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## Book Review: Advancing Equity Planning Now

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## Book Review: Advancing Equity Planning Now

### Abstract

“One [way] is to put into place arranged ideas, the other is to deal with a country of people, of flesh and blood, of thousand-and-many miseries... With luck, you won’t have to choose between the two” (João Guimarães Rosa, Grande sertão: veredas). This quote captures the essence of *Advancing Equity Planning Now*, a book edited by Norman Krumholz and Kathryn Wertheim Hexter. The book contains chapters about equity planning from local, regional, and national perspectives in the U.S., with a view to the future. In Krumholz and Hexter’s words “equity planning tries to provide more choices for those who have few and to redistribute resources, political power, and participation toward lower-income, disadvantaged residents of their cities” (263). Equity planners choose to work with people, and this book, which is organized in three main parts, illustrates some of the challenges and rewards that planners may face by making this choice.

### Disciplines

Cultural Resource Management and Policy Analysis | Regional Economics | Regional Sociology | Urban, Community and Regional Planning

### Comments

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Krumholz, Norman, and Katryn Wertheim Hexter, eds. 2018. *Advancing Equity Planning Now*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 297 pp. \$ 24.95 (paperback). ISBN 9781501730375

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“One [way] is to put into place arranged ideas, the other is to deal with a country of people, of flesh and blood, of thousand-and-many miseries... With luck, you won’t have to choose between the two” (João Guimarães Rosa, *Grande sertão: veredas*). This quote captures the essence of ***Advancing Equity Planning Now***, a book edited by Norman Krumholz and Kathryn Wertheim Hexter. The book contains chapters about equity planning from local, regional, and national perspectives in the U.S., with a view to the future. In Krumholz and Hexter’s words “equity planning tries to provide more choices for those who have few and to redistribute resources, political power, and participation toward lower-income, disadvantaged residents of their cities” (263). Equity planners choose to work with people, and this book, which is organized in three main parts, illustrates some of the challenges and rewards that planners may face by making this choice.

The first part includes three chapters describing local arrangements to fight the dominant status quo in neoliberal cities to include an agenda that furthers equity in planning processes. As each author contributes a different lens (i.e., academic, practitioner, activist), they bring a new layer of information based on their own experiences. Bates describes her involvement in the gentrified Portland, Oregon, where several coalitions were taking shape to assist minorities threatened with displacement. The involvement of the organization known as 1,000 Friends of Oregon marked a game change as the equity policies came to be included in the land use plan. McDermott provides a historical perspective of affordable housing in Cleveland, Ohio, based on thirty-five years of work with community development corporations. He indicates that Enterprise Foundations was a key player that “added value to the local scene” (53) by forming successful coalitions and partnerships to provide affordable housing for those who needed it the most. Carter connects her life experience in South Bronx with her professional career focused on improving the quality of life of residents of ‘low-status’ communities. She uses a redevelopment project to illustrate how her work promotes social justice in the Bronx by making community involvement a key ingredient, similarly to what Bates and McDermott included in their chapters.

The second part the book has two chapters on regional equity planning. Benner and Pastor instigate dialogue at the metropolitan level, introducing the idea of “diverse and dynamic epistemic communities” (85). They illustrate that is possible to achieve equity goals at the metro level, even in the absence of regional governments, by generating, sharing, and using data. In his chapter, Swanstrom describes the suburbanization of poverty in the St. Louis metropolitan

region, and alerts readers to the fact that the equity agenda faces even more challenges in the suburbs because of weaker institutions, higher transportation costs, and superimposed boundaries of segregation. He argues that equity planners who will be working in the suburbs should build collaborations between the suburbs and central city.

The third part is about issues of equity planning at the national level. Grengs advocates for the adoption of a framework focused on accessibility, instead of one focused on mobility, when analyzing social equity in transportation projects. He believes that the former is more comprehensive, incorporating costs and benefits in the analysis, but observes that planners are not using it as much as they should. Giloth's chapter covers the importance of workforce development to promote "equitable employment opportunities" (150). He focuses on six strategies that can potentially be scaled up and that equity planners could use to promote economic development. Costigan describes, in detail, the process of creation of a new Housing and Urban Development program (the Rental Assistance Demonstration), with a special focus on the role of a key staff member, Shaun Donovan. It took several years for this housing program to become a reality, demonstrating how laborious it can be to change policy so that it benefits those who cannot afford housing. Howe gives an overview of the growth of aging population in the U.S. She highlights the need for planners to start implementing policies now, before this growth becomes a problem for cities due to demand to adapt the built environment to meet the needs of the elderly.

These three main parts are preceded by an introductory chapter and followed by a final part. The introduction, written by Norman Krumholz, one of the editors and a pioneer of equity planning development, sets the stage for the book. He provides a historical perspective on equity planning in the U.S., sharing his work at the Cleveland City Planning Commission (1969-1979). The final part of the book focuses on the future, including one chapter by Reardon and Forester on planning education and training. They suggest a new educational approach that addresses "white privilege" and "institutional racism" (234) in the curriculum. The other chapter, by Thompson and Arceneaux, covers how Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS) can be useful in the present time when community engagement for equity issues is becoming essential. The book ends with Krumholz and Hexter's conclusion, setting an optimistic tone for a "new upsurge of equity planning" (277). As they point out, facts such as the environmental sustainability movement, socioeconomic inequalities, and change in demographics are catalysts for equity planners to act.

We live in a world full of injustices that make it imperative to develop equity planning. This is very valuable book for senior undergraduate students and graduate students in planning because the mainstream is often based on "arranged ideas," and planners should choose to work

with people. This book is also very valuable for practitioners who are interested in promoting equity, but as the book well describes, this is not an easy task. On the contrary, it has several layers of complexity involving legal policy and political power. The good news is that the book provides straightforward lessons that the contributors have learned and that could therefore directly become points of actions for planners, making a great contribution to literature on planning.

The book is very well organized. However, an example of injustice that is not examined in the book is how some immigrants, specifically refugees, are not being provided with as many choices as they should. Donald Trump's presidency is an obstacle to the equity actions cited in some chapters of ***Advancing Equity Planning Now***, and the topics of immigration and refugees are controversial under his tenure. Even though I have noticed that the increase in the number of immigrants to the U.S. is mentioned very briefly in a few chapters, I would recommend adding a chapter about immigrants and equity planning, following the lines of inquiry in Sandoval (2013). I would also include a chapter about refugees and equity planning, following Allen and Slotterback (2017). I personally think that even though the chapters on Rental Assistance Demonstration and the growth of aging population are quite interesting, immigrants and refugees would be more relevant and in tune with the contents of the other narratives.

Looking to the future, in addition to PPGIS, the concept of smart cities should also be brought into the discussion, benefiting all readers, and especially instigating younger readers. On the one hand, smart cities are somehow "unconcerned" with social justice and emphasize "business-driven technology" (Hollands, 2008, p. 312). On the other hand, as defined by Viitanen and Kingston (2104) "in smart cities discourse, social justice is substituted with ideas of democratization of technology, flat structures, and participation in the digital world" (814). The topic of smart cities and equity planning does indeed need extensive future research because without that, the gap of inequality may widen.

The need for equity is widespread across the world, and ***Advancing Equity Planning Now*** could be inspirational for authors from other regions to write about how equity planning is being manifested and what ideas are being developed. We are seeing conservative politicians in positions of power in different countries, and one response to this ubiquitous lack of fairness is to disseminate examples of how to improve the life of the lower-income and disadvantaged residents of global cities.

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