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MEGALOPOLIZATION AND LEISURE: A COMMENT¹

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In a recent issue of this *Journal*² J. J. Spengler examines the relationship of megalopolization to resource availability. In light of his objective, "to indicate issues in need of careful analysis," Spengler's insights regarding the time resource deserve expansion and comment.

The theoretical analysis of the time resource is in an embryonic state. Professor Spengler's article makes two points essential to the surfacing of a rigorous analytic approach. First, he acknowledges that discretionary time (leisure) has been subject to a variety of definitions. Since a common definition of terms is basic to any scientific investigation he foreshadows the vortex of problems that arise as to the validity and comparability of predictive estimates if such definitions are not forthcoming. Second, he distinguishes clearly between a leisure-time activity and leisure *per se*. The latter is by definition discretionary time and a resource, whereas the former refers to the particular use to which the leisure resource is put. This distinction is crucial since it is frequently a source of confusion in questions involving leisure.

A weak point in Professor Spengler's analysis is his argument that "time and space are both superior as well as complementary goods,"³ thus leaving the firm impression that the relationship is complementary. Yet, in various footnotes he alludes to the choice between "spacious living" and "easy access" to the city, finally conceding that "in a sense, time is substituted for space."⁴ In other words, the relationship between time and space is not altogether certain in theoretical grounds. The relationship may or may not be complementary depending upon whether or not the consumer's pattern of leisure-time activity requires more or less space. This, as Spengler himself points out, must be answered empirically and hence lies beyond the scope of his paper. Nonetheless, at the initial stages of theorizing, taxonomical pronouncements stressing the privacy of

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1. I wish to thank Jack Knetsch for his helpful criticisms of this paper.

2. J. Spengler, *Megalopolis: Resource Conserver or Resource Waster?*, 7 *Natural Resources J.* 377 (1967).

3. *Id.* at 384.

4. *Id.*, note 53 at 391.

one relationship at the expense of another can often bypass more fundamental issues. Here this appears to be the case.

Professor Spengler's analysis of time and space centers primarily on demand. However, the cause-effect relationship on the supply side appears more relevant in assessing the availability of the time resource within the megalopolis. By Spengler's definition megalopolization means a reduction in urban space per capita. As the supply of space declines, general congestion increases and creates what I will refer to as an *aggravation effect*.⁵ This effect is manifest in an acute and wide-spread queuing problem. Here the familiar problem of urban traffic congestion is generalized to include the waiting involved in all activities. In the megalopolis, because increasing numbers of people are making the same independent decisions to utilize relatively fixed facilities, *each* activity an individual undertakes that is external to his living space requires larger expenditures of the time resource. Since time, in Spengler's own words, is "the most nonstorable of all resources,"⁶ an increase in nondiscretionary time, given a fixed workweek, must, *ceterus paribus*, mean a reduction in the quantity of discretionary time. This loss of discretionary time due to the *aggravation effect* represents a diseconomy external to the individual (given his preference function), yet internal to the megalopolis, and hence an upward shift in a marginal and average time costs per activity, or alternatively a reduction in utility per dollar expenditure.

The time costs imposed by the *aggravation effect* are not wholly unforeseen by Professor Spengler when he discusses the length of the journey to and from work and states "that workers will not look with favor upon arrangements that result in what amounts to taxes upon time that would otherwise be discretionary."⁷ Nevertheless, by failing to generalize the argument Spengler misses the major cause-effect relationship influencing resource availability within the megalopolis—a decrease in the availability of space leads to a decrease in the availability of discretionary time. This oversight stems primarily from the problem of definition touched earlier. Professor Spengler defines discretionary time residually. His definition arbitrarily categorizes nondiscretionary time according to various activi-

5. The term *aggravation effect* is employed intentionally to convey both its literal and colloquial meaning, for unless waiting is a utility-producing segment of a given activity it is cost in terms of utility foregone. As such congestion can be both "more troublesome" and "annoying".

6. J. Spengler, *supra* note 2 at 330.

7. *Id.* at 391, 384.

ties. Why the time journeying to and from work and the time spent in the "performance of necessary household functions"⁸ are any more nondiscretionary than queuing at the theater, for a stop light, or an elevator, Spengler fails to indicate. Clearly there is no analytic justification for his particular definition; nevertheless, the narrow boundaries of his categories limit his scope causing him to exclude the important social and legal obligations megalopolization imposes upon the individual. Consequently, Spengler misses the major impact of megalopolization on resource availability.⁹

Once the correct cause-effect relationship between time and space has been established new vistas are opened to the social sciences and the individual and social responses to the increasing time costs imposed by the megalopolis provide important new problem areas for the economic theorist. These responses appear, at least to this author, to be the major "issues in need of careful analysis" that Professor Spengler is seeking. Whether or not the megalopolis proves to be a resource waster or resource conserver depends primarily upon whether the responses to the *aggravation effect* are moving society toward or away from an optimal use of resources. Quite obviously, if the costs (time and other) of megalopolization are outrunning the benefits ("multiplicity of choice")¹⁰ then a rational society at some future date may demand alternative patterns of social and economic organization. The popularity of suburban shopping centers at the expense of the central city and the rapid growth of convenience stores in suburban areas, for example, may be harbingers of a latent demand for discretionary time. Indeed, if the present trend toward megalopolization continues it is not unrealistic to foresee the time resource achieving the theoretical status of the other economic resources. At present, however, the time resource is sadly neglected.

8. *Id.* at 383.

9. For an attempt to build the necessary analytic foundation from which a scientific approach to the time resource can proceed, see my *The Definition of Leisure*, 1 *Journal of Economic Issues* No. 1 & 2 (June, 1967). Here leisure and discretionary time are examined and found to be identical.

10. According to Spengler, one of the two purposes for which cities "are primarily established." J. Spengler, *supra* note 2 at 390.