

***New York*, by Jill S. Gross and H. V. Savitch**

Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Agenda Publishing, 2023

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BOOK REVIEW

New York, by Jill S. Gross and H. V. Savitch, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Agenda Publishing, 2023

New York, by Jill S. Gross and H. V. Savitch, is the fourth in a megacities series (Savitch is editor), along with books on London, Mexico City, and Paris. While it's a megacities book it is not a megabook, coming in at only 169 pages of text. It addresses big issues with brevity and has the virtue of being written by two eminent scholars who are masters of their subject and render it accessible to undergraduates and non-academics.

The book begins by making the case for New York as a megacity, which actually requires some justification. "From a strictly formal point of view New York City falls just short of the ten million residents needed to constitute a megacity. We are, however, saved from this criterion by the reality of the Greater New York, whose population reaches 15 million" (p. vii). The introductory chapter documents geographic and demographic features of New York's "gigantism." There are juicy tidbits here: At 4,000 square miles it is roughly the size of South Korea, its 15-million population is comparable in size to Israel, and its \$1.5 trillion economy surpasses most nations. There are also surprises; for example, in a fragmented metropolis where 6.7 million daily commuters traverse a range of geographic boundaries, "the stereotypical commute from suburbs to Manhattan accounts for just 6.5% of total travel" (p. 18). Then there are the familiar facts of remarkable wealth and diversity marred by stubborn inequality and segregation.

The Introduction sets out an analytical framework in terms of "(1) *growth*, largely, although not exclusively, economic; (2) *tensions or crises* that stem from that growth; and (3) *adaptation* to manage those tensions in the form of policy initiatives" (p. 2). Chapter 2, "Crises, breakdowns, and New York's endurance," illustrates this dynamic with brief accounts of notable crises past and present, from the 1863 Draft Riots and 1975 fiscal crisis to 9/11, Superstorm Sandy, and COVID-19. These are largely descriptive and familiar, and the authors' conclusion that "optimism about the megacity's resilience is firmly rooted in experience" (p. 56) is comforting if not really arguable.

The growth-crisis-adaptation framework has an uneven presence in the following four chapters on urban development, governance, neighborhoods, and globalization. Chapter 3, "Building a global megacity," addresses an important question of whether we are "seeing a new phase of development in the megacity, a decentering of the growth machine, or perhaps a counterweight is pushing back in the form of an anti-growth coalition advocating for people-centered development" (p. 57). The 1975 fiscal crisis and Amazon's HQ2 plans for the Long Island City neighborhood serve as bookends for an insightful analysis of this changing political economy. The fiscal crisis and neoliberal turn are more widely known, but the Amazon case reveals how decades of public and private efforts to promote the shift from manufacturing to post-industrial services had the paradoxical effect of making the area both appealing to, and resistant to, Amazon. As the authors put it, "The core story here—massive growth of housing and development—made the area desirable" to Amazon, but also "generated a new set of tensions, which manifested in pushback from some in the community and highlighted a fundamental challenge to corporate-led economic development" (p. 79). This is the best of the book's thought-provoking case studies.

Chapter 4, "Expanded governance in the megacity," addresses "one of the most counter-intuitive features of the region ... This highly productive region appears to operate in the absence of a unified or coordinated structure of governance" (p. 83). The authors describe "a complex cacophony of formal and informal institutions" (p. 84), from the massive five-county City of New York to tiny hamlets, all overlaid with special districts and sprawling over two states. In this extremely fragmented metropolis "governance of the region is best viewed as

competitive. Collaboration is driven by self-interest and most likely to occur at moments of crisis” (p. 104). The ongoing saga of a congestion pricing plan for Manhattan highlights these governance challenges. Ultimately, “it does at times seem almost miraculous that the megacity is able to cohere around critical needs, and yet it does” (p. 83).

Fragmented governance also helps explain patterns of “Neighborhoods, diversification, and gentrification in the megacity” (Chapter 5). The central dilemma here is that “the megacity has prided itself on being a locus of diversity” (p. 109) while at the same time being “a territory of inequalities” (p. 110). Gross and Savitch adopt a “longitudinal lens” (p. 110) that focuses on the impacts of public policies over time. An essential point is that neighborhood inequalities nurtured through public policies are remarkably durable and immune to policy solutions like mandatory inclusionary zoning. The authors conclude that “the story of land use, zoning, rent regulation and housing policy reveals that the inequalities to be found in the region’s neighborhoods are not easy to overcome” (p. 128). This lesson seems an uneasy fit with the growth-tension-adaptation framework, except in the sense that adaptation means resistance to change.

“Not all megacities are global” (p. 135) but New York surely is and it consistently ranks atop the global hierarchy. Chapter 6, “Globalization in the megacity,” provides a fascinating look at how and why. When it comes to the “3Cs” of capital, cosmopolitanism, and charisma, New York is first among U.S. cities in the size of its economy, labor force, and Fortune 500 headquarters (capital measures); it has the most immigrants, foreign tourists, and international airline passengers (cosmopolitanism); and (for charisma) it receives the most Google hits, movie mentions, and votes for most fun (Mayor Lindsay’s “fun city” at last!)—though it falls short of the 10 best places to live. As Gross and Savitch note, “Even ‘leftist’ New York has been highly pro-business” (p. 142), and “‘Wall Street’ is one of the world’s largest globalization mills” (p. 145). Globalization exemplifies the dynamic of growth, tensions/crises, and adaptation, and the authors raise the provocative question of whether New York is “degloba-lizing” under the pressure of a “Black Swan”; that is, a “triple whammy” of disasters brought on by COVID-19, global decline, and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (p. 153). Adaptation has consisted of “market interventionist policies” from a united front of New York City, state, and U.S. governments, yet the outcome remains “anybody’s guess” (p. 158).

Maybe so, but Chapter 7, “Conclusions,” points to the authors’ faith in a strong future for megacity New York. Indeed, they close with five reassuring “axioms” derived from their “past is prologue” (p. 161) perspective. “Axiom 1: it’s “hard to ‘kill the city’” because “[d]isaster is the mother of adaptation” (p. 165). It’s nice to hear from esteemed urbanists Gross and Savitch that, “There will come a time when we look back at the bad years and rejoice at the good ones” (p. 169).

We’re left to wonder how New York might compare to a roster of megacities that ranges from Dhaka to Lagos. One suspects that inequality is common, but how about fragmented governance? Or the convergence of megacities and global cities? Still, *New York* is an illuminating book that makes an excellent addition to undergraduate courses on cities and a highly recommended read for anyone interested in New York.

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