

Book Review: Leading the Inclusive City: Place-based innovation for a bounded planet

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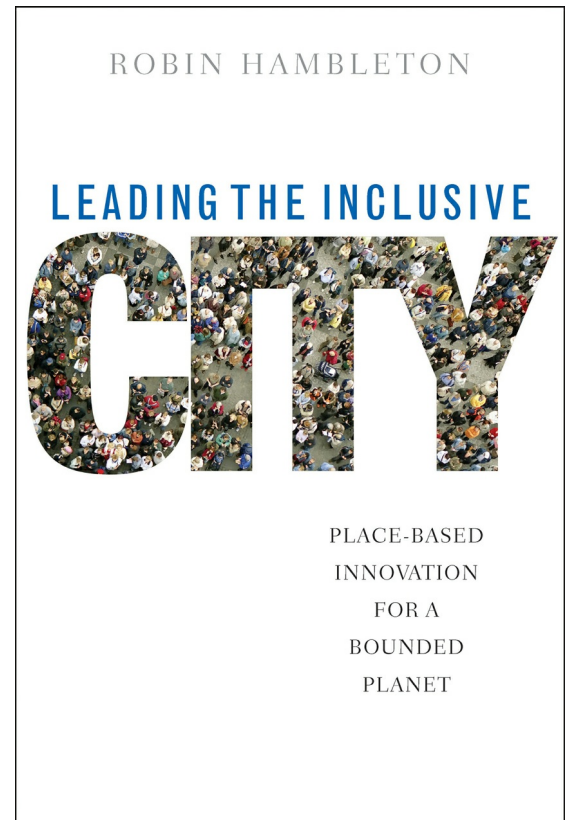
*While acknowledging the difficulties cities face, **Leading the Inclusive City** mounts a powerful case that cities do have tools at their disposal for ameliorating inequality, advancing social justice, promoting environmental responsibility, and bolstering community empowerment. **Susan Marie Martin** thinks citizens of all cities will find this book readable and accessible.*

Leading the Inclusive City: Place-based innovation for a bounded planet. Robin Hambleton. Policy Press. 2014.

According to the United Nations website, humanity has entered “the dawn of a new urban era”. By 2025 most of the top 20 megacities will exist outside North America and Europe and instead in countries like India, China, and elsewhere in central and south-east Asia. However, as city dwellers worldwide know, those who *live* in cities are not always housed. Urban centres are sites of prosperity, but not for all. In fact, as Robin Hambleton details in *Leading the Inclusive City*, cities are growing while social inequality remains marked, and societies are increasingly divided. His experience positions him as someone who knows how to remedy urban ills: currently Professor of City Leadership at the University of West England, and formerly Dean of the college of Urban Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois (Chicago), he has also worked in local and central government in the UK.

The shifts in urban growth are largely grounded in economics; however, Hambleton is clear to set out maps for coping that foreground people. The book has four foci: trends and challenges; governance concepts; innovation case studies; and reflections on lessons learned. Underpinning all is the plea he makes at the conclusion for ‘wise’ cities over ‘smart’ ones. To that end, five claims are developed. Foremost among them, centering ‘place’ means understanding existing communities, and asserting that cities are not ‘helpless’ in the wake of global economic processes. Civic leaders, to build inclusive, sustainable cities, must not fulfil one to the exclusion of the other. Finally, Hambleton highlights the power of collaboration: international “learning and exchange” is vital, but the academic also has a role, beyond the walls of the academy, in policy-making and public management.

Hambleton explores, early, the role of neoliberalism in the continued growth of both the inequality and conflict complicating urban growth. An ongoing obsession with the ideology of ‘the market’ as the reason why, in the realm of the urban, some thrive while many do not, is summarised in six words: “private profit has displaced public purpose”, says Hambleton. While this proviso has come to dominate urban governance, he makes clear that it has not redefined ‘stakeholder’. Take the observation made here, and by the UN, that approximately 1 billion people live as squatters in ‘informal’ urban settlements: they may be property-less but they have a stake in policy decisions made affecting their settlements. Why such conditions persist in 2015 is among the urbanisation growth trends explored. As has been the case for centuries, migration to cities is linked to the search for work. However, contemporary migration is not simply rural to urban, it crosses international borders, and is in-demand: expanding



economies the like those of the Middle East import workers to meet labour needs, whilst satisfying the need for poor countries to ship labour elsewhere to earn and send money 'home'.



Chicago, Illinois. Photo Credit: Brian Koprowski. CC-BY-NC-ND.

Hambleton notes that 83% of Dubai's residents are foreign-born. Under these demographics, a city experiences multiple challenges in governance: even among privileged migrants, the pressing issue of what Hambleton describes as the challenge of belonging and having a role in local decisions loom. That said, he emphasises that belonging is not only contentious for the urban poor when they migrate, but is also problematic in their countries of origin. Hence, the importance of 'voice' across demographics is woven throughout the innovation case studies detailed. As a result, the applicability of solutions across locations and populations are easy for the reader to identify.

In Chapter 6, "Leading public service innovation", he provides the case study of the informal settlement Langrug, South Africa, to illustrate that pro-poor development is possible. Simple erasure, he points out, "is a non-starter". In 2012, Langrug won the South African Planning Institute's award for good 'community/outreach' planning for upgrades and long term planning that recognises the "right for residents to remain on the land" and improve the quality of life there. Among the leadership lessons learned, Hambleton cites the recognition that all communities have leaders: even those "with rudimentary skills" can contribute to community development when they have support through collaboration with local government, NGOs, and academics.

In Chapter 9, "Creating people-friendly cities", challenges for the urban poor are explored via innovation success stories from Bogota, Columbia, under former Mayor Penalosa. Rather than emphasizing the grand 'dreams and schemes' that often characterise modernisation, Penalosa set out to make Bogotans happier, discarding an "ambitious" highway programme in place of cycle paths, public transit, and public spaces such as parks and libraries. According to Hambleton, Penalosa recognised that "appealing to citizen *feelings* is central to effective urban governance", over appealing to material needs. The result of privileging public space that is accessible to all creates, he asserts, a place-based identity that reveals the importance of place in policymaking.

What are the ramifications for economic policy when place and people are privileged? Here Hamilton reveals the fallacy of the current 'smart city' panacea: the term has come to limit *smart* as a qualifier for cities because of the links with ICT and creative economies. Instead, he characterises 'wise' cities as ones that welcome multinationals that are "wealth creators...committed to their city", while taking care with those that are unreliable?. In defining 'wise', Hamilton underscore the role of the "judicious application of knowledge" so that decision makers are aware of

exactly who is affected by their decisions.

While Hamilton says the book takes a stance, this thorough exploration of what constitutes 'wise' urban innovation makes it one that crosses the political spectrum to reach anyone who underscores efficiency in governance. *All* citizens will find the book readable and accessible; indeed, what binds its readership is a genuine love of the city and its people.

Susan Marie Martin holds a PhD in Applied Social Studies (Interdisciplinary) from University College Cork (National University of Ireland). Her research focuses on the impact of modernity and gentrification on the urban poor, particularly women who eke out subsistence earnings as street traders. She is an international educator, currently dividing her time between Ireland and the Middle East. Her thoughts on tangible and abstract markets, and the urban poor may be followed on Twitter [@smariem13](#). [Read more reviews by Susan](#).

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