Sotarauta, M.; Beer, A. (eds.) (2021): Handbook on City and Regional Leadership.

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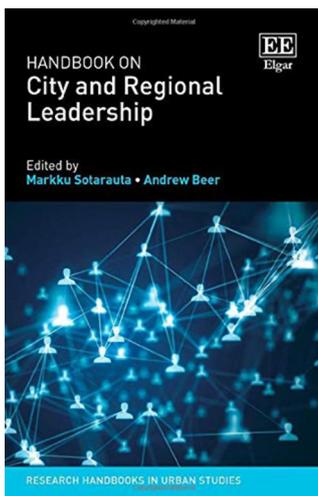
In Sotarauta and Beer's edited volume, "Handbook on City and Regional Leadership", the concept of place leadership comes into focus through a series of theoretical and empirical chapters, bookended by an assessment of the state of scholarship on the topic and concluded with a consideration of novel methods to drive future research. The editors are to be applauded for bringing together both established names and early career scholars. Taken together, the eighteen chapters offer a compelling, interdisciplinary case for why place leadership matters as a concept deserving further engagement by both scholars and practitioners. Although the editors describe the book as putting people at the centre, it distinguishes itself by also embracing context – by allowing "place" to carry equal weight with "leadership".

The editors present the material in four parts (The Setup and the Plot; Theoretical and Thematic Areas; Empirical Studies and New Methodological Avenues), while the structure both across and within these parts does not demand that the reader proceed through these in a linear fashion. Each chapter can stand alone, and a benefit of this approach is that it allows the reader to choose an entry point. The four chapters on novel methodological approaches at the end of the volume, for example (Chapters 16 (Beer and Irving), 17 (Grillitsch, Rekers and Sotarauta), 18 (Karlsen and Larrea) and 19 (Dinmore and Beer)), could readily function as a quick read for researchers seeking to understand how to begin or advance their study of place leadership.

The split between theory, empirics and new methods, however, should not be followed too strictly by the reader. The theory chapters regularly use illustrative empirical examples, with Chapters 4 (Sancino, Budd and Pagani) and 6 (Potluka) using short "Research in Focus" and "Case Study" insets quite effectively. The empirical chapters employ a wide array of theoretical and conceptual perspectives, such as regional innovation systems (Chapter 10 by Blazek and Kveton), social contract theory (Chapter 14 by Quinn) and inclusive leadership (Chapter 15 by Montero and Medina-Garzon). Many of the chapters blend interesting theory with empirical discussion, and it is in this blending that place leadership – in the volume, a complex but highly grounded, contextualized, situated and embedded concept – is most intriguing.

There may have been some utility in a heavier hand being applied by the editors in terms of synthesizing across the material in introductory and concluding chapters, es-

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pecially to help highlight for the reader the tensions that exist in the foundations of place leadership. The conceptualization of institutions matters to the determinants and outcomes of leadership, and the authors vary in how they define and incorporate institutions. This is true, too, across the broader literature on place leadership. Compare, for example, the sociological institutionalism in Chapter 12 (Sotarauta, Kurikka and Kolehmainen) with the more historical institutionalism of Chapters 10 and 11 (the latter by Bellandi, Plechero and Santana). Or consider the distinctions between formal and informal institutions in Chapters 4 and 6. These are compelling differences that are too often smoothed out in edited volumes, and this reviewer would have enjoyed the editors' guidance and remarks on these interesting wrinkles. That they are allowed, though, does substantially enrich the overall experience.

At times the juxtaposition of chapters illuminates these interesting variations. The notion of "placeless power" in Chapter 8 (Hambleton) rubs up smartly against the discussion of "combinatorial power" in Chapter 9 (Sotarauta). But power and its distribution among global, regional and local elites also makes its appearance strongly in Chapter 15 through a study of local economic development and inclusive leadership in Latin American regions. Reading the three chapters – 8, 9 and 15 – together can prove illuminating. The lengthy treatment of methods for investigating agency (Chapter 17) pairs well with the exploration of agency in six university-region case studies in Chapter 13 (Fonseca, Nieth, Salomaa and Benneworth) and, arguably, with the important discussions of emancipatory-oriented place leadership in Chapter 5 (Gibney and Nicholds) and of corporate spatial responsibility in Chapter 7 (Albers and Suwala). The question of optimal arrangement arises for any edited volume, but the astute reader will be able to make connections across the chapters.

After completing the volume, the reader should not expect a clear sense of the conceptual boundaries of place leadership. Place leadership is defined twice as "the mobilization and coordination of diverse groups of actors to achieve a collective effort aimed at enhancing the development of a specific place … [by working] across institutional, organizational, geographical and/or sectoral boundaries to amplify the local power base in order to strengthen the ca-

pacity to influence those with great powers" in Chapters 9 (page 152) and 12 (page 203) (for which Sotarauta is sole and lead author, respectively). But apart from these moments, both the word "leadership" and the word "place" are allowed flexibility. This is to the editors' credit.

Similarly, the chapters mostly avoid a search for best practices about what "good" or "successful" leadership is. Again, this is a healthy move away from the tendency in some academic work and much of the grey literature towards heroic or great-man leader narratives and the privileging of hierarchical, command-and-control leadership at the expense of more egalitarian, collaborative modes. Additional examples from cities and city-regions in newly industrializing and developing contexts beyond Chapter 15 would have enriched the volume, but the editors allow ample room for critical perspectives about power, social purpose, voice and legitimacy.

While Sotarauta and Beer's handbook could serve as a reader for many audiences, its tenor and structure would make it especially useful to two groups. First, graduate students and other advanced learners – particularly in a seminar or similarly dialogic learning setting – would benefit from thinking through the many questions and small debates the text provokes. Second, scholars who already possess a robust familiarity with the history of theory about policy processes, planning processes, public administration, space and politics in cities and regions are likely to enjoy the volume at a deeper level. Some of the chapters directly consider how the concept of place leadership fits within longstanding debates and conversation, (e.g., Chapter 3 (Nicholds), Chapter 5 and Chapter 8), and seeing these connections amplified in future scholarship would be welcome.

Overall, Sotarauta and Beer – and the many contributing authors – are to be commended for crafting an engaging and illuminating volume. The scholarship on place leadership in subnational contexts is undoubtedly strengthened by their work.

Full reference of reviewed title:

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