

purchasers. This is the essential structure of the community land trust. Other models, such as limited equity cooperatives, have successful urban track records. Inclusionary zoning offers a means of creating a mixed-income housing cluster with a percentage of the units set aside for permanent affordability.

Anyone who possesses a true concern for the urban environment and the surrounding countryside, has to be searching for solutions to sprawling development and the number of automobiles competing for space on the network of roads and highways that dominate the landscape. Obeng-Odoom is rightfully perplexed that “homo automobilus – the rise of the automobile as the emperor of urban transportation and its desirability – is defended in mainstream urban economics.” [p. 185] He expresses hope that an “activist campaign” will arise to “delegitimize automobility” in favor of “mass transit and bicycles, walking, and planning for people (not for profit) in the sense of building fewer roads, promoting collective and mixed use urban development ... and safe walking paths”. [p. 200] The hope, in my view, is for communities in which people can live, work and play independent of automobile usage.

Ultimately, what Obeng-Odoom and many of us are working to identify are best practices to achieve sustainable urban development. Again, he is led to Henry George for an effective challenge to orthodox theory by “returning land to common property.” [p. 220] That is, if the clock could be turned back, ownership of all land would be held by the community and (as I wrote above) offered to individuals and entities by competitive bidding for a leasehold interest. Again, the problem is the private appropriation of the rent of land rather than private ownership. Collecting the rent of land triggers sustainable economic development. A basic understanding of the Ricardo-George *law of rent* explains why.

Every parcel or tract of land has some potential annual rental value. A potential user will bid for control of the location based on an expectation of the revenue to be generated by whatever activity in which the user undertakes. Restrictions on this activity imposed by the community impose costs on the user; thus, in order to protect desired and expected profit margins the user will enter a lower rent bid than if no or fewer restrictions are imposed. For the community, the decision to impose restrictions to achieve, for example, a zero pollution outcome will tend to yield a lower rental charge than if some pollution was accepted (although the higher rental revenue obtained would provide funds for environmental remediation). However, one would expect to experience longer-run positive externalities associated with a pollution-free environment. Rent yields could rise significantly as the area becomes attractive to zero-polluting producers, service providers and residential occupants.

Obeng-Odoom misreads Henry George on the role that rent plays in the decision-making process by potential producers. The last thing Henry George wanted to see would be the elimination of rent from the economy. The taxation of rent does not eliminate rent, it merely redirects rent to the community to pay for public goods and services. By eliminating the potential to profit by speculation in land, the supply of locations brought to the market in competition with one another would tend to bring down rental values, at least until population growth increased the competition for well-situated locations.

In the end, what the author attempts is a resurrection of political economy as an interdisciplinary method of analysis and investigation. The book may be read, even discussed, by members of the individual disciplines to whom the book is directed. Will his message serve to bring together those who have come to question the orthodox teachings of their mentors? Others have tried. Back in 1970, Dick Netzer (a Professor of Economics and Dean of New York University’s School of Public Administration)

offered the book *Economic and Urban Problems: Diagnoses and Prescriptions* as an equally-ambitious entry to the argument on behalf of interdisciplinary analysis. Four decades ago he wrote:

Perhaps the most frequently overlooked and most insistently urged analytical argument of the book is this: existing institutions and policies have negative, as well as positive, economic effects on the resolution of urban problems. The mitigation of the harmful effects, by revising existing institutions, may be more important than any conceivable combination of glamorous and wholly new institutions, policies, and mechanisms. ... Societies with economic arrangements that, while paying serious attention to environmental difficulties, make likely the achievement of universal affluence within another generation must be doing something right.

Professor Netzer had challenged conventional wisdom. His book was positively reviewed and may have sold well. Back in 2004, a collection of essays with the title *City Taxes, City Spending* was published in his honor. The editor, Amy Ellen Schwartz, wrote of Netzer:

His research and writing clearly reflect the lessons learned and insights gained from practical applications to problems facing cities. His public service clearly reflects the expertise and analytic acumen honed in scholarly research and engagement. In this, he is a role model for subsequent generations of public finance and urban economists seeking to balance academic inquiry and research with public service and practice.

The fact that Professor Netzer’s work escaped the attention of Franklin Obeng-Odoom is not surprising. But, it is an unfortunate indication of the great difficulty of building a sustained challenge to conventional wisdom. 📌

BOOKS WORTH READING

For those interested in the relationship between jurisprudence and ecology a worthwhile read is *The Ecology of Law: Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature and Community* by Fritjof Capra and Ugo Mattei (Berrett-Koehler, 2015). The authors argue that with the modern advances of ecological science the world can no longer be understood as a vast machine, but rather as an interconnecting network of living forms. But, they write, our “laws and legal system are still mired in the outdated mechanistic paradigm”. The book traces how modern law theory arose out of the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, championed by Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes and John Lock. “In jurisprudence, the rationalist, mechanistic paradigm, developed by . . . jurists like Hugo Grotius and Jean Domat, views reality as an aggregate of discrete definable components, owners whose individual rights are protected by the state. Indeed, ownership and state-sovereignty, respectively, championed by John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, are the two organising principles of legal modernity” they observe in the introduction.

The subsequent argument of the book is to show how our new understanding of nature may inform our conception of law and align it with living in tune with nature. In Chapter 8 they argue that law belongs to community and ought not to be a system imposed from outside. There is detailed discussion of how the laws on property may be transformed by forms of common ownership or sharing, as well as a new recognition of commons. The main thrust of the proposed revision of law is that it be liberated from its focus on isolated property owning individuals and reoriented towards community and the interconnections within community, and the integration of community with the living environment.

Some of the suggestions may be impractical, nevertheless the book demonstrates beautifully that our modern theories of economics are bound up with outdated mechanistic conceptions of science and of law, and that economics and jurisprudence both need revising if justice and ecology are to converge. 📌