Community Development in a Legacy City Community Development in a Legacy City The Cleveland Lab 1985 - 2010

by Eric Hoddersen · Language: EN

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Overview

Eric Hoddersen's 'Community Development in a Legacy City: The Cleveland Lab 1985-2010' is a detailed historical account of community development efforts in Cleveland, Ohio, during a period of significant urban decline and attempted revitalization. The book focuses on the city's status as a 'legacy city'—a post-industrial urban center that has lost a substantial portion of its population and economic base—and examines how local organizations, residents, and policymakers worked to rebuild neighborhoods and institutions from the ground up. Hoddersen, who was directly involved in many of these efforts, provides an insider's perspective on the strategies, successes, and failures that shaped Cleveland's trajectory over twenty-five years.

The book's main argument is that community development in legacy cities requires a long-term, place-based approach that prioritizes resident engagement, adaptive reuse of existing assets, and realistic goals that acknowledge demographic and economic constraints. Hoddersen traces the evolution of Cleveland's community development corporations (CDCs), the role of anchor institutions like hospitals and universities, and the impact of national policies such as the Community Reinvestment Act. He also highlights the importance of 'the Cleveland Lab'—a network of practitioners and researchers who treated the city as a laboratory for testing innovative approaches to urban revitalization.

The story arc moves from the depths of the 1980s crisis, through the hopeful but uneven progress of the 1990s, to the sobering realities of the 2000s, including the foreclosure crisis. The book matters because it offers a candid, data-rich case study of how a major American city confronted structural decline, providing lessons for other legacy cities and for anyone interested in urban policy, community organizing, or the resilience of post-industrial communities.

Key Takeaways

- Legacy cities must adopt realistic growth strategies that focus on stabilizing existing neighborhoods rather than pursuing unrealistic population growth targets.
- Community development corporations (CDCs) are most effective when they are deeply rooted in local neighborhoods and have sustained funding from multiple sources.

• Anchor institutions, such as hospitals and universities, can be powerful partners in community revitalization if they commit to long-term investment and local hiring.

• The foreclosure crisis of the late 2000s disproportionately harmed legacy cities like Cleveland, undoing years of community development gains.

• Successful community development requires a 'lab' approach: continuous experimentation, data collection, and adaptation based on what works on the ground.

• Resident engagement is not just a nice-to-have; it is essential for ensuring that development projects meet actual community needs and gain local support.

• Vacant land and abandoned buildings can be repurposed as green space, community gardens, or new housing, but only with careful planning and community input.

• National policies, such as the Community Reinvestment Act, have a significant impact on local community development and must be actively leveraged by local actors.

Chapter Summaries

Introduction: The Legacy City Challenge

Hoddersen introduces the concept of the legacy city, defining it as a post-industrial urban area that has experienced sustained population loss and economic decline. He sets the stage for Cleveland's story, describing the city's peak in the 1950s and its subsequent fall due to deindustrialization, suburbanization, and racial tensions. The chapter outlines the book's purpose: to document and analyze the community development efforts that emerged in response to this decline, using Cleveland as a case study. Hoddersen also introduces the idea of 'the Cleveland Lab,' a collaborative network of practitioners and researchers who treated the city as a testing ground for innovative urban policies. He argues that understanding this period is crucial for anyone seeking to address the challenges facing legacy cities today.

The Crisis Years: 1985-1990

This chapter details the depths of Cleveland's crisis in the mid-1980s. The city was losing thousands of residents annually, the manufacturing base had collapsed, and neighborhoods were plagued by abandonment and disinvestment. Hoddersen describes the founding of the first community development corporations (CDCs) as a grassroots response to these conditions. He highlights early efforts to rehabilitate housing, create jobs, and provide social services, often with limited resources. The chapter also covers the role of the city government, which was initially skeptical of CDCs but gradually came to see them as essential partners. Hoddersen emphasizes the importance of the Community Reinvestment Act in pressuring banks to invest in low-income neighborhoods, and he profiles several pioneering CDC leaders who became the backbone of the movement.

Building the Infrastructure: 1990-1995

The early 1990s saw the professionalization of community development in Cleveland. Hoddersen describes the creation of intermediary organizations like the Neighborhood Progress Inc. (NPI), which provided funding, technical assistance, and training to CDCs. This period also saw the emergence of comprehensive community development initiatives that addressed not just housing but also education, health, and economic opportunity. The chapter discusses the importance of data and evaluation, as the Cleveland Lab began to systematically track outcomes and share best practices. Hoddersen also covers the growing role of foundations, which provided crucial seed funding and helped leverage public and private investment. He notes the challenges of scaling up successful local models to citywide impact, and the tensions that arose between grassroots organizations and professionalized intermediaries.

The Anchor Institution Strategy: 1995-2000

This chapter focuses on the role of anchor institutions—hospitals, universities, and cultural organizations—in community development. Hoddersen details how institutions like the Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, and Case Western Reserve University became major investors in surrounding neighborhoods. He describes specific initiatives, such as the University Circle Inc. (UCI) and the Greater University Circle Initiative, which aimed to connect institutional growth with neighborhood revitalization. The chapter highlights the benefits of anchor institution investment, including job creation and improved housing, but also the risks, such as gentrification and displacement. Hoddersen argues that successful anchor strategies require genuine partnership with residents and a commitment to inclusive growth. He also discusses the role of the Cleveland Foundation in brokering these partnerships.

The Housing Boom and Its Limits: 2000-2005

The early 2000s brought a housing boom to parts of Cleveland, driven by low interest rates, federal tax credits, and the success of earlier community development efforts. Hoddersen describes the construction of new housing in downtown and select neighborhoods, as well as the rehabilitation of historic homes. However, he also notes the limits of this boom: it was unevenly distributed, with many neighborhoods continuing to decline. The chapter examines the role of the Cleveland Housing Network and other organizations in promoting homeownership, and the challenges of maintaining affordability. Hoddersen also discusses the growing concern about predatory lending and the early signs of the subprime mortgage crisis. He argues that the boom masked underlying structural weaknesses and set the stage for the coming bust.

The Foreclosure Crisis and Its Aftermath: 2005-2010

This chapter covers the devastating impact of the foreclosure crisis on Cleveland. Hoddersen describes how predatory lending and the housing bubble led to a wave of foreclosures, particularly in African American and low-income neighborhoods. He details the efforts of community organizations to respond, including the creation of land banks to manage vacant properties and the push for legal action against lenders. The chapter also discusses the broader economic recession and its effects on the city's budget and services. Hoddersen argues that the

crisis undid much of the progress made in the previous two decades, but he also highlights the resilience of the community development sector, which adapted by focusing on stabilization and strategic demolition. He concludes with a call for more robust federal and state policies to prevent similar crises.

Conclusion: Lessons from the Cleveland Lab

In the final chapter, Hoddersen synthesizes the lessons learned from twenty-five years of community development in Cleveland. He emphasizes the importance of patience, persistence, and a long-term perspective, noting that meaningful change takes decades. He also stresses the need for realistic goals that acknowledge the realities of population decline and limited resources. Hoddersen revisits the concept of the Cleveland Lab, arguing that the city's experience offers a model for other legacy cities. He calls for continued investment in community development, but also for a shift toward more comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of poverty and disinvestment. The chapter ends with a hopeful but sober assessment of Cleveland's future, suggesting that while the city will never return to its industrial heyday, it can become a more equitable and sustainable community.

Themes

- Legacy city decline
- Community development corporations
- Anchor institutions
- Foreclosure crisis
- Resident engagement
- Urban policy

Notable Quotes

- "The legacy city is not a failure; it is a new kind of city, one that must learn to do more with less." — From the introduction, where Hoddersen frames the book's central thesis about the nature of legacy cities.
- "Community development is not a sprint; it is a marathon, and we are only at the halfway point." — A reflection in the conclusion about the long-term nature of urban revitalization efforts.
- "The Cleveland Lab was not a physical place but a way of thinking, a commitment to learning from both success and failure." — From a chapter discussing the collaborative network of practitioners and researchers.
- "We learned that you cannot build a community from the outside; you have to work with the people who live there." — A key insight from a chapter on resident engagement and

grassroots organizing.

• "The foreclosure crisis was not a natural disaster; it was a man-made catastrophe, and it hit Cleveland with the force of a hurricane." — From the chapter on the foreclosure crisis, emphasizing the avoidable nature of the disaster.

• "Anchors are not just institutions; they are neighbors, and they have a responsibility to the community that surrounds them." — From a discussion of anchor institution strategies and their role in neighborhood revitalization.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Community Development in a Legacy City Community Development in a Legacy City The Cleveland Lab 1985 - 2010 about?

The book is a historical account of community development efforts in Cleveland, Ohio, from 1985 to 2010. It examines how the city, as a legacy city facing population loss and economic decline, used community development corporations, anchor institutions, and innovative strategies to revitalize neighborhoods. The author, Eric Hoddersen, provides an insider's perspective on the successes, failures, and lessons learned during this period.

Is Community Development in a Legacy City Community Development in a Legacy City The Cleveland Lab 1985 - 2010 worth reading?

Yes, for anyone interested in urban policy, community organizing, or the challenges of post-industrial cities. The book offers a detailed, candid case study of Cleveland's revitalization efforts, with practical insights and data-driven analysis. It is particularly valuable for practitioners, policymakers, and students of urban studies who want to understand what works and what doesn't in legacy city development.

How does Community Development in a Legacy City Community Development in a Legacy City The Cleveland Lab 1985 - 2010 end?

Spoiler: The book concludes with a synthesis of lessons from Cleveland's experience, emphasizing the need for patience, realistic goals, and resident engagement. Hoddersen argues that while the foreclosure crisis undid much progress, the community development sector adapted and remains resilient. He ends with a hopeful but sober call for continued investment and a shift toward comprehensive strategies to address root causes of poverty.

Who should read Community Development in a Legacy City Community Development in a Legacy City The Cleveland Lab 1985 - 2010?

This book is ideal for urban planners, community development practitioners, policymakers, students of urban studies, and anyone interested in the revitalization of post-industrial cities. It is also relevant for residents of legacy cities who want to understand the history and dynamics of their communities. The book is accessible to a general audience, though it contains detailed data

and case studies.

How long does it take to read Community Development in a Legacy City Community Development in a Legacy City The Cleveland Lab 1985 - 2010?

At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, the book, which is approximately 90,000 words, would take about 6 hours to read. However, readers may take longer if they pause to reflect on the detailed case studies and data. The book is structured with clear chapters, making it easy to read in sections.