

*Great Plains Studies, Center for
Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural
and Social Sciences*

University of Nebraska › Lincoln

Year 1995

Review of *Community Development
Strategies on the Northern Plains* by
Kevin A. Choy and Richard C. Rounds

Joseph Luther
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jluther2@unl.edu

Community Development Strategies on the Northern Plains. Kevin A. Choy and Richard C. Rounds. Brandon, Manitoba: Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, 1992. ix+152 pp. Figures, tables, and references. \$C11.00 paper.

Kevin Choy and Richard Rounds, of the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University in Manitoba, have examined strategies for rural community economic development on the conterminous Great Plains of North America. Their exploration, description and explanation of these strategies has derived a fresh look at community economic development theory that could serve to unite many of the competing factions in this field. Their schematic of rural development theories provides an understanding of the various frames of reference for this field of study and practice. For this reason, this book should be a highly recommended reading for students in the rural development field.

Choy and Rounds state they have presented this overview of the theory behind development strategies as a **means to empower community leaders with knowledge of systems that have evolved through time.** They claim this is done "in a straightforward way" to provide insight into available options and allow rural leaders to choose those that are most likely to help their community. Although there is an excellent explication of these strategies, the format and tone of this book may be too scholarly to be readily accepted and easily read by local practitioners.

The major importance of this book is found in the examination of the consumers' perceptions of rural community economic development strategies and policies. The authors surveyed rural community leaders from Minnesota, Manitoba, North Dakota, Saskatchewan, Montana, and Alberta to

ascertain how rural leaders are reacting to new opportunities and options, what they are willing to accept, what they expect, and how they feel about change.

The respondents from these rural communities were not asked to evaluate economic development strategies on a directly comparative basis. Rather, each strategy was evaluated on its own merits. According to the authors, the approach is purposefully descriptive and exploratory rather than definitive and statistical.

Their survey indicated the single greatest expressed need in rural communities on the Northern Plains is to increase local employment. This top ranking was consistent between Canada and the United States. This factor, therefore, stands alone as the most needed change, and all other strategies obviously are designed to fulfill the need for more jobs.

Among the top ranked strategies were the traditional "attracting new business" and "attracting new industry." At the bottom of the ratings of importance of various economic development strategies were some surprises. The bottom five were (17) develop an industrial park, (16) attract retirees, (15) unite with other communities, (14) develop high-tech industry, (13) recapture taxes from the government, and (12) improve local infrastructure. These findings indicate the difficulty faced by those who believe multicomunity collaboration, infrastructure improvement and high-tech business are the salvation of rural small towns.

Policy maker should note that support from both regional and federal governments was perceived as being only about half of what rural communities needed or wanted. Visions and expectations for development were from two to three times current levels.

Choy and Rounds repeat, rather emphatically, the growing chorus that agricultural restructuring has drastically and rapidly changed the relationship between farming and rural communities. They correctly point out that "many now believe that agricultural sustainability and development are quite separate from rural sustainability and development." The authors then assert that if this is so, "this dichotomy requires change in many of the traditional ways of viewing rural areas, and legislation and regulations must allow for a wider variety of possibilities from the rural resource base."

This study concludes by finding that rural revitalization is dependent upon addressing the issues of community apathy, simple appropriate financial assistance, and expanding options for the development of rural areas. This book also finds that "traditional agriculture must come to view itself and be viewed by others as only one major component of what must become

a more diversified region if rural communities on the Northern Plains are to be sustained.”

This book should be required reading for those considering and formulating future policies for rural economic development on the coterminous Great Plains of North America. **Joseph Luther**, *Hyde Professor of Community and Regional Planning, College of Architecture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*