



## BOOK REVIEWS

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William Rohe, *The Research Triangle: From Tobacco Road to Global Prominence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Over the past decades, the Research Triangle Park (RTP) has emerged as one of those high tech places that many regions in the United States try to emulate. The combination of astute political foresight, strategic planning around three prominent research universities, location decisions of various multinational firms and, in recent years, entrepreneurial development dynamics have put this region on the map. There are numerous publications about economic development in the RTP, including important contributions by local scholars about the region's history (Link, 1995), the role of its science and technology infrastructure (Luger & Goldstein, 1990) and more recently about the catalytic role of entrepreneurs (Feldman & Zoller, 2012). However, most of these contributions focus solely on the region's economic development history and trajectory. Missing are the more holistic insights into the positive and negative implications of economic growth for local communities and how a region responds to resulting development pressures.

*The Research Triangle: From Tobacco Road to Global Prominence*, by William Rohe, fills this gap and provides a holistic account of the opportunities and challenges this region faces. The book is published in the Metropolitan Portraits series edited by the late Judith Martin, who unfortunately passed away the same year this book was published. She initiated this series of insightful metropolitan profiles with Carl Abbott's volume on Portland, Oregon. Since then, portraits of Philadelphia, San Diego, Greater New Jersey, Phoenix, Miami and RTP have followed.

Rohe starts with a detailed description of the region's early geological and human history and describes how the area benefited from geological conditions that divide the mountainous areas of North Carolina from the state's more swampy Coastal Plains. It is interesting to learn how the region emerged and why the RTP area consists of a network of low-density towns and cities. While initially Hillsborough (the county seat of Orange County) benefited from the invasion of European settlers and its selection as a county seat, it was later Raleigh, which was created as a state capital, and Chapel Hill, which was chosen as the site for the state's first university in 1795, that emerged as the more important places. While government action propelled the growth of Hillsborough, the Raleigh–Chapel Hill–Durham area in contrast evolved because it emerged as a business location and became the center of the tobacco industry in the late 1800s.

Chapter 1 traces the early history of these places and describes them as a loose collection of towns that were not functionally integrated. This changed starting in the 1950s, when the region took on three major development projects. The first catalytic project was the establishment of the RTP as a science and technology park that would attract industry and research organizations. The second project was the development of the Raleigh–Durham International Airport as a

gateway located at the center of the RTP metropolitan area. Third, the development of Interstate 40 started to connect the various towns in the Triangle area. Rohe argues that in combination the three projects led to unprecedented growth of the area that culminated in the recognition of the region in 1980 by the U.S. Census Bureau as a functionally integrated metropolitan area.

Rohe reviews the various struggles that came along with the rapid expansion of the Raleigh–Durham metropolitan area. Starting in the 1960s, the region grew at a constant rate. During the 1980s, for example, population increased from 885,725 to 1,223,564, representing a staggering growth of 38.1%. Along with this development came various political struggles, which Rohe describes with great insight and sensibility. One of these struggles was the battle over accommodating growing school enrollment in the face of fiscal austerity in one of the region’s fastest growing counties, Wake County. Voters rejected a bond referendum for new schools and the county school board’s efforts to develop long-run plans to accommodate up to 94,000 students by 2020 (including year-round schools) failed. In addition, rapid growth of the county undercut using family income instead of race to ensure diversity in the school system. This meant that the school districts needed to be redrawn every year, which was not popular among parents. In subsequent elections, the newly elected candidates to the school board eliminated the diversity policy. This episode illustrates a problem that many growing metropolitan areas face, an unwillingness to raise taxes to increase funds for education and citizen resistance to progressive educational measures.

The RTP area’s efforts to alleviate traffic congestion through rail transportation proved problematic. The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) was created in 1989 to help devise solutions to regional transportation but mostly focused on intercity bus service. More recently, TTA has taken the lead in the discussions about establishing a regional rail service system. However, several obstacles—including getting access to existing rail corridors, obtaining federal funding, financing improvements through higher taxes and general skepticism about the efficiency of rail service in a low-density region—have prolonged this process seemingly indefinitely. Rohe is optimistic that the region’s efforts to revitalize urban centers, along with increased awareness about the need to curb sprawl, will make rail transit feasible in the future.

The dilemma the region is facing with regard to sustainable development sounds familiar. This region, like many others, is plagued by fragmented decision making and a lack of coordination between land use and transportation planning. Recent efforts toward regional planning need to be strengthened according to Rohe because state government has no interest in regional solutions to land-use and transportation planning. Instead, he sees the solution in a bottom-up regional stewardship model in which local jurisdictions play an important role. He introduces the reader to Denver’s “Mile High Compact,” through which local jurisdictions established urban growth boundaries in a collaborative manner and which is now recognized as an effective tool for regional planning.

Perhaps the book’s main strength is also its weakness. Because Rohe provides a holistic overview of the Research Triangle area, it is more of a broad survey rather than an in-depth study of a particular urban issue. At times, some of the accounts read more like a listing of the mission statements and achievements of the various organizations and institutions rather than a reflective, in-depth analysis. The reader is introduced to a broad set of issues that this region faces and often gets lost in the details of the political economic process. Nevertheless, it is an important book that adds to our understanding of the Research Triangle region.

Regardless of these small shortcomings, the book provides a refreshing and critical perspective about metropolitan development patterns in the Research Triangle area. Rohe’s insights complement the earlier work on this region, which has relied on an economic development perspective. As we conduct research about successful economic development patterns, we need to be

reminded that such patterns take place against a complex political economy, in which regional actors negotiate social and political processes.

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John Kromer, *Fixing Broken Cities: The Implementation of Urban Development Strategies* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

This book is like a long lunch (or several lunches) with a favorite uncle. It tells the story of redevelopment in the Philadelphia area, with plenty of names of people and places, and lots of insider observation. Of course, this favorite uncle would have to be a policy wonk who has more than a whiff of the ivy halls in his cologne. John Kromer held various community development posts in Philadelphia, spanning the years from Mayors Frank Rizzo to Ed Rendell, and ended up at the Fels Institute of the University of Pennsylvania. Given those experiences, I suppose it didn't hurt that he began his career as a student of Kremlinology.

Kromer's goal is to share his insights on "how to fix broken capital assets. . . in post-industrial cities." Most of that experience comes from Philadelphia, with side excursions to Camden, NJ and Allentown, PA. The topics range from using tax abatement to rehabilitate housing, forming a downtown management organization, building out abandoned neighborhoods, using eminent domain to support neighborhood redevelopment, developing a "human capital development plan," protecting the quality and condition of rental housing, and promoting neighborhood reinvestment (public, public-private, and private). Each topic gets its own chapter, the chapters arranged by the chronology of Kromer's career. The chapters are generally organized by a vignette that sets the context, a telling of the tale of what happened (complete with alternatives foregone, blind alleys pursued, and frustrations and successes encountered along the way), and a summary of the lessons learned.

The final chapter, "The Future of Reinvestment," breaks the mold. At its heart are 10 challenges/opportunities that Kromer foresees for cities facing in the 21st century. Some of these issues were discussed in some depth in the earlier chapters, others were barely mentioned; so this is not a summary chapter. It is more of an *envoi*. Some of the issues focus on data collection, such as maintaining information on current inventories (vacant houses, vacant lots, foreclosures, etc.), making public land records accessible over the Internet in user-friendly formats, and assessing outcomes of publicly funded projects (not just while the program is operational, but several years after the project is completed).

Others focus on investment strategies. Part of the burst housing bubble, he contends, was due to unprepared people overextending themselves to buy into the homeownership market. Kromer recommends establishing (and enforcing) realistic threshold criteria to determine readiness for publicly supported homeownership programs. He also argues that current tools (like the Low Income Housing Tax Credit) cost too much and generate too few units. He recommends finding better ways to make more rental housing available at lower cost, providing housing assistance for new jobholders who have graduated from workforce development programs, and developing “clawback” provisions so cities can recapture and recycle some of the appreciated value upon the sale of property that received public subsidy.

A third set of recommendations focuses on business practices. He argues that cities should attempt to influence the foreclosure auction process so the properties are redeveloped consistently with city and neighborhood strategic planning goals. He also argues for rental housing asset management, including a cycle of rental property inspection and a requirement for a “responsible agent” who is required to share in the legal responsibility of the absentee owner. And he argues that the inclusion of minority- and neighborhood-based businesses should go beyond oversight and enforcement, and should focus instead on public-private partnerships and private-sector joint ventures to build the capacity of neighborhood- and minority-based businesses to compete successfully.

This is not a textbook on urban economic development. It is too personal, too tied to a single region, and as interested in the interplay of power and personalities as it with the fine points of regulation and balancing expenditures against benefits. But neither is it simply a memoir—there are 15 pages of endnotes and 5 pages of index. Basically, it is a wise book and challenging book. *Fixing Broken Cities* lends itself more to the seminar room than the lecture hall. And I will be pressing it on all of my best students, telling them, “You need to read this. I don’t know that he’s right, but he’ll sure make you think.”

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Arthur C. Nelson and Robert E. Lang, *Megapolitan America: A New Vision for Understanding America’s Metropolitan Geography* (Chicago and Washington, DC: American Planning Association, Planners Press, 2011).

Arthur Nelson and Robert Lang have written an important book that seeks to reshape how we think about metropolitan areas. Contemporary functional economic communities clearly spill over SMA-defined boundaries. According to the authors, definitions of the metropolis based largely on population densities need to be replaced by concepts that reflect networking patterns and functional economic integration.

Nelson and Lang’s reconceptualization includes many low-density and seemingly rural areas as integral parts of the contemporary megalopolis—at least when their residents actively engage in urban networks. Exurban areas and low-density areas lying between urbanized counties are often the sites of dynamic economic development. Even the paradigm of the polycentric metropolis fails to denote the extent to which technological advances have broadened (if not broken) the older borders of the metropolis.

Nelson and Lang identify 23 “megapolitan areas” (areas with a population of 4 million or more where commuting patterns provide evidence of economic interdependence). In turn, megapolitan areas provide the heart of 10 increasingly interconnected megapolitan or regional “clusters,” including Seattle–Portland “Cascadia,” the Denver–Salt Lake City “Mountain” region, the “Texas Triangle” of Dallas–Austin–San Antonio–Houston, and an extended version of Jean Gottman’s Chesapeake–New York–Boston “Megalopolis.” In the Great Lakes cluster, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Columbus, and Madison (Wisconsin) no longer occupy the center of discretely separate metropolitan areas. Instead, the knowledge exchanges and entrepreneurial interactions among the residents of these various communities serve to make each metropolis part of a larger economic network: a noncontiguous, transmetropolitan “megapolitan cluster.”

*Megapolitan America* is firmly rooted in the literature on economic regionalism. Nelson and Lang portray megapolitan areas and clusters as the nation’s “economic engines,” requiring continued investment (in both hard and soft infrastructure) if the United States is to succeed in a competitive global economy. The authors’ purpose in writing the book is rather straightforward. They hope that the megapolitan concept will promote a new regional awareness that will lead the nation to provide the infrastructure investment and other supports necessary for megapolitans to continue to drive the national economy.

The authors are not idealistic dreamers who seek grandiose government restructuring and planning schemes. Instead, Nelson and Lang embrace the pragmatic approach of New Regional governance. They offer an incremental first step that will, over time, help to build a functional regionalism of “soft-nosed planning” (p. 15). They urge the Census Bureau to adopt their megapolitan definitions (which use the Census Bureau’s data for Combined Statistical Areas) in place of the antiquated SMA concept. Nelson and Lang hope that such a shift in data gathering and reporting categories will begin to influence project conceptualization and funding decisions, much as federal ISTEA definitions and requirements helped lead to new regional actions in transportation.

Most urbanists will find little to criticize in Nelson and Lang’s recognition that local and national economic development often requires regional undertakings that extend beyond the borders of a single metropolis. There are other areas, however, where the book is likely to prompt greater debate.

Nelson and Lang contend that continued suburban and exurban development is needed to provide the new homes and jobs demanded by a growing population. The authors also call for increased investment in highways, including projects aimed at widening thoroughfares and increasing road capacity, in order to alleviate traffic congestion, including traffic jams found in the more peripheral parts of megapolitan areas. The authors argue that such investment is necessary to reduce the “frictions” that obstruct the smooth flow of people and goods and thereby impose a drag on economic growth. Such policy advice, however, will not likely to be well received by more traditional environmentalists and urban advocates who favor infill development to strengthen central cities and “first suburbs,” as opposed to programs that continue to catalyze rim growth.

A second point of controversy stems from the authors’ rejection of the conventional wisdom that urban rim development threatens the loss of valuable farm acreage. As Nelson and Lang state, “In some quarters, the whole concern about land consumption is misplaced” (p. 113). Although the authors do pinpoint megapolitan areas, especially “SoCal” and the Twin Cities, where spillover urban development does indeed pose a serious threat to prime farmland, they report that new urban development poses no similar threat to agricultural acreage in the Texas Triangle and in other megapolitan areas. On the whole, the authors observe that the threat to farmland “might be worse” (p. 116).

Similarly provocative are the authors' arguments on behalf of large-scale investment in high-speed rail (HSR) in order to connect the "global gateways" of a "global economy" (p. 106). Nelson and Lang see HSR as a necessity if the United States is to effectively respond to the challenge posed by global competitors who have already begun to initiate the investments that will weave together their economic regions. Their enthusiasm, however, is not shared by critics who argue that HSR will fail to produce the ridership necessary to justify the huge construction costs and operating subsidies that HSR will require. Nelson and Lang show only a most limited concern for the costs of HSR, recognizing that "higher speed" trains within a single megapolitan area can operate along existing Amtrak tracks, providing a less costly alternative to "true" or "express" HSR systems (pp. 107–108). They recognize that even the controversial Tampa–Orlando connection does not require the expensive express HSR system that President Obama supported and that Florida state officials rejected.

Finally, residents from Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Louisville, Indianapolis, and St. Louis are likely to be puzzled (and maybe even a bit offended) as their metropolitan areas do not meet Nelson and Lang's exacting definition of a megapolitan. These communities appear to be economic backwaters as contrasted to the dynamism attributed to megapolitans. The authors, however, promise to correct this slight in future conceptual work that will underscore the importance of metropolitan areas that are not connected to a larger megapolitan entity.

*Megapolitan America* is more likely to find its place in the library or on a scholar's bookshelf than in a student's backpack. The book is very nicely illustrated, with voluminous supporting charts and maps in color. However, students (and even professors who are not geographers) will find little of interest in the long sections where the authors discuss Census Bureau definitions and such arcane matters such as which alternative measures do a better job than others in capturing the reality of commuting sheds and network exchanges. The book also devotes more than 100 pages to profiles of the nation's 10 megapolitan clusters. These pages provide valuable reference material but are unlikely to be of great interest to a student audience.

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Steven P. Erie, Vladimir Kogan, and Scott A. Mackenzie, *Paradise Plundered: Fiscal Crisis and Governance Failure in San Diego* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

San Diego may have been the only major city in the United States (8th largest in population) lacking a significant academic book analyzing its urban politics and governance. No more. With *Paradise Plundered* we now have a well researched and reasoned volume that fills that gap. The book documents and explains the shift from a city long held as a model of good government, fiscal responsibility, and advanced planning, to a scandal-riddled municipality that was derided as "Enron-by-the-Sea" in *The New York Times* in 2004.

The theoretical framework of the book expands on regime theory by stressing the search for the primary causes of governance failures in San Diego (as opposed to predicting outcomes), and by focusing on the city's political culture. Additionally, the authors have emphasized "the microfoundation of urban governance," paying "particular attention to the motives of individuals"

while “rejecting alternative accounts of urban politics based largely on theories of economic determinism.”

The book attributes San Diego’s near collapse to deficiencies in civic leadership and capacity, political culture, and political institutions. The authors contrast the capacity of boosters to foster partnerships with the Navy and government officials during the first half of the 20th century—that were instrumental in mobilizing voters to support bond campaigns to build the infrastructure of San Diego—with the recent incapacity of businesses to further citywide projects by engaging the public directly. This is not due so much to the loss of corporate talent (San Diego has never had a large corporate presence), but to the incorporation of certain business needs, for example in downtown institutions such as the Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC). Civic-minded business leaders of the past have been replaced with project-focused interests with the power and money to shape, in the absence of a significant civic culture of civic engagement, political decisions to achieve private objectives; that is, to “plunder” the city.

*Paradise Plundered* describes a political culture of government distrust and aversion to taxes that permeates civic discourse and sets the limits of the possible. For example, in San Diego residents of single-family homes receive the unique bonus of free trash pickup. It has no utility tax and its business taxes are among the lowest in the state. San Diego residents and businesses, then, expect good quality public facilities and services while refusing to pay for them.

This political culture has contributed heavily to the most severe crisis confronting San Diego: the systematic raiding of the municipal employees’ retirement system. Facing structural deficits, the city’s civic leaders did not even attempt to put tax increases on the ballot. Instead, they conspired with public employee unions to shift the costs of benefits onto the backs of future taxpayers.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) offers a summary of the book and its theoretical framework. Chapter 2 presents a synopsis of San Diego’s growth and governance between 1800 and 1990. Chapter 3 traces the roots of the city’s fiscal woes to Proposition 13. This amendment to the California Constitution cut taxes drastically and required that new general taxes had to be approved by a two-thirds majority of the voters, leading to a search for more “creative” financing mechanisms. Chapter 4 compares San Diego’s fiscal situation to other major California cities and outlines how “fiscal conservatism” has led to the deterioration and deficits of public facilities and services. Chapter 5 accentuates the disconnect between the reality of the disastrous fiscal situation and the continuous pressure by downtown elites for costly projects, including another expansion of the convention center and a new football stadium.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to downtown redevelopment. Together with the previous chapter it documents how downtown business interests—a powerful combination of hoteliers, property owners, sport team owners and developers—have used, actually hijacked, a unique system of private–public partnerships to further enrich themselves, with few public benefits.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to regional and binational infrastructure problems. Although it is the problem of underfunded pensions, public services, and infrastructure systems that have attracted the most attention, the challenges that confront the San Diego–Tijuana binational region, are just as severe. And equally symptomatic of the San Diego malaise is the inability to improve regional coordination and increase investments in firefighting capacity. After a 2007 fire that destroyed 1,700 homes in the county, a \$52 countywide parcel tax was placed on the ballot, but failed to garner the required two-thirds votes. Chapter 8 concludes the book by reiterating the notion that San Diego’s crisis is not simply due to “greedy unions” to be solved by the wholesale privatization of city services as advocated by conservative leaders, but is instead due to a dearth of leadership.

As I write this review (March 2012), political decisions from San Diego City Hall indicate that the privatization of the city is proceeding unabated. City Council voted to transfer control of Convention Center bookings from the publicly accountable Convention Center Corporation to ConVis, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, a private entity representing hotel owners. Hoteliers will now have the power to book conventions in their own meeting spaces, leaving to the Convention Center only meetings too large for the hotels. The possible consequences are many, but few are good for the public.

A quick aside about the book. The emphasis on individual motivations in the research approach—at the expense of economic explanations—may have led the authors to unduly stress the uniqueness of government failures in San Diego. For example, while the more than \$1+ billion unfunded liability of the pension system was precipitated by individual actors, it reflected a structural deficit that is becoming common to many localities, in large part the result of the economic upheavals of the last decade. Also, the privileging of downtown development at the expense of the neighborhoods is a recurrent theme in the urban regeneration literature.

Through many years of participant observation, interviews with key decision makers, theoretical arguments and a rich use of primary data and public documents (I have counted 32 tables and figures) Erie, Kogan, and Mackenzie have raised the bar for single-city case studies, and have produced a powerful indictment of fiscal conservatism and public-private partnerships.

While essentially an academic book, *Paradise Plundered's* organization, clarity, and writing style makes it well suited not only for academics and graduate and undergraduate students, but also for practitioners and citizens interested in understanding how political power is exercised in American metropolitan areas.

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