REVIEW ESSAY
New Works on the New Regionalism

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The idea of regional governance has a long history in the US, dating back more than eighty years to the Regional Planning Association of America, which envisioned an expansive form of metropolitan development enabled by the new technologies of the automobile, electric power, the telephone and the radio. The "dinosaur city" would be superceded by an ecologically sustainable form of deconcentrated development at the regional level, filled with small-scale self-contained towns surrounded by greenbelts (Sussman 1976).

The failure of that effort has been well documented. But in the past few years the idea of regional-level planning and governance has begun to gain currency in US metropolitan areas, where local control at the municipality level is sacrosanct. Myron Orfield, a Minnesota state legislator, was one of the first to observe that the pattern of poverty spreading from inner cities to inner suburbs had within it the potential for metropolitan coalitions that could foster regional governance. Orfield (1997) showed that older city suburbs, core cities and other fiscally stressed political units within a metropolitan region could band together to institute tax revenue pooling, fair share housing requirements and other policies that could have large impacts on metropolitan problems.

Three recent books pay their respects, in varying ways, to this new regionalism. In *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl* (2001), Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton team up to call for enlightened planning practices, asserting that such practices are even more necessary than in the past given the increasing size and extent of metropolitan areas. Their work is a journalistic overview of the new regionalism, with a heavy physical design emphasis. In *Regions That Work: How Cities and Suburbs Can Grow Together* (2000), a team of authors led by Manuel Pastor asserts that the futures of central cities and suburbs are inextricably linked, requiring more attention to the regional level from both neighborhood-level development organizations and from regional-level elites. Their volume is an interesting, if at times problematic, empirical justification of "equity-based" regionalism. Finally, in *City Making: Building Communities Without Building Walls* (1999), Gerald R. Frug focuses on the potential for regionalist solutions to foster community building and improve the quality of urban living. Frug's book is an original and insightful account of how the sociological and cultural forces fragmenting metropolitan regions are a result of the institutional structure of municipal entitlements and the nature of governance in the metropolis.

The Regional City

Architect and development consultant Peter Calthorpe is one of the leading proponents of New Urbanism, a design strategy for neighborhoods that emphasizes pedestrian- and transit-oriented development. William Fulton is a journalist and planner, and the author of two well-received books, *The Guide to California Planning* and *The Reluctant Metropolis*. Their joint effort, *The Regional City*, is a well-written synthesis of their views on planning and an able summary of the new regionalism. Calthorpe and Fulton are not the first to point out that "the urban space regularly traversed by the typical American is not really a 'community' at all, but rather a series of connected urban and suburban districts that often stretch across a vast geographical space" (15), but they provide a readable explanation of the ways in which metropolitan areas are becoming economically and ecologically more regional in nature.

Calthorpe and Fulton's understanding of regionalism is clearly influenced by their land use planning background. They are particularly strong believers in the importance of urban design:

> In many unseen ways, urban design and regional form set the physical order of our social structure, the dimensions of our economic needs, and the extent of our environmental impacts. Although it is true that changing the physical form of our communities will not address all our social and ecological challenges, it is also true that economic vitality, social stability, and environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without a coherent and supportive physical framework. Ultimately, it is not one or the other but the way that the two—physical forms and cultural norms—interact. (5)

The authors' vision of regional design is a kind of comprehensive physical planning writ large. The importance of neighborhood-level physical design is emphasized as well. They recommend creating regional growth boundaries and integrating land use and transportation planning—ideas that are quite familiar to students in academic planning programs. With little discussion of the theoretical background to support the assertion, they state that physical planning policies provide an "underpinning to end sprawl and bring shape, form, livability, and functionality to the regional city" (73). The authors also recommend a number of other regional-level policies, such as fair-share affordable housing, tax base sharing and regionally organized school systems.

Calthorpe and Fulton are believers in the importance of creating "communities of place," social networks based on physical proximity in neighborhoods, in order to arrive at an integrated society—even while acknowledging that such communities in the past were often exclusive. In contrast, "everywhere communities," or communities of shared interests whose creation has been facilitated by cheap transportation and telecommunications, have to some extent allowed social networks to cross natural geographical boundaries. They state that "the art of place making must be reestablished piece by piece," because they believe that place-based communities are important generators of social capital.

Despite what could be seen as an over-reliance on physical design as a solution to metropolitan problems, the authors at times make a genuine attempt to be comprehensive in their overview of the im-

pacts of other policies on regions. They discuss housing policy and finance, education, tax sharing and fiscal incentives, environmental policy, urban revitalization programs and transportation investment. The policy recommendations that flow from these discussions are plausible and often familiar. But despite this attention to other kinds of policy, the authors leave the distinct impression that a strong physical plan for the region is paramount. "The region—even if it is the basic economic unit in the global economy—cannot thrive unless it is consciously designed with strong physical and economic connections between the city, suburb, and countryside" (276). The authors do not demonstrate the truth of this assertion—surely, few thriving regions were "consciously designed."

In the middle section of the book, the authors describe a number of places in the United States that have instituted some form of regionalism. These include the cities of Portland, Salt Lake City and Seattle; the larger metro regions of New York, Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area; and the states of Maryland, Minneapolis and Florida. They are optimistic about the efforts of the three cities, all of which have instituted physical design efforts of the sort they admire (in fact, of the sort that Calthorpe has been directly involved in). Unsurprisingly, when the other regional efforts have failed, they attribute this to the fact that these efforts have paid little or no attention to physical design. On the whole, this section is a thorough, if partisan, overview of the state of regionalism in practice in the US.

The Regional City has three sections of beautifully rendered color drawings and photographs illustrating Calthorpe's design principles as applied to the development of greenfields and the redevelopment of inner ring suburbs and inner city urban neighborhoods. The book serves as a basic introduction to some of the concepts that have made regionalism popular, and some will find the vision of the authors appealing and inspiring.

Regions That Work

The authors of *Regions That Work* are interested in showing that a regional perspective is important to neighborhood level community development organizations, and that a neighborhood perspective is important to regional level efforts, which are more dependent on processes of globalization than in the past. Their term for this combined focus is "community-based regionalism:"

> The new regionalists…argue that internationalization has helped regions emerge as the key level of economic activity, partly because it is at this level that actors can constitute effective social capital…and a set of industrial clusters. The new community builders likewise stress social capital, noting that the first step to neighborhood development is often rebuilding the basic community fabric and recognizing that neighborhoods should be seen as part of a regional whole in a deeply globalized economy. Community and regional development should be linked. (181)

By far the most empirically ambitious of the works discussed here, *Regions That Work* is a compendium of interviews with Los Angeles community leaders,

statistical analyses of national MSA data and case studies of Charlotte, San Jose and Portland. The book was written by a team of academics at four California universities: Manuel Pastor at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Peter Dreier at Occidental College, Eugene Grigsby at UCLA, and Marta López-Garza at California State University, Northridge.

The authors identify three variants of regionalism: efficiency-based, environmentally-based, and equity-oriented. They describe the third variant as an attempt to "deconcentrate poverty, promote a broader tax base, and provide for a more equitable distribution of resources for schools and other public services" (8). This concern drives the work carried out for this book, which focuses primarily on Los Angeles.

Pastor et al identify four constituencies that have a basis for coalition building founded on an equity-oriented regionalism:

> Big-city mayors, who may see regionalism as a way to bring the urban agenda to the fore; residents of the inner-ring suburbs who are frustrated that new infrastructure spending is heading outward as their older communities disintegrate; leaders of community-based organizations who worry that they are "managers of decline" as the region passes them by; and labor unions, particularly metropolitan-based labor councils, that see the fates of their (often immobile) workers tied to the fortunes of the regional economy. (9)

In one of the most interesting sections of the book, the authors provide statistical evidence that metropolitan areas with greater disparities between levels of poverty in suburbs and inner cities have slower economic growth. Their analysis controls for the possibility of reverse causality: slower-growth areas may give rise to greater disparities in poverty levels. This problem has cast doubt on previous studies that show a correlation between income gaps and regional economic health. To deal with it, the authors employ a sophisticated simultaneous equations model.

Unfortunately, the statistical evidence from the model is somewhat weak, as several initial formulations of the model fail to show significant relationships. Furthermore, notwithstanding the fact that one of the models shows statistically significant results, their theory to explain how a higher poverty level in the central city stifles regional growth is not well articulated. One version is as follows:

> Businesses often see central-city deterioration as a signal of gaps in labor force skills, infrastructural investments, and protection of property, and may decide to locate manufacturing, service, and retail activities in another region rather than in an outlying suburb. After all, the growing permeability of city and suburb suggests to investors and residents alike that the inner city may be showing the region its suboptimal future. (100)

A more general theory to explain this result, presented as a primary hypothesis but not developed in great detail, is that regions with greater disparities in wealth are more likely to have lower amounts of "social capital," a concept that came into prominence with the work of Robert Putnam. Putnam (1993) found that the economic success of regions in north-

ern Italy was due to the presence of strong civic traditions that fostered horizontal networks of relationships of civic engagement. The authors acknowledge that this complex idea is difficult to relate to the results of their statistical model, noting that "the simplicity of our approach means that the complex chains from equity to social capital to regional growth are largely unspecified" (123).

It is clear that Pastor et al have a particular story to tell, and they ably marshal their evidence to support their story—but at times one gets the impression that alternative explanations have not been closely examined. This is true not only with the statistical analysis, but also with the case studies of San Jose, Charlotte and Portland. For example, while the details in the case studies are interesting and relevant, they do not clearly support the idea that "successful" regions—those that both grow and reduce inequity—are particularly good at social capital building.

Interestingly, despite its emphasis on equity concerns, *Regions That Work* does not include strong ethical or moral arguments about the importance of reconnecting poor and rich people, transferring income or improving services in poor areas. Instead, it relies for the most part on the claim that economic regions will suffer if the gap between rich and poor areas grows larger. However, the book as a whole is an important contribution to the literature connecting the economic fates of regions and their success at maintaining equity between poor and rich. Finally, the conclusion includes some interesting policy recommendations, such as the importance of focusing regional development strategy on industrial clusters that are less footloose than large-scale industries, refocusing regional infrastructure efforts on existing urbanized areas and regularizing the informal labor sector.

City Making

Both *The Regional City* and *Regions That Work* discuss the economic implications of regionalism in some detail, though their major policy recommendations have little in common. For both books, an important argument for regionalism is that it is necessary to stop the contagion of inner city economic decline from creeping into the inner suburbs and beyond. In *City Making*, Gerald Frug spends relatively little ink on this subject, focusing more on exclusion and the social and cultural consequences of metropolitan fragmentation, and making a strong argument that regional reforms could have benefits that go far beyond economic outcomes.

Frug, a Harvard law professor, addresses the laws and institutions that, he argues, have contributed to metropolitan segregation. Cities are treated like corporations in US law, with the consequence that there is little incentive for city governments to take other than an individualistic approach to decision making. This encourages exclusion, fear and a cycle of deepening segregation.

Much of the discussion of regionalism in the planning literature is vague about the forms that regionalism might take. For example, in *Regions That Work*, Pastor et al claim that the exact form such collabora-

tions will take is less important than the concept: local leaders must learn to think and act regionally. Frug sees things differently. He believes that specific legal reforms are absolutely necessary for regionalism to have any viability, and presents interesting ideas about how to carry out such reforms. Among other innovations, he advocates allowing voting across conventional jurisdictional lines, so that, for example, residents of inner suburbs can vote for council members who are in favor of developing multi-family housing in outer suburbs.

The book has four sections, each based on a previously published law review article. In the first section, Frug discusses the legal status and history of cities, which have resulted in the primacy of property rights as the controlling principle in how cities and suburbs are legally treated. In the second section, he makes a somewhat esoteric, but often fascinating, argument about the need for "decentering cities' subjectivity," or making cities less focused on only local concerns. He relates these arguments to possible governance reforms, such as a "postmodern" form of voting rights, in which voting is no longer based on residential status in a given jurisdiction. Instead, several votes are allocated to each resident of a region, to be used in any local election occurring within that region that strikes the individual's interest (106). A resident of Los Angeles might cast one vote for a particular candidate for Los Angeles mayor and four votes for a particular candidate for mayor of Beverly Hills. As Frug puts it, this section is intended to "suggest the possibility that local government law can be based on something other than the model of the autonomous individual or the nation-state" (112).

The third section lays out the benefits of creating such institutional changes, while the fourth develops recommendations for changing the nature of city services. Frug argues that city services are commonly misunderstood as "objects of consumption"—an understanding that corresponds to the "voluntary concept" of the city, in which people choose where to live based on a package of amenities offered in that locale (and whether they can afford to live there). Frug's preferred conception, in which city services can foster the development of "other aspects of human nature" such as citizenship and the need for association, is correlated with the "fortuitous association concept" of cities. This concept is developed in the chapter entitled "Community Building," in which Frug spends some time defending the worth of living in cities (versus homogenous suburbs), addressing and contesting the psychological, sociological and political justification for the existence of homogenous suburbs. His idea of community building is in the tradition of Jane Jacobs (1961) and Iris Young (1990: 226-56), who see cities as heterogeneous breeding grounds for creativity, fun, and above all, tolerance. "The purpose of community building is to increase the capacity of metropolitan residents to live in a world composed of people different from themselves…. A consumer's understanding of 'what's-in-it-for-me' fails to capture the ways in which city services can promote not just the public interest but individual self-interest as well… Community building offers an alternative to the priva-

tized conception of what city services are" (117, 176-7).

Frug uses education as an example of a city service that could be reformed regionally and foster community building. Schools should prepare children for living in our diverse society, he says, but most existing school choice proposals (such as vouchers) would intensify the existing process of segregation by income, class and race. However, if schools were administered on a regional basis, the self-isolating tendency of the current neighborhood-level process would be mitigated and the exclusionary education system would be opened up:

> The vast majority of people who live in America's metropolitan areas would benefit from the elimination of the legally created suburban escape hatch. School funding would become more fairly allocated. All residents of the metropolitan area—not just the most mobile—would have a choice about the best school for their children. The concentration of poor people into a limited number of schools would be reduced… Once school systems became organized as fortuitous associations rather than as a series of voluntary organizations, education funding and innovation might even increase. (190)

Frug's conception of regionalism includes regional-level negotiation over decision making and devolution of entitlements to cities. This sort of negotiation could happen in a regional parliament with elected legislators. He points out that such a negotiation process makes policy outcomes for any given metropolitan area unclear, dependent on the outcome of the negotiation. Other conceptions of regionalism often have specific policy prescriptions in mind that are seen by regionalists as being preferable in terms of equity, efficiency or some other criterion. In contrast, Frug sees the process of regional negotiation to be the primary reform—the nature of the resulting policy decision will depend on the issue and region. When it comes to schools, for example, he writes:

> If it turned out that most people in the metropolitan area preferred neighborhood schools, the regional negotiation process would likely focus on making schools comparable enough so that most parents would choose to send their children to neighborhood schools. After all, a school choice program that offered no admission preference to neighborhood residents would undermine neighborhood schools (assuming most people preferred them) only if they substantially varied in quality. If, on the other hand, most people preferred to send their children to the best school in the region wherever it is located, the negotiations might focus instead on the dynamic that now makes residents of poor neighborhoods as reluctant to apply to out-of-district schools as residents of the more prosperous districts are to receive them. (187)

Frug's discussion of how existing delivery systems for education and police services increases isolation and fear of others is thought-provoking and insightful. His policy recommendations have a specificity and novelty that makes his book a must-read even for those who feel they have been over-exposed to the new regionalism. While Frug acknowledges that his ideas can be criticized as romantic and unrealistic, he argues that there is a great deal of potential for widespread recognition of the value of reforming the urban system, even under the banner of privatized self-interest.

The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl*.* Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton. Foreword by Robert Fishman. Island Press, Washington DC. January 2001. 304 pp. ISBN 1-55963-784-6 (paperback).

Regions That Work: How Cities and Suburbs Can Grow Together*.* Manuel Pastor, Jr., Peter Dreier, J. Eugene Grigsby III, and Marta López-Garcia. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis MN. July 2000. 263 pp. ISBN 0-8166-3340-1 (paperback).

City Making: Building Communities Without Building Walls*.* Gerald R. Frug. Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ. July 1999. 256 pp. ISBN 0-691-00741-1 (cloth).

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