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Coping With Rapid Growth in Rural Communities, Bruce A. Weber and Robert E. Howell, Eds.

Frederick H. Buttel

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BOOK REVIEWS

COPING WITH RAPID GROWTH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

BRUCE A. WEBER and ROBERT E. HOWELL, Eds.
Boulder: Westview Press, 1982. Pp. 284. \$22.50

While most areas of the United States are languishing in economic stagnation and insecurity, many rural communities in the western states are experiencing natural resource-related economic booms that involve very different threats—particularly dislocations caused by rapid population growth. *Coping with Rapid Growth in Rural Communities* was compiled with two primary objectives in mind. The first objective was to provide a sourcebook of practical utility to local rural public officials struggling with the prospect or actuality of rapid population growth, while the second was to provide a synopsis and synthesis of relevant research for researchers interested in this issue. Simultaneous achievement of these two goals, despite the frequent lip service accorded to them, is rarely accomplished in contemporary social science. *Coping with Rapid Growth in Rural Communities*, however, will stand as one of the few book-length—especially edited—efforts to be meaningful for audiences of both practitioners and researchers. Each of the chapters is a well written and, at a minimum, competent summary of relevant literature. Moreover, each paper contains a more-than-token discussion of policy implications formulated in careful, though accessible, language.

In contrast to most edited volumes, every paper is a solid contribution and is located in the book so as to enable the editors to tell a coherent, cumulative story. After a short introduction by the editors, Wardwell and Cook provide a convenient summary of the larger socio-demographic context of rapid rural growth in the west. Leistritz and co-authors, and Murdock and co-authors then discuss, respectively, local economic and local population changes found to be associated with rapid rural growth in previous studies. Four papers, by Murray and Weber, Cortese, Freudenburg, and Albrecht, follow on various institutional impacts of rapid rural growth. The next two papers are the most creative in the volume. Barrows and Charlier discuss local government options for managing rapid rural growth, making some especially useful comments on equity aspects of growth management. Little and Krannich then explore the issue of enhancing local control in rapid growth communities. The editors conclude the volume with an able summary of the papers within the rubric of impact assessment and rapid growth management.

That the papers are well done and well organized within the anthology does not imply that the authors are in complete agreement on all issues.

Such disagreement is, in fact, appropriate given the nature of the "boom-town" literature in specific and social science in general. For example, Murdock, Leistriz, and their colleagues take a highly quantitative, macro approach and are cautious in not straying very far from hard data when formulating advice for local public officials. Freudenburg, and Little and Krannich, are more inclined toward qualitative, micro methodologies and a normative view of the implications of their work. To have excluded either of these two approaches would have done a disservice to both major audiences of the book. But perhaps the principal weakness of the volume is that the editors call relatively little attention to disagreements—both explicit and especially implicit—among their contributors, possibly being too concerned with creating an image of consensus on established, "hard" knowledge within the social science community. Nevertheless, this objection is a mild one in light of the significant achievement this volume represents.

Two additional features of this volume deserve attention for prospective readers from the land-grant university community. First, the volume is delightfully interdisciplinary, with the contributors representing sociology, economics, and mass communications. Moreover, nearly half of the papers are coauthored by persons from two disciplines. Second, the initial impetus for the volume came from western region extension specialists who desired improved educational materials for helping to advise community officials about the challenges of rapid growth in rural population centers. *Coping with Rapid Growth in Rural Communities* will no doubt stand as an exemplary model for approaching applied or public service issues in an academically creative way. Applied topics *do* demand high quality academic input, and research *is* more creative if it is enlightened by interaction with front-line practitioners who work where "the rubber meets the road." The editors are to be congratulated for their work. My hope is that this volume will serve two purposes beyond the two the editors set forth in the preface and introduction: to demonstrate the promise of interdisciplinary regional research-extension projects, and to suggest a model for publishing the output of these projects.

FREDERICK H. BUTTEL
Department of Rural Sociology
Cornell University