

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

Megalopolis

The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States

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PART TWO

THE REVOLUTION IN LAND USE

Exploding far beyond city limits, the seaboard metropolises have converted vast areas to urban and suburban modes of life and land occupation, and in several ways these new forms of land use and social reorganization have introduced revolutionary changes. Within the vast territory of the United States this large section specializes in urban pursuits while some other sections specialize in agricultural production. The long-accepted opposition between town and country has therefore evolved toward a new opposition between *urban regions*, of which Megalopolis is certainly the most obvious and advanced case, and *agricultural regions*, the largest and most typical of which is found in the grain-growing Great Plains.

The agricultural regions have always had towns and urban centers in their midst, for they were and are dotted with such groupings of dense population on tightly built-up small areas. Most of these urban dwellers live there in order to service the farms, but in a few cases cities within an

agricultural region have developed industrial and trading activities, the horizons of which extend beyond the scope of the local region. Inversely, today an urban region such as Megalopolis encompasses farming areas, some of which may produce certain kinds of agricultural goods on a scale quite comparable to that of farms in agricultural regions. However, the occupation of the land for such farming purposes in an urban region appears entirely subordinated not only to the near-by urban market but also to a whole organization of society and to a system of land values quite different from those that can be found in the predominantly agricultural countryside.

The major "revolution" takes place in our understanding of how society is organized, how land is occupied, and how the various professions actually function. The picture we shall now sketch and analyze for Megalopolis results from a gradual evolution. The common man's knowledge about it, however, has lagged behind the actual changes. Apparently even most experts in social and economic fields have been so absorbed each in his own specialty that they have had little time to observe the interrelations between the trends, the entanglements linking the "facts" as defined by each expert. Thus the immense and complex process that has been steadily modifying the morphology of this whole region's lands and people was recognized only when its strangeness and its problems hit our eyes and our daily lives with overwhelming force.

Let us now try to shed the old ideas and images inherited from an education and a vocabulary that have not kept up with the changes going on around us, and let us start to explore with due curiosity and the many tools at our disposal this new "wilderness" that has grown up in Megalopolis. We may often be surprised: perhaps by the hint at the kind of farmers in the area suggested by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture report that a company has been established to furnish "cow-sitters" for dairymen who have to be absent from their farms;¹ or perhaps by the expansion of the forested area and the proliferation of deer in the immediate proximity of highly urbanized and densely occupied districts. In some aspects we may find this urban region much "wilder," and in others much more "civilized," than would be expected. At times it may be demonstrated that it was as people became more urban that the landscape came to look wilder. A new integration is thus being ironed out between concepts and trends we have been trained to separate and oppose. The analysis must start with the new symbiosis integrating what used to be "urban" and "rural," and then proceed with an examination of the component parts.

¹ *The New York Times*, January 17, 1960 (brief notes by W. E. Farbstein).