

# Just Growth: Inclusion and Prosperity in America's Metropolitan Regions

By Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor

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Reviewed by Chris Schildt

The dramatic rise in income inequality is now an undisputed reality for most Americans. Less talked about is what city planners and economic developers can do about it. UC Berkeley Department of City Regional Planning alumni Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor's latest book, *Just Growth: Inclusion and Prosperity in American's Metropolitan Regions*, begins to address how our cities can achieve not only economic growth, but also a more equitable distribution of economic gains. Using both a robust quantitative analysis and in-depth case studies, the authors tease out the complex relationship between economic growth and social equity.

Benner and Pastor's findings are thought-provoking, and at times alarming. Strong regional governance, whether by the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) or another entity, seems to support more equitable regional resource distribution, or at least help prevent fractured and isolated jurisdictions from competing with each other. Similarly, the development of a shared learning community that brings together diverse stakeholders to work on common causes (what they call a diverse epistemic community) helps overcome isolation and promotes resource sharing among various social, ethnic, and economic groups. Both of these factors make intuitive sense at a certain level. It is not surprising that they are coming from these two authors, whose previous work has been about the rise of regional social equity movements.

What is alarming, however, is that many of the indicators the authors found to contribute to equitable growth are faring poorly in the latest economic recession. They found that the presence of a strong African American and Latino middle class is highly correlated with growth and equity. However, such households have also been hit the hardest by foreclosure and unemployment in this recession. Likewise, both the public sector and the construction industry— which are also highly correlated with equitable growth— have faced a sharp decline in employment. As the economic recovery slowly takes hold, these findings suggest that it may be even harder to make gains in social equity without strong interventions.

The form these interventions might take is suggested by several of the book's case studies, which showcase four equitable growth cities (Kansas City, Missouri; Nashville, Tennessee; Jacksonville, Florida; and Columbus, Ohio). In addition, the authors highlight three cities that have encountered mixed experiences with economic growth and equity (Sacramento, California; Denver, Colorado; and Cleveland, Ohio). Though smaller and lesser known than some of the well-studied metropolises of this country, these cities have developed some fairly innovative strategies to achieve equitable growth. For example, Jacksonville's Chamber of Commerce worked with local government to require businesses that receive a public subsidy to relocate to pay their workers at least 115 percent of Florida's average wage. Kansas City's workforce development programs have received multiple awards over the years, and has served as one of the models for the creation of Workforce Investment Boards nationally. It seems planners can learn a lot from strategies being developed in these often-overlooked cities.

The big disappointment in this book is that it falls short of actually determining the causal links between equity and growth, as the authors themselves readily admit. Benner and Pastor offer a strong quantitative analysis of the correlation of several variables with both equity and growth as well as some compelling hypotheses. However, this book is in need of a sequel that opens up the black box of equitable growth and lays out a clear policy roadmap showing how to get there.