

# Lectures

Reviews

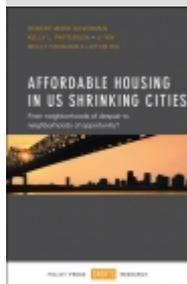
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## Robert M. Silverman, Kelly L. Paterson, Li Yin, Molly Ranahan, Laiyun Wu, *Affordable housing in shrinking cities. From neighborhoods of despair to neighborhoods of opportunity?*

MAGDA MAAOUI



Robert Mark Silverman, Kelly L. Patterson, Li Yin, Molly Ranahan, Laiyun Wu, *Affordable housing in US Shrinking cities. From neighborhoods of despair to neighborhoods of opportunity?*, Bristol, Policy Press, series: « Shorts Research », 2016, 192 p., ISBN : 9781447327585.

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### Full text

PDF

- 1 'The story I tell is one of a city transformed'<sup>1</sup> (p.1). These opening words by T. Sugrue, as he set out to share his seminal tale of Detroit's postwar decline, also ring true in *Affordable housing in shrinking cities*. This book is precisely a story of transformation. And because discourse on decline both shapes our attention and gives reasons to our actions on cities<sup>2</sup>, the narrative about decline is seen as a prerequisite for talking about recovery.

2 This book is derived from a collective research project funded by a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Research Grant<sup>3</sup>. Through a prismatic selection of case studies for five shrinking cities that they investigate using a mixed-methods approach, the authors' goal is to offer recommendations for the institutionalization of equity-based planning and place-based affordable housing siting practice to connect lower-income residents with neighborhoods of opportunity.

3 Based at the University of Buffalo, Robert Silverman and Li Yin (professors at the School of Architecture and Planning), Kelly Patterson (professor at the School of Social Work), and Molly Ranahan and Laiyun Wu (PhD students) work on topics that range from shrinking cities, through housing policy and urban inequality, to GIS and location theory.

4 In order to illustrate their point, they select five cities, namely Detroit, New Orleans, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Buffalo, a choice which was based on a combination of metrics. They belong to the category of the fastest shrinking cities in the US<sup>4</sup>. Their core downtown concentrates both affordable housing units and low-income residents. In addition to these metrics, and because 'the precipitous fall of cities is a prelude of recovery'<sup>5</sup> (p.6), authors top this off with the fact that these cities all experiment with 'eds and meds' revitalization strategies.

5 They combine a historical overview of each city's cycle of growth and decline with the statistical analysis and mapping of present-day demographic and institutional characteristics. Such a snapshot is complemented with a cross-sectional analysis of the three most common local subsidy programs providing affordable housing units<sup>6</sup>. They insist that these issues cannot be understood without a proper focus on the institutional context of city and suburban neighborhoods.

6 Their argument is the same for all five cities. First, the tale of decline is told by weaving together the story of an economic glory that once was, with a detailed account of landscapes of sustained shrinking based on housing, demographic, institutional and economic variables. For instance, Detroit is portrayed as the 'quintessential shrinking city' (p.23) plagued by externalities of deindustrialization and suburbanization. Buffalo's decline is approached through the lens of systemic racial segregation in the education and housing systems.

7 This is followed by an emphasis on the discrepancy between current eds and meds revitalization strategies versus the location of affordable housing units and lower-income residents. New Orleans is taken as a reference for its University Medical Center project, a \$1.1 billion flagship consolidation of the healthcare system post-Hurricane Katrina (2005). Such a strategy is characterized by its disconnection with the preservation and expansion of affordable housing<sup>7</sup>. The Cleveland Model is cited for its stabilizing effect on the city's downtown, largely benefiting from its dense network of public, private and nonprofit organizations and intermediaries. Yet, long term consequences of revitalization efforts could still include local threats of gentrification and displacement. Buffalo's rightsizing strategies are labeled as piecemeal, fragmented initiatives that have not managed to change the course of the city since the postwar era. Pittsburgh gets the harshest verdict, as the 'prototype for urban revitalization strategies catering to the creative class' (p.150).

8 The authors position themselves within an existing solid literature on shrinking cities. While they very briefly touch upon the causes of decline for the cities under study, their concern is with what has been attempted to reverse such a fate. Urban revitalization efforts are defined through the prism of the rightsizing paradigm<sup>8</sup>. Such rightsizing efforts are criticized mainly for the way they fuel growing inequality, specifically for disenfranchised communities. Their proposition of more socially equitable siting of affordable housing within neighborhoods of opportunity echoes precedents of Housing Suitability Models based on the identification of variables measuring desirability, index construction and mapping of high-score areas within each city. They justify their focus on affordable housing provision as a key part of equitable revitalization strategies that should also be strongly rooted in advocacy<sup>9</sup>. While we find the proposed model to be interesting, we wish to hear more about the exact steps cities should outline toward a more equitable future.

9 The authors recommend that affordable housing siting be driven by grassroots processes of decision-making informed by open source urban data. This stems from a growing conversation on PPGIS (Public Participation Geographic Information Systems), as embodied by HUD's existing enterprise Geographic Information portal eGIS. Such a call for strategic positivism<sup>10</sup> draws emancipatory geographies based on partnership and equality.

10 Second, urban revitalization strategies should be associated with a core Community Benefits Agreement component. They base their argument on CBA pilot projects in Cleveland (2013) and Detroit (2014). Here again, we now also wish to hear more on how the actual involvement of the public sector, which acts as a key stakeholder<sup>11</sup>, would work in the implementation of such agreements.

11 This could, in their opinion, allow for more transparent local policy-making in the field of urban revitalization, which can in turn empower disenfranchised resident groups. Such a conversation matters because the siting of affordable housing in more desirable neighborhoods is a way to fight segregation and gentrification.

12 Researchers, students and practitioners focusing on urban planning and housing policy issues will find this book fruitful. One can actually benefit more by reading each chapter as a standalone case to fuel the conversation on the siting of affordable housing in amenity-rich neighborhoods.

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## Notes

1 Sugrue Thomas J., *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. With a new preface by the author, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005.

2 Beauregard Robert A., *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*, New York, Routledge, 2003.

3 'Sustainable Affordable Housing in Shrinking US Cities: Developing an Analytic Tool for Siting Subsidized Housing'.

4 All cities lost more than half their population during the postwar era. The only exception to such a pattern is New Orleans, which first peaked during the 1960s, prior to also losing 45.6% of its population.

5 Beauregard Robert A., *op. cit.*

6 The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program subsidizing rental units, the Section 236 and Section 8 program subsidizing housing managed by private and non-profit developers, and traditional public housing.

7 After Katrina, there was a decrease of 54.7% in the city's public housing stock.

8 Birch Eugenie L, "Downtown in the 'New American City'", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, n° 626, 2009, p. 134-53.

9 Davidoff Paul, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners; Washington, D.C.*, vol. 31, n° 4, November 1, 1965, p. 331.

10 Wyly Elvin, "Strategic Positivism", *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 61, n° 3, July 6, 2009, p. 310-322.

11 Wolf-Powers Laura; "Community Benefits Agreements and Local Government: A Review of Recent Evidence", *American Planning Association. Journal of the American Planning Association; Chicago*, vol. 76, n° 2, Spring 2010, p. 141-159.

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Magda Maaoui, « Robert M. Silverman, Kelly L. Paterson, Li Yin, Molly Ranahan, Laiyun Wu, *Affordable housing in shrinking cities. From neighborhoods of despair to neighborhoods of opportunity?* », *Lectures* [Online], Reviews, 2017, Online since 04 December 2017, connection on 21 December 2017. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/lectures/23892>

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## About the author

**Magda Maaoui**

Magda Maaoui est doctorante en urbanisme, agrégée de géographie (2016) et ancienne élève de l'École normale supérieure de Lyon. Elle possède un master de Systèmes territoriaux, aide à la décision, environnement (2014). Sa recherche de master a été réalisée dans le cadre d'un échange universitaire avec l'Université de Berkeley (Californie). Ses thèmes de recherche portent sur la ségrégation socio-spatiale, l'accès au logement, la gentrification, la périurbanisation de la pauvreté, les mobilités, l'urbanisme nord-américain et européen.

*By this author*

**Robert A. Beauregard, *Planning matter. Acting with things*** [Full text]

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