

# Book Review

October 2015

## ***Citistates, How Urban America Can Prosper in a Competitive World,***

Neal R. Peirce with Curtis W. Johnson and John Stuart Hall,  
Seven Locks Press, Washington, 359 pages, 1993.

[Summary](#)  
[YouTube](#)  
[Published Reviews](#)

### Summary

Peirce, Johnson and Hall resurrect a concept from the past, the concept of city-states with a history that starts with civilization itself, maybe 10,000 years ago. Their work is based on studies in many regional cities throughout the United States. The book highlights: Phoenix, Seattle, Baltimore, Owensboro, Dallas and St. Paul; concluding with "Citistate Guideposts".

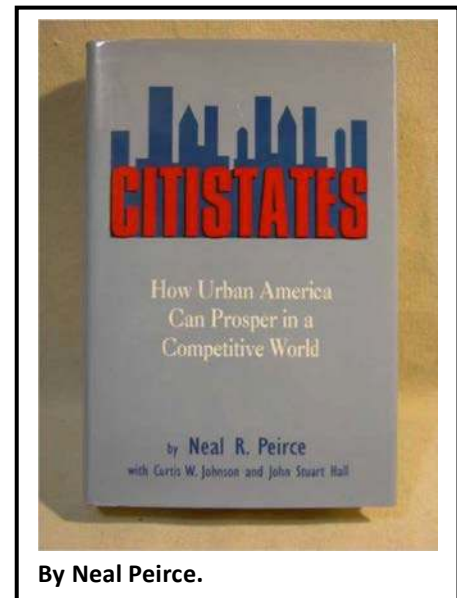
Every review quotes: *"No one in the country knows as much as Neal Peirce about the ins and outs of American local government. Neal Peirce is the best writer on urban affairs in the country"*. -- Henry Cisneros, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. And this is probably still correct.

The focus of the work is regionalism as opposed to the global spirit of the ancient city states. Regional cooperation, regional governance and infrastructure are prerequisites to success in the global economy. This book describes how to build and maintain a city state. However, there is another point to be made. Cities, as virtual sovereign nations, can participate in global trade directly.

This is an inspirational treatise for the economic success of ambitious small cities and towns. Local small businesses and entrepreneurs can, more than ever, deal directly with customers and suppliers without interference from state and federal agencies.

Governance is shifting from a model based on national, state/province, local government to a bi-polar system focused on local and national/global governing systems. Consider the existing levels one by one:

- **The nation-state.** Globalization is testing the nation-state model by asking it to address problems that transcend national borders such as climate change, oceanic pollution, mass migrations of refugees, global terrorism and fully integrated economic systems where capital can move across the globe in an instant. National sovereignty is being challenged by the International System that replaced the Bretton Wood System of the 20th century. National governments must deal with international issues through agreements and alliances; and national governments are being asked, or directed, to put global priorities over national priorities...witness the Euro nations.



By Neal Peirce.

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At the end of the day, some system of governance must emerge that addresses global issues of the environment, the economy and security. This system can do without state and provincial levels of government. This new national-global system can work directly with local governments.

- **States and Provinces.** Sub-national governance is the most vulnerable because it is the most marginalized. The legitimate role of states and provinces is diminishing with its powers and responsibilities either moving to a larger platform of the nation or the smaller scale of the local governments...the cities, counties and metropolitan regions of the nation. State governments cannot effectively deal with global issues; and they cannot adequately address local issues of education, local infrastructure finance, development regulation, or social welfare. States are too far removed and cumbersome.
- **Local Governments.** Here is where the citistate idea flourishes. Cities, counties and metropolitan regions are where things can get done. The connection between taxation and results is very direct. Accountability of elected officials is very direct. Issues that face real people are more visible at the local level offering a better chance for solutions than can be provided by remote federal and state agencies. State governments, knowing their vulnerability and impending extinction, maintain a firm hold of revenue and regulatory processes without any purpose other than survival of their passé institution.

**“The Citistate Guideposts [p291] are:**

1. Recognize the indivisibility of the citistate.
2. Plan the regional economy to marshal internal strength and find a profitable niche in the new world economy.
3. Reaffirm the critical importance of the citistate’s heart – its historic center city and neighborhoods.
4. Focus on the growing link between social deprivation and workforce preparedness, and go to work to fix the problem.
5. Spurn defeatism; dismiss the big social engineering solutions; focus on the re-creation of community at the grassroots.
6. Plan for a multi-cultural future.
7. Build a sense of regional citizenship.
8. Remember quality of life issues. Pay special attention to the environment, its quality and protection, and to the physical form of the region.
9. Fight hard for fiscal equity.
10. Create work for everyone – even if public money is required.
11. Make governance work.
12. Undergird governance with a strong citizen organization for the citistate.”

All of the **“Guideposts”** are importance and insightful. They are all applicable to small cities and towns of character. Two of particular interest to small cities and towns from a strategic perspective are:

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- First, to be an active regional citizen by participating in and supporting regional programs to grow the economy, improve society and protect the environment.
- Secondly, small cities and towns can improve their chances for economic success by supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs as they make direct contact with customers and supplies. In the age of instant communication and easy international travel, size does not matter as it once did. Infrastructure and attitude are the key variables that cities can provide to enrich their economies.

### The Citistates Group.

From the author's website: <http://citistates.com/>

The Citistates Group is America's only journalist team focused first and foremost on metropolitan regions and how they position themselves to cope with the demanding economic, environmental, social challenges of the 21st century.

[Neal Peirce](#) and [Curtis Johnson](#) have written "Citistates" Reports on strategic issue sets facing 26 U.S. metros, the results published in over 50 newspapers from the 1980s onward.

The Citistates Group, managed by [Farley Peters](#), the group's organizer and strategist, includes a collegial network of Associates with parallel interests and achievements. Many are public speakers and authors of cutting-edge research and writing in the field.

Recently the Group created [Citiwire.net](#) -- a weekly news service -- and [Citiscopes.org](#), a non-profit focused on 21st century connections and learning among cities and metro regions, in the United States but also worldwide as the urban agenda of our time turns global.

**YouTube:** In addition to the reviews cited below, check it out:

### Creating the Best Regional Park System in the World: Greening our City Square

This YouTube presents Neal Peirce discussing his ideas within the context of the City of Portland's City Square. The presentation covers his contemporary work on global regions and city, county and state governance and gives the viewer a feel for his approach to the world of cities and regions.



City Club of Portland

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Neal Peirce; David Bragdon

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP2IGy\\_-TnQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP2IGy_-TnQ)

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## Published Reviews

Find reviews by Amazon and Goodreads at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Citistates-Urban-America-Prosper-Competitive/dp/0929765168>

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1322213.Citistates>

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