

Book Review

The Business Improvement District Movement: Contributions to Public Administration and Management by Seth A. Grossman

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Business improvement districts (BIDs) are an important mechanism for promoting local economic development. These public–private partnerships have played a vital role in the redevelopment of urban cores by leveraging private investment to promote economic growth, facilitate civic engagement (Banyan, 2008), reduce poverty, and reduce crime (Macdonald, Stokes, & Grunwald, 2014). These organizations are often the primary means of promoting revitalization, though often complement other local and regional strategies. Additionally, their policies often lead to positive economic spillovers in adjacent areas (Hoyt & Gopal-Agge, 2007). Consequently, familiarity with their operations is a crucial skill needed by municipal administrators tasked with promoting economic development.

In this work, Seth Grossman provides an introduction to multisectoral-managed business districts (MBDs), emphasizing public–private partnership (PPP) administration and special district governance. The text is based on the Business District Management Certification Program at Rutgers University-Newark and, consequently, focuses on the managerial enterprise over a review of techniques. The author feels that the BID manager is neglected in the subject's literature because their intersectoral work makes them “hard to pin down professionally” (p.2.), so he presents this review of theory and practical applications for audiences (namely, public managers and graduate students) that may be called upon to fill this role. Chapters 1-3 comprise of the managerial and organizational theory underlying the movement, while chapters 4 & 5 address issues of MBD implementation, governance and practice.

Chapter 1 begins with a review of BIDs, their purpose and their antecedents, couching their presentation within larger discussions of trends within the field of public administration. The author argues that the BID manager is “a different kind of animal in the public management field,” which requires a combination of skills and professional competencies derived from a number of allied fields, including business, marketing, finance, politics, and urban planning (p. 37). This entrepreneurial public manager is a blended specialist who must master the art of the community, building dialogues in ways that public and private institutions cannot. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the author's partnership model, which is applied in different contexts throughout the book.

Chapter 2 addresses foundations of the BID movement, touching on a number of its criticisms. These include aspects of accountability, commitment to democracy, and its challenges to the norms of administration, all which inform the hypotheses he presents. Grossman argues that “at the edge of public administration” lies a dysfunctional “no man's land” where BIDs operate (p. 61), a result of a unique institutional arrangement for which they possess economic and political legitimacy (p. 62). The author challenges the separation of public and private management by

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arguing for the complementarity of public entrepreneurship, whose agents promote social change and, through formalized PPP “exemplify a new pragmatism in public management” (p. 74). Though it does address issues of civic trust at length, it also identifies many core conflicts in the administrative enterprise; consequently, the work may benefit from a wider exploration of the BID manager’s professional ethos. The conversation then shifts to comparisons with new public management before addressing its function in promoting social capital, theories of participant motivation, and issues underlying performance measurement. At 70 pages, this chapter proves the most substantial of the book, both in content and examination of public management theory. Its ability to relate the enterprise with paradigms in public administration no doubt increases its relatability with students of the field.

Chapter 3 shifts the conversation toward a comparatively short (18) page review of the BID organization, discussing its authorization, operation, and legitimacy. It examines sectoral interdependence for the sake of explaining the importance of place management, where community revitalization is pursued with a customer service orientation. This reflects the value dynamics inherent within current other trends in public administration scholarship, namely, the distinctions “between those things public and those things private is no longer as meaningful as it once was” (p. 129). The narrative then reverts back to the manager as the subject of analysis, through a section of which is reprised from Chapter 1, though the author notes this chapter was previously published in *Public Performance & Management Review* (p. 140). The analysis then returns to the BIDs, which now seems a bit discontinuous in terms of conceptual progression, though the chapter concludes with a useful discussion of criteria that underlie BID failure and success.

Cooperative forms of commercial management become the focus in Chapter 4. Emphasizing retail, Grossman explores how managers pursue development when the goals of actors (particularly malls and “big box” development) do not align with those of the MBDs. He argues that town centers provide a “higher volume public use” (p. 150) that draws people into the area. He posits that the decline of downtowns might be of partial consequence of the lack of professionalized business district managers present within local government and chambers of commerce (COC) in the past (p. 151). It is under this frame that he explores COCs, which he finds to be an institutional mismatch with the mission of business district management; they are actors and advocates premised on networking and lack the authority of MBDs. A communitarian approach underlies the following discussion of asset-based development, asking managers to consider what residents like about their town. This dovetails into a discussion of destination marketing, as tourism is a component of a comprehensive place management strategy to realize the value (natural, historical, artistic, etc). To inventory these assets, the author suggests using principles of ALPP & SWOT analysis to provide a systemic review.

Success (or failure) of BIDs may be difficult to assess, so performance measurement is a consideration that must be incorporated to ensure their continued support. Chapter 5 provides an introduction to these measures, which combine public impact (quality of life) with private (return on investment). The author again stresses trust as a foundation, as it underlies the development of social capital and is critical in pushing a model of leadership where the community “may pursue things worth failing at” rather than accepting the status quo (p. 168). The latter half of the chapter stresses strategies for implementing PPPs, including management tools such as scorecards. It then addresses NPM and its emphasis on privatization, seeking to reframe the conversation to one of partnership, though this risks agencies shirking public responsibility or may alarm those in the private sector by overstating the political nature of BIDs (p. 178). After reviewing BID fundamentals, the author concludes the chapter by presenting the framework for the universal PPP & BID performance survey included in Appendix B.

Chapter 6 consists of a brief epilogue, broadly covering trends in global development and its influence on management theory. In advocating for his PPP model, Grossman urges public administrations to address the neglected base of governance that undermines trust in government. These “remarkable examples of public administration” offer an alternative lens for understanding contemporary community development and may challenge existing assumptions about the practice of public management, as detailed throughout the book. The appendices present previous research on the topic as well as the aforementioned survey, which is part of a manual for BID boards. The work concludes with an annual report for the *Ironbound Business Improvement District* (Newark, NJ), which serves as a useful guide for those seeking cues on BID program design and structure.

This text provides a strong introduction to the BID movement and excels at providing the reader with an expansive treatment of the theory that underlies their design and management. The author makes a convincing case that increasing business buy-in requires more than simply leveraging private capital, it means managing a community of interests that create public value. In linking public and private sector frames, Grossman provides a more pragmatic managerial approach to BID administration than have others. Consequently, the work is a valuable review for public managers and a helpful resource for graduate study in the subjects of economic development, local government administration, and urban planning.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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