



Hopeful Signs US Urban Revitalization 1970 to 2000

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Urban revitalization is a slow process in the United States and, today, the results of three decades of city renewal policies are revealing hopeful signs of municipal growth, livability and fiscal strength. This paper explores urban revitalization policy from 1970 to 2000 with a focus on cities not metropolitan regions. The choice of 1970 and following decades reflects a watershed period: 1970 was the first year since 1920 that city population was lower than that of suburbs and the beginning of the decade in which US urban public policy developed in new directions. Tracing urban revitalization in the subsequent decades reflects the impact of this two-part phenomenon. By emphasizing cities, the paper underlines the primary purpose of urban revitalization: the enhancement of a city's chief asset, its land. This focus is critical because in the United States a city supports its municipal services and public amenities with locally-raised taxes collected directly (property) or indirectly (income/wage and sales) from the productive use of its land. Cities that have more land or more highly valued land are more able to meet their municipal obligations than others. Broadly construed, US urban revitalization has taken many forms related to the age, local political strength, and economic vigor of the cities in which it is taking place. Some places are more advanced than others but all large cities have engaged in some form of renewal in the past thirty years. Furthermore, the hopeful signs listed above are the outgrowth of thirty years of experience in addressing national and regional structural - economic, demographic and political - changes played out in cities. Thus this paper organizes frames and discusses US urban revitalization policies as a typology having the four inter-related categories: 1. Catalytic 2. Downtown 3. Neighborhood and 4. Project-oriented. It has three parts. The first part reviews city population changes from 1970 to 2000, highlighting the US national urban profile, regional shifts and specific city performance to outline the demographic context of contemporary urban revitalization. The second part considers the twin, inter-related phenomena shaping late 20th century cities and driving urban revitalization approaches: evolving theoretical and attitudinal underpinnings of city development and shifting economic, demographic and legislative climate. The third surveys the four urban revitalization categories listed above, defining each one and providing examples. The paper concludes with a brief assessment of the results of these policies and an outlook for future urban revitalization.

KEY WORDS: Urban revitalization, urban policy.