

**BOOK REVIEWS**  
**Rethinking Cities and Regions**

***The Regional City***

Authors: Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton (Island Press 2001)

***Knowledge-Value Cities in the Digital Age***

Authors: Joel Kotkin and Ross C. Devol (Milken Institute 2001)

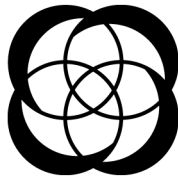
Together, these two impressive works help regional stewards rethink the meaning of both cities and regions. Calthorpe and Fulton's elegant new book looks at the region from the livable community perspective while Kotkin and DeVol's well-written report looks at the region from the new economy perspective. They end up in a similar spot- cities have an important place in new regionalism. We just need to think differently about both cities and regions.

Together with Manuel Pastor's *Regions That Work* which looks at regions from the perspective of community-based regionalism and Bruce Katz's *Perspectives on Regionalism* which looks at regions from a governance and metropolitan policy perspective, these four impressive works help round out the four conversations that make up regional stewardship today and, together, can be view as critical foundations for understanding regions today.

Building on an outstanding body of regional work ranging from Portland and Salt Lake to the Bay Area and Minnesota, Calthorpe and Fulton make the case for the Regional City. The Regional City combines the economic, ecological and social region into vital communities of place composed of connected neighborhoods. The author's unique contribution is captured in the following statement: "designing the region is designing the neighborhood... Just as a neighborhood needs a vital center to serve as the crossroads of the local community, the region needs a vital central city to serve as its cultural heart and its link to the global economy. In the edge city metropolis, both types of centers are failing. In the suburbs, what were village centers of human proportions are overcome by remote discount centers and relentless commercial strips. In central cities, poverty and disinvestments erode historic neighborhood communities. Both fall prey to specialized enterprises oriented toward mass distribution rather than local community"

The book outlines how to facilitate the shift from Edge City to Regional City by reconnecting the building blocks of regions: centers, districts, preserves and corridors. Most of the examples in the books show how this can be done. Extensive regional maps show how regional building blocks are weaved together from the neighborhood to the regional level.

While there are many concrete examples and case studies in this book, its primary contribution to regional stewards is the attempt to define a new vision of a regional city as connected



communities of place. The region, city and neighborhoods can be purposely designed in parallel to move away from the Edge City toward a region of vital centers.

Kotkin and DeVol look at the changing role of cities and regions in response to new digital technologies. They state that “ the revitalization underway in some of America’s urban centers represents one of the most important, if surprising, developments of the new millennium.” Perhaps the most encouraging phenomenon of the digital revolution has been the movement back to the old industrial center. The report answers why this is happening by focusing on the emergence of “soft” technology. While hard technology such as computer and chip production remains concentrated in the periphery, soft technology such as software, Internet and multimedia have concentrated in urban areas. Clustering of creative and design activities occurs within innovative networks of talented people who want to live in exciting places.

The report provides numerous examples of this clustering of talent in urban places including Digital Hollywood, Boston’s Cyber District, South of Market in San Francisco as well as Omaha, Boise, Central Dallas, Baltimore and Dayton. The message is clear: place matters in the new economy because talent is king. The regional focus should be on creating a good quality of life and attracting and growing talent.

What is most encouraging about the Kotkin and DeVol report is that any region can play in this new dynamic, not just the first tier technology cities. In fact, with rising costs and congestion in the first tier tech cities, the opportunities for other regions to provide a better habitat for new economy workers grows. Hence, Baltimore and Dayton figure in their story, along with Boston and San Francisco.

Putting together these two volumes, the regional steward comes away with a different picture of cities and regions today. First, strong neighborhoods and central cities are critical to the health of regions. The Edge City of disconnected suburbs is being challenged by the new vision of a region with many connected vital centers- the Regional City. Second, digital technologies, especially the “soft” technologies, have created new opportunities for cities to become a desired place to live and work. We don’t have to give up on central cities and look only to the suburbs for good jobs. Spatial patterns in the new economy are changing. While dispersion of “hard” capital intensive technology (in search of low cost land and labor) will continue both outward across the United States and globally, we are likely to see a continued concentration of soft, human intensive technology in vital centers in creative urban areas.

Think of the opportunities that these converging trends create for the creative regional steward. Technology and economic trends point toward new opportunities for central cities at the same time that innovative regional planning suggests that we focus on creating vital centers that connect within our regional cities.