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Book Review

Perry, M. (2011) *Controversies in Local Economic Development: Stories, Strategies, Solutions*. Regional Studies Association. Regions and Cities. Routledge UK. ISBN: 978-0-415-48968-3 (hardback) 978-0-203-84949-1 (electronic)

Controversies in Local Economic Development forms the latest offering of the international interdisciplinary series of Regions and Cities.

Early in the book, the author Martin Perry postulates that reliance on theories and economic modelling rather than 'experience' can be limited in value to decision makers. He suggests that often the context and complexity of the 'issue' is lost in the associated simplification process. This book aims to draw on 'experience', be it strategies or case studies in areas of controversy within regional economic development. The book is premised on the principle that successful local economic development experiences are governed by regularities. The book aims to uncover these 'regularities' for a range of controversial contemporary topics central to regional economic development.

Within this context, the author discusses the current knowledge base of seven areas of controversy with an obvious depth of understanding of due complexities. The topics analysed include: territorial competitiveness as a strength for local economic development; alternative policy approaches to address spatial unemployment variability; knowledge and learning as localised processes; promotion of business clusters as local development tools; creating environments to attract the

creative class as an alternative to local economic development; technology incubators converting scientific discoveries to commercial enterprises; good environmental practises leading to a stimulated local economic development and lastly Perry offers suggestions as to how research might progress in response to these controversies.

This discussion is intended to inform archetypal strategies that influence the policy initiatives emerging at the local and regional scale. As is necessary to this task, Perry moves with familiarity across the borders of defined academic disciplines of social science and environmental science which lead to a simplified appraisal of these relevant contemporary issues. For example, in the sixth chapter Perry reports on the human capital theories of economic growth. He specifically analyses theories and experiences relating to the association between the artistic / creative communities with economic success. In order to achieve this outcome, Perry tackles multidisciplinary subject material relating to community acceptance of minority groups' lifestyles and events.

Of the seven topics, there is disparity between the level of complexity and the degree of controversy with some topics seemingly addressing global challenges for the modern society as in the example above. In contrast the chapter relating to business clusters or technology incubators could be viewed as relatively uncontroversial topics. There is potentially debate as to whether a book chapter can adequately summarise the complexities inherent in complex issues such as the promotion of a creative / artistic class to drive growth in GDP. Although topics

like this and others such as ‘ecological modernisation’ do need to be addressed at the regional scale, much will be determined at the global scale that will strongly influence the ability of the regions to resolve these controversies. Within this context, it is important to note that Perry does not promise to ‘solve’ these issues only report on experiences that he feels has addressed the issue.

In reference to the ecological modernisation topic, Perry contributes to the policy development discussion by identifying the effectiveness of drivers that incite local businesses to respond to environmental issues beyond the eco-efficiency level that reflect good business management. He also draws attention to possible larger scale shifts that will have an immediate effect on regional scale policy initiatives.

Overall, an interesting read with well supported perspectives on some difficult contemporary issues. The book is pitched towards postgraduate students and policy decision makers. It will be an excellent resource for readers with specific interest in any of these covered topics. It provides an in depth discussion of the current knowledge base and presents ‘lessons learnt’ and will provide a strong platform for policy development in these particular areas.

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