland where more aggressive policies serve as appropriate laboratories for evaluating the feasibility of some of policy alternatives advocated by authors. Finally, some of the existing policies targeted for overhauling have been such enduring features of the U.S. economy that it would be hard to recognize the country without them. The Interstate highway system has served as a key interregional transportation network that has facilitated regional specialization, sparked agglomeration economies and improved technology diffusion as well as facilitated urban sprawl. The home ownership tax credit has stimulated higher homeownership rates and household wealth and is associated with more stable property values and lower crime rates. The effects of these policies are so profound and systemic that a more comprehensive interregional modeling and social-cost benefit framework is needed to properly evaluate them. Simply put, sprawl isn't all.

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