

BROWNFIELDS REDEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVE  
ADVANTAGE THEORY:  
URBAN REVITALIZATION AND STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH TROY, NY

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation focuses on brownfield redevelopment as viewed by key stakeholders in South Troy New York, an older industrial community now laden with these underused, abandoned, and idle properties. South Troy is a microcosm of small, urban cities dealing with the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution that once brought them prominence. Research shows that successful redevelopment of brownfield sites has the opportunity to impact urban communities by providing well-paying jobs in blighted communities, reducing urban sprawl and related fossil fuel consumption, and to revitalize neighborhoods (USCM 2006; Bartsch, C., Ward, Brown, Dickson, Thorsen, Ewen and Fox, 2004). At the core of the study is the belief that economic development means more than increasing average income (Nussbaum 2000; Sen 1999; Easterlin 2001; Daly 1997). Improving quality of life and well being of communities involves more than gains in per capita income. Positive sustainable development is a dynamic, self-reinforcing process that encourages individual entrepreneurship within a community-based, social and supportive context.

This research builds upon theoretical and empirical work in Competitive Advantage Theory, Ecological Economics and Brownfield Redevelopment. It examines the role of stakeholder engagement and the complexities of brownfield redevelopment as a positive solution for urban revitalization in South Troy, New York. “The Competitive Advantage of the Inner City,” a phrase coined by Harvard Professor Michael Porter, is based on wealth creation through business development (Porter 1995). Porter (1995:56) postulates that a sustainable economic base for inner city revitalization can be achieved “through private, for-profit initiatives and investment based on economic self-interest and genuine competitive advantage – not through artificial inducements, charity, or government mandates.” A qualitative methodology was used to

allow stakeholders to tell their own stories. Through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders I examine the aspirations from the point of view of those directly involved and affected by the development process. Through the forum of these interviews, stakeholders are allowed to disclose their perceptions of the influence of their environment, community structure, and economic and political initiatives. What emerged from the data is the influence of social capital, defined as “developing networks of relationships that weave individuals into groups and communities” (Putnam and Feldstein 2003). Social capital is a source of a competitive advantage, but it is not driven by private sector intervention.