Mohrman, K., Shi, J., Feinblatt, S.E., & Chow, K. W. (Eds.). (2009). *Public Universities and Regional Development.* Chengdu, Sichuan: Sichuan University Press.

Review by Joe Sumners

*T*he topic of public university engagement in regional development is both important and timely. In *Scholarship Reconsidered (1991)*, Ernest Boyer wrote, "At no time in our history has the need been greater for connecting the work of the academy to the social and environmental challenges beyond the campus" *(p. xii)*. In March 2000, a Kellogg Commission report stated, "The obstinate problems of today and tomorrow in our nation and world . . . must be addressed by our universities if society is to have any chance at all of solving them" *(p. 20)*. Governments around the world increasingly are looking to universities as engines of economic growth and social development.

Public Universities and Regional Development provides an important contribution to our understanding of such university engagement in communities, both in the United States and around the world. The volume represents an ambitious undertaking by its editors, Kathryn Mohrman, Jian Shi, Sharon E. Feinblatt, and King W. Chow. It highlights case studies focusing on 15 universities in seven different countries—Australia, China, Mexico, Portugal, Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States. A total of 44 authors contributed to the book.

In her introduction to the edited volume, Sharon E. Feinblatt describes "regional development" as a much higher level of university engagement than "outreach" or "university-community partnerships." She depicts regional development as "a long-term commitment to a public agenda benefiting the greater region in direct collaboration with other regional stakeholders" *(p. 4)*.

Feinblatt identifies four overarching themes in university-community regional development: economic development, social development, environmental development, and communication and technology development. Many of the succeeding chapters provide case studies that highlight each of these categories. *Economic development* chapters examine university-community engagement related to downtown revitalization, neighborhood enhancement, and regional poverty reduction, with case studies from Arizona State University, The Ohio State University, and Sichuan University (China). *Social development* chapters look at university-community collaborations related to youth, elderly and family services, and student engagement in economically distressed

communities, with case studies from the University at Albany (State University of New York) and Cornell University. Chapters focusing on *environmental development* include cases from the University of Guadalajara (Mexico) and Louisiana State University. *Communication and technology development* case studies focus on engagement efforts at Texas Tech University and Lulea University of Technology (Sweden). Other chapters take a more comprehensive look at regional development in particular settings, including Portugal (Center for Higher Education Policy Studies), Australia (Monash University), Great Britain (the University of Newcastle), China (Chongqing University and Nanjing University), and the United States (University of Utah).

In their description and analysis of the 15 case studies, the editors and contributors identify several key factors common to successful university engagement in regional development, including (a) university commitment, leadership, and passion; and (b) university and community partners who share power in a reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship. The authors also emphasize the importance of developmental context.

The factor that most contributes to success of university engagement in regional development is the presence of institutional leadership and commitment to engagement. However, while there recently has been increasing interest in "university engagement," the term is ill-defined and overused. The many public universities that claim to be "engaged" institutions vary greatly in how aggressively they actually respond to the needs of communities and citizens. In a 2007 study looking at European policies toward regional development, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) described university engagement efforts as "sporadic rather than systematic" *(p. 12)*. One unique contribution of *Public Universities and Regional Development* is its detailed depiction of these varying levels of university commitment to community engagement, based on an adaptation of Barbara Holland's levels of commitment to service matrix *(Kenny, Simon, Kiley-Brabeck, & Lerner, 2002)*. Despite the heightened rhetoric about university engagement, the authors conclude that rhetoric exceeds reality and that engagement is not sufficiently appreciated, documented, evaluated, or rewarded—as compared with teaching and research.

Unlike many of their counterparts, the universities showcased in this volume do not view community engagement as "a peripheral 'do-good' activity, but [as] a significant contributor to the university's core missions of teaching and research" *(Mohrman, p. iv)*. University leadership sends a clear, consistent message that

addressing regional needs is an important component of the university's core public mission. Engagement is thus incentivized, rewarded, and adequately and consistently funded.

A second key determinant of success in regional development is the existence of a dynamic relationship in which university and community partners share power in a reciprocal, mutually beneficial way. Much of what universities claim as "engagement" is more properly defined as "community outreach": the university connects with the local or regional community in a one-way transaction from the university to the community, rather than a two-way process with shared development and decision making. Community stakeholders will be much more inclined to follow through on strategies and solutions they help to create and in which they have a vested interest. Importantly, in each of the case studies presented, some funding support came from outside the university.

The authors also demonstrate that the regional context of development has important implications for success. Lessons learned in one country are not necessarily transferable, since universities in different regions face different opportunities and constraints. American experiences and models, for example, are particular to the United States and are not readily applicable even in such European countries as Great Britain and Portugal.

In the United States and Australia, decision-making power lies with states, provinces, and individual universities. Leaders at American public universities, for example, have autonomy to formulate their own mission and vision. In China and Portugal, on the other hand, universities operate under centrally determined missions and policies and can make decisions about regional development only at the operational level.

The primary weakness of the volume is its organization, or rather, its lack of organization. Despite the discussion in the introductory chapter about the book's four overarching themes of development (*economic, social, environmental*, and *communications and technology*), the editors failed to utilize these themes to organize the book's placement of the case studies. In fact, the sequence of chapters appears random. The six case studies with a more comprehensive perspective were also interspersed throughout the volume with no discernible attempt to group them by principal lesson learned or other common theme. As a result, the chapters seem disjointed, and the volume lacks a progressive flow.

Despite this shortcoming, *Public Universities and Regional Development* does a good job of highlighting a variety of models

for successful university-community engagement from diverse international settings. In *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, the Kellogg Commission *(1999)* noted, "we can organize our institutions to serve both local and national needs in a more coherent and effective way. We can and must do better." The case studies highlighted in this volume point the way, and present both an inspiring vision and an important challenge to those of us who work in the field.

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About the Reviewer

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