

RECOMMENDED READING

THE NEW GEOGRAPHY

by Joel Kotkin

as reviewed by David Kirk, CRE



David Kirk, CRE

**RELATED READING
RECOMMENDED
BY THE REVIEWER**

JOEL KOTKIN

Cities
Coming Soon

*Tribes: How Race,
Religion, and Identity
Determine Success in
the New Economy*
Random House, 1993

RICHARD FLORIDA

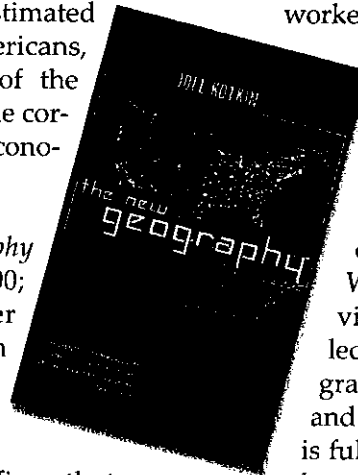
*The Rise of the
Creative Class*
Basic Books, 2002

NICHOLAS NEGROPONTE

Being Digital
Knopf, 1995

The pattern of personal preferences is reportedly the new golden rule that shapes today's virtual workplace. This is a departure from the well established pattern that "he with the gold rules." In the *Boston Globe Magazine*, Richard Florida ("Finding a Bright Idea," June 23, ©2002) noted that where the "creative class, estimated at 38.3 million Americans, roughly 30 percent of the U.S. workforce" go, the corporates of the new economy follow.

In *The New Geography* (Random House, 2000; paperback, October 2001), Joel Kotkin spins some wonderful anecdotal evidence and demographic data to confirm that indeed, some of the traditional values of quality of life have once again started to dominate site selection criteria. Kotkin likens the pattern to one that dominated the pre-industrial countryside both here in the U.S. and elsewhere. The information economy and its telecommunications have not created a placelessness but rather some new discernable patterns of growth worth measuring and discussing.



Joel Kotkin in the *The New Geography* develops a lexicon that evolves from the trends he identifies. The most memorable elements and prominent themes of his new geography include among others: "nerdistans"—Austin, Santa Monica, and sections of Boston, San Francisco, and Manhattan—urban concentrations of knowledge-workers and like-minded souls,

"Valhallas"—Boulder, Colorado and Park City, Utah—beautiful remote places now connected by the new economy, and the "midopolises"—the older suburbs. With the terminology providing a helpful aid in collecting the supporting demographic data and anecdotes and related trends, the reader is fully persuaded by the book that these trends are clear and increasingly prevailing.

This group of personal preference pattern-makers is not limited to the telecommunications CEO, the telecommuter, and the virtual outsourcing contractor, but now includes a broad and deep and growing creative group with skill sets that will dominate the labor force in the information economy. People are increasingly making personal decisions based on preferences presumably not only

on quality of life but also on lifestyle interests that their prospective employers will be trying to anticipate by their own site selection criteria and corporate strategies, real estate and otherwise. Remember low cost, plentiful labor, favorable tax climate, and plentiful power? Distribution and transportation systems and airport accessibility? These criteria still govern our manufacturing site selection, but the growth is elsewhere.

Kotkin concludes that these trends prevailed during the pre-industrial period before requisites for industrial production dominated site selection criteria and the people patterns. In addition to describing the prevailing context for the pre-industrial patterns of growth of the American colonies and England, Kotkin describes the historic context for the development of Venice, Amsterdam, and Rome. He includes appropriate references to Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs and an array of contemporary economists, historians, demographers, planners and researchers. His book is truly a mixed bag of treasures and treats both profound and entertaining, that engages the serious student and the accomplished professional as well as the disinterested pattern-maker.

Not surprisingly, Kotkin is working on a new book that deals directly with the resonance and relevance of the history of cities. He has effectively and delightfully combined his academic background and journalistic experience in a substantive reading experience. Because I have heard Kotkin speak since the book's publication, I know he has continued to update his file on the new geography and I anticipate a rewarding appearance at the observations in the "Global Cities in an Era of Change" symposium on September 4-6, 2002 at Harvard University.

What are the common denominators that characterize successful cities and the forces that stimulate urban investment worldwide? That is a mouthful and headful and it is the question being asked by world economists and leaders, university presidents, corporate leadership and, at the macro level by the micro agents of change, real estate investors. Globalization and technology have been changing the traditional patterns of urban development.

ABOUT OUR REVIEWER

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