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The Interactive Megalopolis and The Regional City: Embracing Regionalism

An extraordinary book has just been published for readers interested in the economic, environmental, and social development of cities. The Regional City is an intriguing book, written by Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton. What is interesting is that both of these writers have in the past, promoted small self-contained garden cities, eschewing expanded transportation links for fear of promoting urban sprawl.

And while these authors continue with reason, to be fearful of urban sprawl, they do however seem to recognize the social and economic benefits of regionalism. On the surface, regionalism is an apparent contradiction for the New Urbanism movement. But the reality is that regionalism is an important objective for future urban development if we are to have cities that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

While I have not yet been able to obtain a copy of the text, the authors write about the city as: **an Economic Region; an Ecological Region; and a Social Unit**. Combining these three dimensions has led the authors to accept the reality that our urban regions are ['Regional Cities' where the pattern of urban development resembles 'constellations' with many urban centers](#). This approach matches the mission of Magplane Technology Inc. which is to develop 'Regional Cities' in a manner that is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable, in short: ***Cities that provide employment and a high quality of life for all residents.***

Far too often in the past, writers have concentrated on only one dimension of a city's evolution, neglecting other important factors that if considered, would alter their diagnosis and recommendations guiding future urban development. In the 'Regional City', Calthorpe and Fulton consider the spatial implications of all three dimensions. The 'Regional City' as an economic region certainly supports the economic benefits that a Magplane Commuter System would provide in the New Economy.

The following text is composed of paragraphs that are directly lifted from the first chapter of the 'Regional City' discussing the economic benefits of an expanded city. The abridged version of this chapter appeared in the New York Times website and is made available at the end of this story.

All of the excerpts are fascinating especially the last bullet point explaining the conflict between the required mass of specialized labor and quality of life in the metropolitan areas of America.

Definitions:

While there may be slight differences in meaning, the following terms used by Calthorpe and Fulton are similar if not, identical to the Magplane concepts.

"Network Metropolis"

This term is identical to the concept of the Interactive Megalopolis, a linked urban system composed of adjacent metropolitan areas and their satellite towns.

Calthorpe and Fulton define it this way: "A region where all these networks are located in close proximity that they can remain lively and active without a heavy investment in travel or long-distance telecommunications.

"Spatial Suicide"

This term is similar to the economic and social damage inflicted on cities as the shortcomings of the transportation infrastructure begin the slow contraction of the city; the reduction of choices of where to work and live.

"Networking"

This term explains the fundamental objective for the Magplane system: to promote electronic and physical networking among a highly specialized pool of talented labor and businesses. The adjective *interactive* in "Interactive Megalopolis" for Magplane is a synonym for Networking.

The Regional City

by Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton

1. Whether national or local, these "economies" might be important to the politicians who preside over them, but it has become increasingly clear that they don't really exist. Economic activity does not come to a halt when it reaches a jurisdictional line, whether the jurisdiction is a local, state, or national government. Political boundaries are artificial—and they don't reflect the way the global economy operates.
2. The global economy operates best at the regional scale for two reasons. First, much to everyone's surprise, despite our advances in telecommunications technology, *proximity* still matters a great deal. And, second, because of the decentralized nature of the economy, *networking* among a large number of highly specialized people and businesses matters more than ever. The fact that proximity still matters has been something of a surprise in the past decade. At the dawn of the modern age in the 1980s, economists and urban planners predicted a great untethering of "work" from "workplace."
3. Although a few executives do work on mountaintops, most choose instead to operate within the physical confines of a metropolitan economy. Take Silicon Valley in California—probably the hottest economy in the world. In the past decade, Silicon Valley has become both extremely crowded and extremely expensive, and many of the people who work there have become extremely rich. Yet most still choose to remain there. Why?
4. The reason is simple: technological advances, globalization, and the changing nature of work have transformed the form of our economy into what might be called a "**network economy.**" Economic activity is volatile and unpredictable. It's impossible to predict what an

entrepreneur, or a business, or even an employee might need from one day to the next in order to thrive.

5. Therefore, the single most important component of economic success, either for a business or for a worker, is access to networks of all kinds: job networks, money networks, idea networks, and networks of vendors and services. And the only sure way to operate successfully in the network economy is to be physically located in what might be called a "**network metropolis**"—a region where all these networks are located in close enough proximity that they can remain lively and active without a heavy investment in travel or long-distance telecommunications.
6. "What actually attracts business is the entire geographically based infrastructure of skills, markets, and expertise," the California economist Manuel Pastor and his colleagues recently wrote in their new book *Regions That Work: How Cities and Suburbs Can Grow Together*. **"These are the assets that make it worthwhile for businesses to accept higher labor standards in return for access to an educated and enthusiastic pool of workers, as well as the 'intangibles' of sound public policy and supportive business suppliers. And, increasingly, these assets are constituted at the regional level."**
7. The reasons that the network metropolis must operate at a regional level are obvious: the global scale of the economy and the vast range of specialization required to compete globally demand a large and varied pool of labor skills and other expertise.
8. Instead, economic development now revolves around analyzing and understanding business and industrial "clusters"—geographically based groups of companies, entrepreneurial networks, and labor skills that permit any region to find and keep its place in the global economy year after year. The cluster approach recognizes that it is the network that matters, not any individual business.
9. "**Spatial suicide**" is an apt term for the manner in which many American metropolitan areas choose to tear themselves apart rather than adapt to the idea of an economic region. As we will discuss below, the mismatch between regional economic reality and local political fragmentation often leads to such severe social and economic inequality across a region that it cannot function well either as an economic unit or as a social unit.
10. **Indeed, even as business leaders recognize the emergence of regions as the basic unit of the global economy, they are becoming increasingly concerned that the very regions on which they depend will lose many of the qualities required to stay**

competitive. In particular, many American metropolitan areas are seeing both their quality of life and their ability to provide affordable housing erode.

The full text of the New York Times on-line edition is available here: [The Regional City.](#)