

**Inside Game / Outside Game:
Winning Strategies for
Saving Urban America**

David Rusk. 1999.

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David Rusk is widely recognized as the author of *Cities without Suburbs*. However, *Inside Game / Outside Game* is perhaps a better reflection of his years spent as a neighborhood organizer, government policy analyst, state representative, mayor, and advisor to city governments. The book draws upon these experiences to articulate a clear reform agenda for metropolitan regions. He presents empirical evidence and inspiring stories of success tempered with cautious tales and a practical outlook. This book argues that core issues for many practitioners—housing affordability, neighborhood revitalization, open space preservation, and fiscal policy reforms—are inherently related.

The book also reflects an evolution of Rusk's perspective on metropolitan regions. His core thesis makes an important contribution by linking the success of urban revitalization to suburban growth management, tax reform, and fair share housing. The necessity of pairing an *Inside Game* with an *Outside Game* is an important lesson for planners and policy makers concerned with the future health of metropolitan regions.

Rusk begins the book by revisiting the central arguments from his previous work. In *Cities without Suburbs*, he developed a theory explaining the dynamic he believed was behind this wide range of social and economic outcomes among cities. He contrasts outcomes in *Elastic Cities* with outcomes in *Inelastic Cities* to demonstrate the strong association between the ability of a cities to encompass new suburban growth with their ability to avoid highly concentrated inner-city poverty, maintain strong fiscal health, and robust economic growth.

After reviewing this fundamental concept, he introduces what's new about this book. He explains:

My policy perspective in *Cities without Suburbs* was "Sprawl happens; capture it." A central theme of this book is "It is better to control sprawl than just capture it."

The first section of the book details the limitations of playing the *Inside Game*. Rusk describes the positive accomplishments of several Community Development Corporations from a personal perspective. However, he then turns to statistics to argue that such efforts have

not been able to substantially improve overall economic conditions in their target areas and amount to “walking up a down escalator.” He goes on to describe the underlying forces that overwhelm such noble efforts: racial bias; government policies fueling suburban sprawl, further isolation, and impoverishment of urban minorities; and the inevitable decline in fiscal health of city governments coping with these dynamics.

The second section goes on to describe the *Outside Game*. The story is told through case studies demonstrating successful examples of regional coordination of land use planning (Portland, OR), a comprehensive affordable housing program (Montgomery County, MD), and tax base sharing (Minneapolis, MN and Dayton, OH). The use of examples focusing on land use, housing, and fiscal policy is by no means accidental. Additionally, within each case study Rusk also highlights the interconnected nature of these policies. The ability of Portland’s system to counter forces which concentrate urban poverty, the capacity of Montgomery Counties system to protect open space, and positive impacts of tax base sharing on reducing both sprawl and fiscal inequality are all examples of how regional policies bring benefits in several arenas.

In the final section he turns to his attention to the coalitions that must be built to replicate such positive models in other metropolitan regions. He spends a chapter on federal housing policies, which seems primarily devoted to booster-ism for the Clinton Administration’s policies, with particularly fulsome praise for former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros. The final two chapters are dedicated to a more practical discussion of building regional coalitions at the metropolitan and state legislative levels.

Rusk’s work gets wide recognition, particularly among policy makers, due to his adept use of census statistics to illustrate a dynamic that had previously been asserted by anecdote. Although some would argue that the analysis leans too heavily on descriptive statistics and shows association but not causality, the central argument is so compelling that such heavy reliance on descriptive statistics does not diminish the overall value of the book. More sophisticated empirical analysis should be done in this area through more traditional academic forums. Rusk’s comparative advantage is to use more basic analysis to clearly articulate policy proscriptions and in so doing he combats much of the current malaise over how to effectively meet the challenges of metropolitan regions. The book pulls no punches in its attempt to put forward an agenda for metropolitan policy reform.

Departing from the style of his previous work, Rusk also relies more heavily on relating personal experiences than statistics. He succinctly explains his rationale:

[S]uccessful political reform movements are not about data. They are about real people in real situations: inspired legislators,

courageous city and county officials, determined citizen activists.
I hope that the success stories told here will inspire some readers
to step forward in their own communities.

In one case he even employs a fictional device to interact in an argument with Newt Gingrich. In the vignette, he leaves the former speaker silenced with powerful evidence that major cities have poor bond ratings because they cannot expand to encompass new suburban growth. The passage is a bit self-indulgent. However, the sentiment does resonate with anyone who has left a meeting frustrated only to come up with “just the right thing to say” hours later.

The concepts Rusk outlines in his book are central to so many key policy debates that they are relevant to a broad range of planning interests. The most salient point of his argument is that many of the challenges facing metropolitan regions are connected to the same underlying dynamic. Careful thinking about how to build regional coalitions to bridge this divide should be foremost on the mind of practitioners concerned with urban poverty, housing affordability, environmental sustainability, regional development, public finance, and transportation planning. In this book Rusk makes the case that the problems and potential solutions that concern many planners in urban regions are inextricably linked and require comprehensive solutions.