Public Libraries and Resilient Cities. Edited by Michael Dudley. Chicago, IL: ALA, 2013. 175 pp. 65.00 USD. ISBNs: 978-0-8389-1136-5 (paper); 978-0-8389-9612-6 (PDF); 978-0-8389-9613-3 (ePub); 978-0-8389-9614-0 (Kindle).

An unexpected mix of interesting. That is how I would describe Michael Dudley's story of public libraries and urban resiliency. In his preface, Dudley is very clear about what he sets out to do and, either explicitly or by inference, what he does not intend to do. Before opening the book, I had a personal wishlist of what it might do – for the most part I was wrong, but that is not the author's fault. Ostensibly, the book is about public libraries and their potential, both current and future, to be key components in making cities better able to adapt to the changing stresses of being a city.

The book and its essays are very accessible and, I would suggest, introductory in nature. Library school students, early career librarians, urban planners and municipal administrators would find the book a valuable read. It does not require expertise in any particular field and leaves readers with plenty to think about.

Calling this book a story is intended to be complimentary and is one of the book's unexpected pleasures. I initially imagined a stiff compilation of essays, all professing fundamentally the same truths but from slightly different perspectives. The title initially suggested that the fundamental truth was that public libraries are essential agents of urban resiliency, and I was hopeful about reading a number of essays making that incontrovertible link using research and data and testimonials and perhaps an amen at the end. Part one of my assumption was somewhat correct, but part two was just wrong (although there is an amen at the end, in the form of an essay by Pilar Martinez).

Dudley's book is a proposal and a story about how what is could be more, and like any other story, it is layered with themes and ideas, intended and not, that will keep you thinking for a long time. Along the way to public libraries and resilient cities, the essay authors introduce, but do not fully explore, a number of significant issues in the urban public library environment. It is a foray into the leader/follower relationships among urban public libraries, their cities, and their residents. It touches on the issue of the independence of urban public libraries both from their cities (for the most part) and from each other in their lack of a federal mandate. It speaks, perhaps too briefly, to the principles of social exclusion in the public library context. Inclusion of the essay by Innocent Chirisa provides not only a look at how public library contributions to urban resiliency are context sensitive but also invites North American and European urban library practitioners to think about whether public library principles are universal or to what degree they are also context sensitive.

This collection of essays does take a bit of getting used to. The essays run the gamut from relatively formal and academic to very informal and detailed public library program success stories. The reader will go back and forth between big picture thinking and

philosophizing about the role of public libraries in society; to a detailed account of, for example, how many children were served lunch at the library in Peabody, Massachusetts; and on to the practical and political struggles of the public library systems serving Harare, Zimbabwe. While another editor might have tried to minimize these differences, Dudley has let each essay stand on its own to advance the story in its own way. Accessibility of the material was probably improved by that choice. Each essay's strengths lie in either urban resiliency or public library services, and only a couple of them overtly attempt to link the two.

It is important that the reader understand that this collection does not reflect an evidence basis for its proposition. There are no references to outcomes or impact measures that will allow the reader to see a proven link between public libraries and urban resiliency. Although disappointing, Dudley is very clear that that is not his intent, and the essay by Glen Holt provides a good explanation of the challenges such an approach would create. Instead, the collection creates a core with the essays of Dudley, Holt, and the Urban Libraries Council. The core has been surrounded by a number of essays that provide examples of public libraries working toward a presumed improvement in urban resiliency. From the vast array of public library options and programs that could have been chosen to support the suggested proposition, those selected do the job nicely. The stories told in many of the essays are familiar within the library community and provide the reader with an easy link between principles and practice.

Dudley accepts, rather easily, in this collection that the role of public libraries in urban resiliency is the exercise of leadership as a social service type agency. While I would agree with the public library theorists who suggest that public libraries will find their strength in meeting community identified needs, the community's needs are many and varied, and a focus on the public library as a social service agency for the marginalized is but one possibility or, at most, one component of a multifaceted service that would meet community needs. Even if the reader accepts the premise that public libraries have a history, tradition, or obligation to be social equalizers, there are many ways that a public library could fulfill that role, without embarking on the kinds of activities outlined in this book, while still contributing as significantly to urban resiliency.

All of the essays in the compilation are fundamentally well written, and there are a few that are key to moving the story forward. Dudley's own introductory essay and Holt's essay do a very good job of setting the stage. Essays by the Urban Libraries Council and Maija Berntson address some broader issues vital to public libraries in the urban context. Martinez uses a story example that incorporates many of the fundamental ideas of the compilation and looks ahead to capturing measurement of community impact. The essay co-authored by Matthew Evan Havens and Dudley is, perhaps, a bit out of place in this compilation. While fossil fuel depletion and its potential impacts on cities and, ultimately, public libraries is a speculative wonderland, it is a bit tangential to the immediacy generally conveyed by the discussion at hand.

Dudley's compilation requires the reader to get into its groove – to think about the interconnections in an urban context that allow a city and its residents to adapt and

change, to question what public libraries are, to appreciate the complexity and value of the sometimes uneasy marriage between public libraries and cities, and to explore what could be. It will take you from the philosophical cloud of library service down to the front line delivery of programs and, with a couple of stops in between, keeps you interested in all the parts of this public library story.

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