What Research Shows about Resurgent Cities: Lessons for Connecticut Policy Makers

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Experts were too optimistic about the future of small and mid-sized industrial cities.
Small and mid-sized industrial cities have faced an array of common challenges.

- Transition away from a manufacturing-oriented economy.
- General migration of jobs away from city centers.
- Changing skill requirements in high-paying urban jobs such as professional, medical, educational, and financial services.
- Changing racial and ethnic make-up of city populations.
- Dwindling property tax bases.
- Lack of attention from national funders.
Today’s presentation draws from Boston Fed study of Springfield, MA and its peer cities

- Why Springfield?
  - Springfield has one of the highest rates of concentrated poverty in the nation.
  - Springfield’s challenges are similar to other old manufacturing cities across the nation.

- Core questions
  - Are all old manufacturing cities economically distressed, or have some manufacturing cities fared substantially better than others?
  - What lessons can we draw from the resurgent cities?
Identifying 25 peer cities for Springfield:
1. manufacturing employed 30%+ residents in 1960
2. population of 100,000-250,000 in 1960-80
3. remained primary city in metro area (MSA)
The 10 resurgent cities are located in eight different states.
What constituted success in these cities?

- Outcomes for the residents:
  - Economic prosperity / absence of poverty
  - Absence of severe population losses
  - Social well-being / quality of life

- How to measure success:
  - Relative to peer cities
  - As objectively as possible
Median family income in the resurgent cities is now $12,520 higher than in the other peer cities ... But well below the U.S. median.

![Graph showing percent of U.S. median family income over time for resurgent cities and other peer cities.](image-url)
Major themes from studying resurgent cities

- Lead and collaborate
- Transform the economy
- Develop and attract human capital
- Extend prosperity and involve communities
Key lessons: Industry modernization

- High initial dependence on manufacturing hindered resurgence.

- Both resurgent and non-resurgent cities have reduced their dependence on manufacturing.

- Industry modernization involves developing more robust manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors.
All of the cities—resurgent and other—now rely less on manufacturing jobs.

Share of employed residents working in manufacturing, 2005-07
Key lessons: leadership and collaboration

- Initial leaders can come from any sector – government, business, or non-profit.

- Sustained progress requires broad collaboration across all constituencies.

- Building a durable civic infrastructure involves making changes in organizational structures.
Key lessons: Long-term visioning and re-evaluation

- Resurgent cities develop comprehensive long-range plans (10-20 years).
  - Based on broad participation.
  - Frequently involve regional engagement.

- Success requires re-evaluating these plans.
  - Initial successes are likely to be selective.
  - New economic challenges emerge.
Key lessons: Infrastructure and downtown revitalization

- Transportation and communications improvements are important draws for both manufacturers and other businesses.

- Downtown makeovers attract residents and create entrepreneurial activities.
Key lessons: Role of higher education institutions

- Educational attainment has improved considerably in resurgent cities.

- Higher education institutions also play important roles as economic developers, major employers, and financiers.

- Cities lacking one major higher education institution can benefit from coalitions among smaller institutions.
Key lessons: Helping low-income families and neighborhoods

- A continuing struggle, even in resurgent cities.
- Need for separate, focused initiatives and active collaborations.
Conclusion: Takeaways from studying resurgent cities.

- Realistic examples
- Patience and determination
- Fresh ideas
- Importance of cross-sectoral and regional cooperation
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