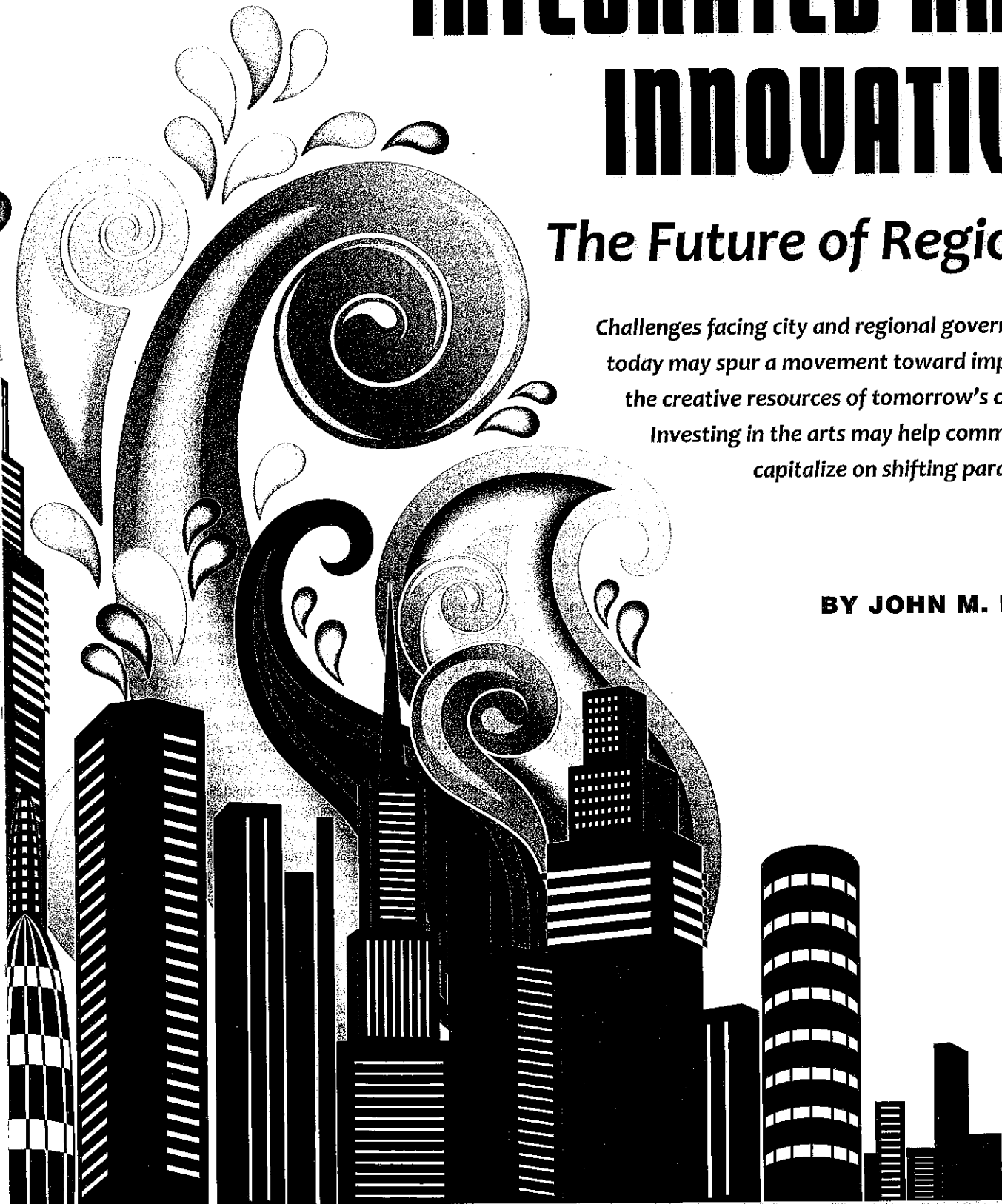


INTEGRATED AND INNOVATIVE

The Future of Regions

Challenges facing city and regional governments today may spur a movement toward improving the creative resources of tomorrow's citizens. Investing in the arts may help communities capitalize on shifting paradigms.

BY JOHN M. EGER



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Creating a city of the future, for the future, is about organizing one's community to reinvent itself for a knowledge-based economy and society. Citizens must be prepared to take ownership of their community, and the next generation of leaders and workers must be prepared to meet global challenges.

It will not be easy.

Now more than ever, business and industry are dependent upon an economic system that rewards innovation. Thus, at the heart of this effort to build more-creative communities is the recognition of the vital role that art and culture play in enhancing economic development.

A creative and innovative community is one that exploits the vital links among art, culture, and commerce. It consciously invests the human and financial resources necessary to prepare its citizens to meet the challenges of the rapidly evolving, postindustrial knowledge economy and society.

Almost 20 years ago, the city of San Diego put together a committee to launch a "city of the future" initiative. The committee members really didn't know what a city of the future looked like, but they knew that fiber optics and having lots of bandwidth in the ground were key ingredients. So fiber optics and bandwidth were the foundation of the effort.

Today, with greater understanding of the challenges of the new global economy and knowledge of what it takes to succeed in the workplace of the future, we know it is not bandwidth in the ground that matters most. In fact, it is not technology at all, but the bandwidth in people's heads that is important.

We also know now that, to have a creative community, cities and regions must have creative people. To have creative people, a city needs to nurture its youth and create a system of education that engenders the new thinking skills that business is now demanding. And it must provide the vibrant culture that is essential for attracting and retaining that innovative workforce.

In San Diego, arts and cultural organizations are credited with making it a "vibrant city," according to a recently released city report. The 68 arts and culture organizations that received \$5.8 million in funding stimulated the economy with more than \$170 million in expenditures in 2011.

Regional Goals and Government Roles

Government has a vital role in building creative communities: It can promote affordable, accessible broadband, and it can enact land-use policies to develop creative economic clusters that include art districts, public art, museums, and other cultural institutions. Government can also embrace green initiatives, encouraging private-sector investments in enterprises that exemplify and foster the concept of sustainability.

Every region must make its community highly livable to attract, nurture, and retain the best and brightest. But a truly regional innovation community understands that:

- Globalization has changed life and work as we know it. Technology—particularly the Internet and the pervasive spread and influence of new media—has led to the emergence of a world where every nation is inextricably tied to every other, and where manufacturing and service-sector jobs are being outsourced or off-shored.

- Economies based on creativity and innovation also promote freedom, free enterprise, and entrepreneurship.

- Education must be reinvented to ensure that workforces are capable of succeeding in this new economy.

- Efficient, affordable, effective broadband infrastructures available to citizens, businesses, governments, schools, and the entire nonprofit sector are essential for economic survival and success.

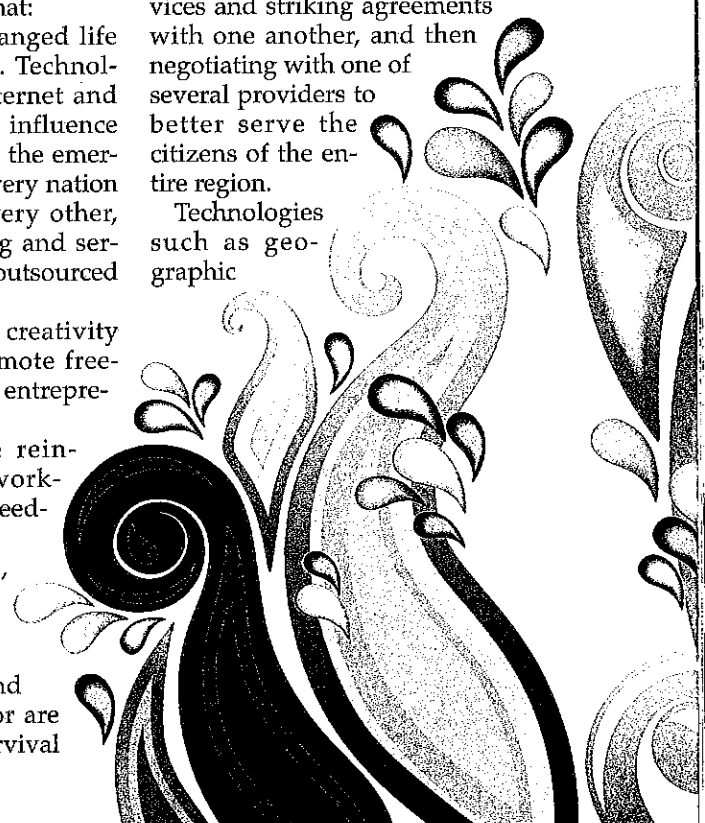
- Metropolitan regions are the new centers of commerce. Cities and counties within regions must work together to compete in the global economy. Governmental planning and development, as well as the provision of vital public services, must be regional.

The Rise of Regions

Most people live in one jurisdiction, work in another, and play or dine in a third. They have no idea that the cost to them is enormous because of the duplication and waste, or that consolidating these activities in one place can save money. But more is at stake to communities than simply dollars or turf.

Most of the issues that communities now deal with are not just local: Reducing crime, energy consumption, water use, waste, and toxic emissions, while also making it easier for people to get around, are not the concerns of individual cities but of the whole region. Indeed, communities in metropolitan regions should be aggregating demand for such services and striking agreements with one another, and then negotiating with one of several providers to better serve the citizens of the entire region.

Technologies such as geographic



information systems allow regions to strategically manage data and to consolidate and streamline all departmental operations, bringing new ways for people to do business and get more services online. In the future, citizens may never have to physically wait in line again.

By pushing the limits of electronic services, the government lays the foundation for a more robust private sector. "Green" initiatives, too, can set the stage for more sustainable community-wide services.

The new global knowledge economy, not to mention the current fiscal crisis, demands that governments rethink how to organize themselves to be most competitive. At a minimum, it means cities within a region (including the counties) ought to be jointly pursuing opportunities to operate services together. Fragmented governments struggle to provide even the most basic services.

Larger cities are experiencing the same problems, but the real loss is not simply municipal deficits; it is the loss of the metropolitan region to brand itself and create a forward-thinking economic development strategy.

Integrated regional economies will foster quality locales—vibrant downtowns,

"A creative and innovative community can nurture, attract, and retain the talent we need to succeed in the new economy."

attractive town centers, and historic, older suburbs—that nurture creative human capital and robust financial capital and that contribute to sustainable, resource-efficient growth.

Not merging municipalities or certain basic services puts the prowess of a region at risk.

Developing Creative Regions

Involvement by the entire community—and region—will be needed to make meaningful and lasting changes. Engagement and collaboration of all citizens and institutions is critical. Public art, art integration, graffiti parks, art districts, museums, regional collaboration, civic engagement, and robust information infrastructures—all are important to the region of the future.

Today, understanding the challenges of the new global economy is critical. It demands that we renew and reinvent the places where we live, learn, and work. There is no alternative short of letting our communities atrophy and die.

A creative and innovative community can nurture, attract, and retain the talent we need to succeed in the new economy. Therefore, parents, politicians, policy makers, and businesses need to better understand the powerful role of the arts in nurturing creativity overall.

Does all creativity come from the arts? Of course not, but clearly we can improve the chances of nurturing creativity by investing in arts-based training. This is why STE(A)M—adding arts to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—is so important. It is also why cities and regions must nurture creativity in young people by reinventing a system of education that values and promotes innovation and critical thinking.

"Arts learning experiences play a vital role in developing students' capacities for critical thinking, creativity, imagination, and innovation," observes Sandra Ruppert, president of Art Education Partnership. "These capacities are increasingly recognized as core skills and competencies all students need as part of a high-quality and complete 21st-century education." □



About the Author

John M. Eger holds the Van Deerlin Chair in Communications and Public Policy and is director of the Creative Economy Initiative at San Diego State University.

His last article for THE FUTURIST, "Pleasure, Beauty, and Wonder: Educating for the Knowledge Age," was published in the January-February 2011 issue. E-mail jejer@mail.sdsu.edu.