Book Review

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China Brotsky, Sarah M. Eisinger and Diane Vinokur-Kaplan: *Shared Space and the New Nonprofit Workplace*

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China Brotsky, Sarah M. Eisinger, and Diane Vinokur-Kaplan. *Shared Space and the New Nonprofit Workplace*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019, ISBN: 9780190940461, \$60.00, 472 pp.

The angst of the current moment in American urban development concerns a trend towards repopulation of urban core communities, creative-class professionals who are both reversing a decades-long trend of white flight as well as fueling concerns around gentrification. This moment has created an apt time for China Brotsky, Sarah Eisinger, and Diane Vinokur-Kaplan to bring real estate back to the fore in considering nonprofit services. The authors are self-confirmed evangelists for the creation of flourishing nonprofit centers where collaboration, shared-services, and a strong commitment to placemaking leads to striking improvements in how nonprofits work. With that said, their book is a soup-to-nuts exploration of how nonprofit leaders can practically design, create, and govern a nonprofit center.

The zeitgeist of the modern firm is around coworking, flexibility, and innovation; WeWork, perhaps the most identifiable coworking firm, is slated for an Initial Public Offering in the tens of billions of dollars. Nonprofit leaders must ask themselves if they are being left behind in this moment as coworking can be expensive due to typical locations in trendy neighborhoods and flashy amenities. Brotsky, Eisinger, and Vinokur-Kaplan advocate for a series of workplace options that seemingly can catch the appeal of hip coworking spaces while also being attentive to the needs of nonprofits and their clients. The book highlights the question: can nonprofits afford to create attractive, functional, and economical workspaces in order to better work in the public's interest? Their answer is a strong 'yes', but with thoughtful analysis of the myriad decision points one needs to consider if the idea of a nonprofit center is interesting.

Brotsky, Eisinger, and Vinokur-Kaplan start from the premise that place matters. Through a commitment to placemaking, nonprofits and social ventures can be better together. This book is the result of dozens of experiments in creating nonprofit centers and the creation of the Nonprofit Centers Network, a support organization dedicated to aiding in the creation of these structures. The book is replete with case studies of successful centers, sometimes highlighting pain points in their creation. Perhaps the greatest benefit is for thoughtful nonprofit leaders, foundation program officers, or public officials concerned about the need to scale impact in particular communities.

There are several systematic challenges that nonprofit organizations face in creating common workspaces. First, the concept of overhead has become toxic in the past decade as expense ratios have been distilled into 'star ratings' and widely publicized. Physical space is ultimately an overhead cost, resulting in nonprofits continually considering how they can be as economical as possible. Brotsky et al.'s bottom-line answer is that by collaborating with other tenants, nonprofits can significantly decrease real estate costs. They are careful to delineate all of the considerations that must go into having this math work. Second, nonprofits have traditionally existed in zero-sum resource spaces whereby one organization's success with attracting a grant or contract has meant that another is unsuccessful. While we encourage our students to consider the positive-sum opportunities of collaborating across organizational boundaries, there are many incentives for nonprofits to close ranks and not collaborate. The authors bring forward a series of well-documented cases where nonprofit centers were able to create physical and cultural structures that ultimately broke down reticence in cooperation. Lastly, there is the very real governance challenge: beyond creating a physical space, how do organizations develop the governing structures that serve to both apportion risk and decrease costs?

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In reading *Shared Space*, it is hard not to imagine how co-locating nonprofits could lead to a new era of collaboration and increased impact. The authors undoubtedly believe that nonprofit centers are an important and essential means to extend the reach of social ventures, but the book is constructed more as a thoughtful legal brief than a polemic screed. Nonprofit leaders will be able to see step-by-step how nonprofit centers can be developed from the design phase to operations. The empirical results peppered throughout the text are impressive and the architectural renderings tickle the imagination with possibility. Ultimately, the value of the book comes in the fine-grained exploration of the dozens of steps that one needs to consider in bringing a nonprofit center to life.

Shared Space is also thought-provoking for nonprofit scholars. Location is important and in urban communities, there are profound changes as processes of depopulation have often turned to repopulation. Real estate prices have been increasing, and as communities of disadvantage gentrify, nonprofits are caught much as their clients by this challenge. While colocating is a natural and attractive idea, perhaps nonprofits should also consider radically not committing to particular locations; contrary to the energy behind place-based philanthropy and placemaking community organizations, perhaps nonprofits should be particularly nimble in their ability to continue to move to populations that are also having to dislocate. Taking up residence in nonprofit centers, perhaps on shorter-term leases, can be a strategy for organizations to be geographically nimble.

From a policy standpoint, should philanthropic and public funders consider how to facilitate the movement of social ventures as opposed to sinking capital into any one location? The WeWork coworking phenomenon is predicated on the idea that being tied to any one location can only restrict nimble responses to environmental needs.

Ultimately, Brotsky, Eisinger, and Vinokur-Kaplan create a thorough and vivid picture of how nonprofits and social ventures can harness the power of collaboration in order to better serve clients. It is captivating and raises important questions about how the sector can scale responses to community needs. It will provoke many sector leaders and funders to consider how to create such centers, and likewise push scholars to further investigate why place matters.