

Filling the Governance Gap

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Cities Without Suburbs, by David Rusk. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993.

Metropolitics, by Myron Orfield. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997.

Regional Politics, edited by H. V. Savitch and Ronald K. Vogel. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996.

Regional Excellence, by William R. Dodge. Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, 1996.

New Visions for Metropolitan America, by Anthony Downs. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1994.

In the mid-1970s, more than forty federal programs were operating to promote regional coordination and planning. But during the Carter administration, and on through the Reagan and Bush years, interest in metropolitan regionalism waned as the political base of both parties moved firmly to the suburbs and the Sunbelt. By the early 1990s, the attention of those still searching for signs of regional vitality shifted away from central cities (which appeared to be increasingly superfluous) toward what Joel Garreau aptly dubbed *Edge City*.¹

The New Regionalists

Even as the central city was being declared dead and its suburbs fully liberated, a spate of books emerged identifying new interdependencies of cities and their suburbs, and calling for the renewal of efforts to achieve regional governance. In 1993, Neal Peirce, Curtis Johnson, and John Stuart Hall led the advance with *Citistates*, along with David Rusk's *Cities Without Suburbs*. The following years saw Tony Downs's *New Visions for Metropolitan America*, *Regional Excellence* by Bill Dodge, and most recently *Metropolitics* by Myron Orfield. Academic articles also began appearing, including edited volumes such as *Regional Politics* in the Urban Affairs Annual series.

Why the revival of interest? Todd Swanstrom, of the State University of New York at Albany, suggests that the principal reason is social equity. With liberal compassion for the urban poor crumbling, "it is not surprising that

urban advocates have begun to search for common ground with suburbanites.²² The social equity argument of those whom Swanstrom calls the “new regionalists” is based on analyses showing that suburban prosperity is linked with the economic health of the central city. People living in suburbs surrounding a declining central city may be better off than residents of the core, but they are not as well off as suburbanites living in a region with an economically healthy central city.³

Although most of the new regionalists stress economic interdependency tied to social equity as a principal justification for renewed attention to the challenge of governing regions, it is not the only rationale. Another major justification is environmental protection. Sprawling suburbs and vacation-home subdivisions provoke calls for growth management, but it is increasingly on a regional level. Finally, the cost of providing new infrastructure and services suggests to many the need for regional coordination and cooperation.

None of the justifications for regionalism—economic competitiveness and social equity, environmental protection, efficient and effective provision of infrastructure and services—are new. In fact, most were offered by past advocates of regionalism, beginning in the 1920s.⁴ But what is new is the scale and degree of interdependency.

Current appeals for regionalism based on economic interdependency often include discussion of the globalizing economy, which reduces the significance of nation states and focuses greater attention on regions as basic geographic units of competition.⁵ Likewise, arguments for regionalism to protect the environment are now based not on evidence of polluted river basins and water sheds alone but on concerns over global warming and acid rains, which cross national boundaries.⁶

The Governance Gap

All of the publications of the new regionalists offer some combination of justifications for regionalism. They then turn to the issue of how to fill the “governance gap” (the term may have been coined by Neal Peirce), by which is meant the lack of governance capacity to address regional problems.

This review focuses on solutions offered by several prominent new regionalists for filling the governance gap. Some of these approaches are recastings of old solutions, but others attempt to chart new territory. They range from top-down structural remedies to bottom-up voluntary compliance with regional plans. They are tempered by concern for current political feasibility, yet they appeal to popular consensus through new images of the form of (and quality of) life in regions.

Cities Without Suburbs, by David Rusk

The first part of this volume offers a novel analysis of the problems faced by many declining cities based on their “elasticity,” that is their ability to annex

new growth areas. Rusk concludes that inelastic cities decline because they have no way to distribute their equity burden, while elastic cities continue to thrive.

Rusk calls for state governments to take the lead in addressing this situation. He proposes a five-point course of action:

1. Improve annexation laws to facilitate central city expansion into urbanizing areas.
2. Enact laws to encourage city-county consolidation.
3. Empower county governments with municipal powers so that they can act as *de facto* metro governments.
4. Require all local governments in a metro area to have "fair share" affordable-housing laws.
5. Establish metrowide tax sharing arrangements.

Although many of the new regionalists praise Rusk's analysis for connecting urban decline with inelasticity, few are willing to focus responsibility for filling the governance gap so squarely on state legislatures, especially when the states are advised to act top-down by imposing such measures as city-county consolidation. In fact, Rusk suggests that sustaining the changes he recommends will require "a grassroots movement like the civil rights movement or the environmental movement. . . ." Unfortunately, this critical dimension of implementing regional reform received short treatment, both in this volume and in a subsequent special study of Baltimore.

There is some irony in the fact that Rusk was the mayor of Albuquerque, where several previous attempts at city/county consolidation met with defeat. However, since Rusk classifies Albuquerque as a highly elastic city, and one where poverty households are not concentrated in the central city, it may not require the type of remedy he advocates for other regions.

Metropolitcs, by Myron Orfield

Myron Orfield is a state legislator who has represented a southwestern district of Minneapolis since 1990. In large part, *Metropolitcs* is a detailed case study of his attempts in the legislature to reinforce mechanisms for regional governance in the Twin Cities. Although much of Orfield's approach reflects the type of structural solutions advocated by regionalists in the 1970s and embodied in the Metropolitan Council established in 1967, he recognizes the importance of creating a cross-sectoral coalition of interest groups to help promote and sustain regionalism.

Orfield's contribution to the analysis of metropolitan interdependencies consists of recognizing two trends. First, inner-ring suburbs suffer many of the same problems as do core cities, but with far fewer resources. Second, new growth and stable older suburbs tend to be concentrated in the "favored quarter," a wedge of development moving out from the core that "dominates regional

economic development and garners a disproportionate share of the region's new roads and other developmental infrastructure."⁸

Orfield demonstrates these trends with numerous colored maps. But these could be also be used to demonstrated Garreau's edge city. Indeed, what is curiously missing from this graphic presentation are indications of the major highways and shopping centers that provide the armature for edge cities.

Orfield's solution for filling the regional governance gap relies on enhancing the powers of the Metropolitan Council. The council already has significant regional responsibilities, but it has failed to exercise them when challenged by major new developments. Indeed, by the late 1980s the council was losing its bipartisan legislative support, and in 1991 the governor threatened to eliminate it.⁹

Between 1993 and 1994, Orfield introduced a package of bills providing for:

- An elected metropolitan council
- A mandate that the council prescribe low- and moderate-income housing goals for each suburb
- Council authority to enforce its low- and moderate-income housing goals by denying sewers and highway extensions to suburbs out of compliance
- Establishment of a housing reinvestment fund that would be used to increase the supply of affordable housing

In order to win support for his legislative package, Orfield forged an alliance between inner-ring suburbs and the core city. His coalition included mayors, church groups, support from foundations, and eventually the Citizens League. Conspicuous in its absence was big business, which was a strong supporter of regionalism in the 1960s and 1970s. In the end, Orfield's housing bills were passed by the legislature but vetoed by the governor.

Metropolitica offers important details regarding the difficulties of coalition building and fights within the legislature and between the legislature and the governor in the cause of regionalism. In this regard, it helps flesh out Rusk's call for coalitions to sustain regionalism. Indeed, Orfield ends his book with eleven lessons on coalition building. These distillations notwithstanding, the case lacks generalizability, in part because its starting point is a region that already has a significantly stronger governance mechanism than most other regions could hope to achieve, even if they wanted to.

Regional Politics, edited by H. V. Savitch and Ronald K. Vogel

This edited volume brings together case studies from ten regions, each authored by a local expert. Savitch and Vogel, both of the University of Louisville, author the introductory and concluding chapters, which provide a general framework from which to interpret the case studies. Unlike Rusk and Orfield, the editors of *Regional Politics* are neither advocates nor political activists

in the cause of regionalism. Rather, their objective is to build an empirical base on which to revisit questions of metropolitan and regional governance.

“Our examination,” they write, “is built on the twin pillars that sustain regional politics—a region’s political economy and its political institutions. By political economy, we mean the interdependence through which public and private sectors interact across local boundaries. By political institutions, we refer to the mechanisms through which regional cooperation takes place.”¹⁰

The typology used to organize the case studies divides efforts at regional governance into three categories: avoidance and conflict, metropolitan government, and mutual adjustment. The approach of avoidance and conflict—with cases from New York, Los Angeles, and St. Louis—is characterized by avoidance of regional issues and conflicts over economic development, both aggravated by highly fragmented governance. The metropolitan government alternatives—illustrated by Miami–Dade County; the Twin Cities; Portland, Oregon; and Jacksonville–Duval County, Florida—all involve formal government arrangements providing for some coordinated regional planning and service delivery. Mutual adjustment—represented by Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C.—consists of interlocal agreements and public–private partnerships that try to address issues of regional concern without resorting to creation of a formal metropolitan government.

Drawing lessons from these cases, Savitch and Vogel observe that regional strategies are shaped in most cases without benefit of regional governments. Moreover, creation of a regional government is politically unfeasible in most regions. This leaves the approach of mutual adjustment as the most viable alternative. “More and more, regions cited as viable are those that pursue strategies of ‘mutual adjustment’ rather than formal ‘metropolitan government. . . . The voices of approval have now become a chorus, chanting that some regions have the best of all possible alternatives and enjoy ‘metropolitan governance without metropolitan government.’”¹¹

The path of mutual adjustment is based on working out cooperative agreements among local governments and between public and private sector interests. One lesson drawn from these cases is that “regions work out cooperative patterns in particular, least controversial ways.” The process is incremental and based on trial and error. Another lesson is that “although regionalism can be managerially viable, it is politically fragile.”¹² These and other lessons in the concluding chapter recommend a very cautious set of strategies, including among others:

- Make the case for regionalism by systematically assessing the social and economic evolution of cities and suburbs.
- Narrow disparities by requiring that federal and state assistance focus on more narrowly mapped regions.
- Use existing grants and legislation to encourage regional coordination and integration.

- Establish a federal organization responsible for coordinating, evaluating, and strengthening regionalism.

In the end, Savitch and Vogel are so cautious that it is not clear if they are holding out hope for viable regionalism anytime in the near future. What remains most troubling is that at the rate regions are disintegrating, counter-efforts toward integration cannot hold their current ground.

Regional Excellence, by William R. Dodge

For those who believe that the path of mutual adjustment is the correct one, *Regional Excellence* provides a useful guide to a wide range of cooperative arrangements. Three dozen initiatives and hundreds of examples offer a “cafeteria of ideas.”

Although Dodge provides a very useful selection of descriptions of existing regional governance efforts, his own solution (first presented in a 1992 *NCR* article) is based on the idea of networks, more specifically **strategic intercommunity governance networks (SIGNET)**. “Intercommunity governance evolves out of, or is the product of, the formal and informal interaction between intercommunity problem-solving [planning] and service-delivery processes and mechanisms.”¹³ “The community problem-solving mechanism must be capable of developing visions and strategies for addressing cross-cutting challenges and influencing their adoption and implementation by the intercommunity service-delivery mechanism. In turn, the intercommunity service-delivery mechanism must be capable of implementing the strategies as well as monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness while influencing the development of new visions and strategies.”¹⁴

Dodge takes pains to distinguish regional governance, which he advocates, from regional government. “By regional governance, I mean how we bring community leaders and citizens together to address challenges that cut across communities. . . . By regional governance I do not mean metropolitan government, the one-big-government approach to regional challenges.”¹⁵ *Decision making* and *governance* are used synonymously throughout the book; both refer to designing strategies and delivering services to address challenges.

There are several strengths and weaknesses in taking the network or governance tack. One major strength is flexibility. The approach looks for opportunities, in terms of available capacity and perceived issues, and incrementally builds upon them. Related to this is a strong focus on the often overlooked civic dimension. This is built from the grassroots on a sense of regional citizenship. Dodge advises activists to begin their work at the kitchen table of neighbors and work their way up to larger and more formal meetings. He recognizes that the fear of losing local power by establishing regional-level governance can be offset by building the region on a strengthened base of neighborhood governance.

Some of these strengths are also principal weaknesses. The approach is process-intensive. The kind of activism it requires is typically driven by a

clearly perceived threat and not by a desire to do good; hence it is difficult to sustain over the long haul and over a large region. Moreover, the focus on cooperative voluntary agreements tends to underplay the role that government can and must play if a regionalism agenda is to be sustained when challenged by such events as economic recession, racial riots, and local government competition for a new regional shopping mall. Despite these weaknesses, the network or governance approach will be attractive to those anxious at least to begin the journey toward establishing local regional governance.

New Visions for Metropolitan America, by Anthony Downs

For those who feel that filling the regionalism gap requires a more direct combination of governance and government, *New Visions* provides a well-measured solution. The first part of the book offers an analysis of regional problems that rounds up the usual suspects but places central emphasis on the consequences of fragmented growth management.

The underlying rationale guiding current patterns of regional growth is what Downs calls the *dominant vision*. This vision consists of five elements: ownership of a detached single-family house; automobile ownership; low-rise workplaces; small communities with strong local governments; and an environment free from signs of poverty. The dominant vision succeeds admirably in satisfying short-term needs, while simultaneously making it more difficult to solve long-term problems.

Downs stresses the importance of providing a new vision, one that can stimulate an alternative growth pattern. His analysis concludes that “a limited-spread mixed-density policy would not require either centralized metropolitan government or a governing body that wields power directly affecting transportation and land use. Instead, it could depend on local land use planning within a framework controlled by state government.”¹⁶

Having identified a desirable land-use pattern that could help mitigate major regional problems, Downs then explores ways to offset fragmented land-use regulation. He dismisses Rusk’s solution because of “the difficulty of persuading people that adopting metropolitan government is truly in their interest.”¹⁷ He also dismisses state agency control as well as wholly voluntary initiatives. Instead, Downs advocates a mixture of local, state, and federal initiatives promoting specific but limited aspects of his new vision: “. . . it might be desirable to have different local and regional agencies that organize themselves in ways best suited to their individual tasks. But if several growth management agencies are created at the regional level, they should certainly be linked through both formal and informal coordination.”¹⁸

In addition to intergovernmental arrangements, Downs calls for *public-private partnerships*. “I believe that it is crucial for some type of public-private regional association to strongly support such strategies if they are to be adopted anywhere. The membership should consist of executives of major employers,

citizens' groups in the metropolitan area, and government leaders who can influence crucial transportation and land use policies."¹⁹

Beyond crafting effective institutional arrangements and the capacity to shape regional growth, the central difficulty in promoting an alternative vision of life in metropolitan areas is to convince people that living in medium-density mixed-use communities is more desirable than the current low-density use-segregated pattern. It is perhaps telling that Downs most fully addresses this in Appendix C, where he discusses the work of Peter Calthorpe²⁰ and acknowledges coming across it while *New Visions* was almost completed.

Calthorpe is part of a group of designers identified with the new urbanism.²¹ As a whole, these designers offer solutions to community and new-town design stressing the kind of medium-density mixed-use pattern advocated by Downs. But they offer two additional contributions. First, they present their ideas in drawing, which helps enormously in communicating a lifestyle. Second, they get their ideas built, in at least limited projects, so that people can take a look for themselves. One of the things that helped give power to the theories of such earlier urbanists as Clarence Stein and Lewis Mumford was construction of Sunnyside, Queens, as a model neighborhood and Radburn, New Jersey, as a model community. Developing a similar connection between regional planners and urban designers is equally important in winning popular support for new efforts to establish effective regionalism.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Past solutions, notably those that are essentially structural (such as city/county consolidations), offer limited promise for filling the governance gap. Nevertheless, some sustaining structure is essential lest regionalism resolve itself to being a celebration of process over substance. But what kind of structure, and how much is needed? "Herein lies a regional paradox," Savitch and Vogel conclude. "If metropolitan regions are to pursue effective policies, they must be politically viable (i.e., command popular and elite consensus), yet regional bodies whose policies go beyond the bounds of consensus are apt to lose that viability. In effect, the more aggressive regions become, the less power they possess. Regional bodies must then forever balance these tensions, trading off and adapting themselves to pressure and circumstances. The challenge is to do this while taking a long-term view of the need to convert political legitimacy into broader political mandates."²²

Resolving this paradox requires more than analyses of all of the things that are problematic with current arrangements. It requires, as Downs suggests, some type of shared vision based on shared values that are in turn embodied in institutional arrangements.

These visions and values need to be developed simultaneously at the neighborhood and regional levels. At the neighborhood level, people must be convinced of a net gain in shifting from patterns of spatial and social organization

that follow the current dominant vision to a new vision and lifestyle. This is beginning to happen as more and more local comprehensive plans adopt the language of the new urbanist and call for creation of urban villages and transit-oriented developments. At the same time, it is necessary to create vision and binding values at the regional level. A call for environmental stewardship that is based on preserving the natural assets of each region is one important foundation. Developing fair-share formulas for distributing a wide range of land uses, including affordable housing, is another.

Vision and values flow through networks of communications and social interaction. This calls for the kind of civic networking that Dodge, Peirce, and others²³ recognize as essential to the development of regionalism. Unfortunately, evidence of that sort of networking is still hard to find.

Does all this support the contention of such pragmatists as Savitch and Vogel, that the pace for achieving regionalism will be glacial? Not necessarily. If other advanced industrialized countries continue to move rapidly forward on government reform, embracing regionalism in order to make themselves more globally competitive, then changes in the United States may be forced to accelerate. If so, the presentations offered in the books reviewed here will gain a very wide audience.

Notes

1. Garreau, J. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.
2. Swanstrom, T. "Ideas Matter: Reflections on the New Regionalism." *Cityscapes*, 1996, 2 (2), 5–21.
3. See Barnes, W. R., and Ledubur, L. C. "Local Economies: The U.S. Common Market of Economic Regions." Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, 1994; Savitch, H., Collins, D., Sanders, D., and Markham, J. P. "Ties That Bind: Central Cities, Suburbs, and the New Metropolitan Region." *Economic Development Quarterly*, 1993, 7 (4), 341–358; and Voith, R. "City and Suburban Growth: Substitutes or Complements?" In *Business Review*. Philadelphia: Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, 1992.
4. Wallis, A. "The Third Wave." *National Civic Review*, 1994, 83 (5).
5. Wallis, A. "Regional Governance and the Post-Industrial Economy." *The Regionalist*, 1995, 1 (3), 1–11.
6. Daly, H. E., and Cobb, J. B. *For the Common Good*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. See especially Chapter Nine, "From Cosmopolitanism to Community of Communities."
7. Rusk, D. *Baltimore Unbound*. Baltimore: Abell Foundation, 1996, p. 125.
8. Orfield, 1997, p. 5. The "favored quarter" seems to follow the general pattern of urban development suggested by Homer Hoyt in his sector theory.
9. See also Harrigan, J. "Minneapolis-St. Paul: Structuring Metropolitan Government" in Savitch and Vogel, 1996.
10. Savitch and Vogel, 1996, p. 4.
11. Savitch and Vogel, 1996, p. 297.
12. Savitch and Vogel, 1996, p. 292.
13. Dodge, 1996, pp. 105–106.
14. Dodge, 1996, pp. 108.
15. Dodge, 1996, p. 2.
16. Downs, 1994, p. 163.

17. Downs, 1994, p. 170.
18. Downs, 1994, p. 182.
19. Downs, 1994, p. 172.
20. Calthorpe, P. *The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993.
21. In addition to Calthorpe's 1993 work, see Langdon, P. *A Better Place to Live*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994; and Duany, A., and Plater-Zyberk, E. *Town and Town-Making Principles*. New York: Rizzoli, 1991.
22. Savitch and Vogel, 1996, p. 298.
23. Wallis, A. "Governance and the Civic Infrastructure of Metropolitan Regions." *National Civic Review*, Spring 1993; Weir, M. "Cities and Suburbs in State Politics." Washington, D.C.: HUD Roundtable on Regionalism, Dec. 1994; Swanstrom, 1996; Putnam, R. *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.

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Notes

8-4 This is the vision of Shalom for which the local congregation is called to be a prophetic public companion.

9-3 Network theory of organizations.