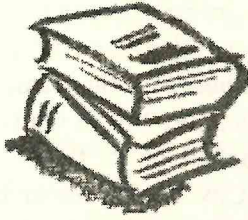


Exploring the Bioregional Paradigm

Two recent thesis abstracts reveal a serious intellectual context for bioregionalism as well as its great potential for practical change. Contact the authors directly if you can't wait for forthcoming books.

BY RICHARD EVANOFF



Trends towards globalization are creating new social and environmental problems, which require the development of a new global ethic. The main problem that the thesis investigates is how cross-cultural dialogue on a global ethic can be effectively conducted among cultures with differing epistemological, value, and ethical orientations. The thesis argues that an adequate framework for intercultural dialogue is provided by neither foundationalists nor relativist theories of ethics and proposes an alternative constructivist theory which acknowledges the historically contingent and socially situated nature of cultural discourses but contends that the current globalization creates a new *situs* in which intercultural dialogue on environmental ethics becomes not only possible but also necessary.

Constructivism, as it is developed in this thesis, accepts realism in the ontological sense but argues that because the world itself underdetermines how it should be thought about or acted in, knowledge, values, and ethics are a product of human construction. Part I argues that precisely because there is no teleological end which humanity as a whole is moving towards, there is the need to develop non-totalizing, dialectical, and integrative forms of intercultural dialogue based on a radical critique of existing social arrangements and the construction of new guiding visions both within and between cultures that structure action towards the achievement of objective goals. In Part II a global ethic is proposed which adopts human flourishing, social justice, and environmental integrity as its guid-

ing objectives. Since current forms of development are unable to meet these objective, an alternative bioregional paradigm is developed which calls for the creation of economically self-sufficient and politically decentralized communities delinked from the global market but confederated at appropriate levels to address problems that transcend cultural border. END

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BY MIKE CARR



Examining the bioregional movement in North America; its vision, values, strategies and tools for community building and networking towards a more sustainable society and are integral to this thesis.

The interrelated problems of the over-consumption of natural resources, the dominant culture construct of people as consumers, and the decline of human community provide the context for my research in radical planning.

The goal of my inquiry into bioregionalism (which places cultural change at the center of its paradigm for societal transformation) is to reveal lessons for a "post-Marxist" theory of civil society. This latter theory proposes a dual strategy of horizontal communicative action among associations in civil society combined with strategic vertical campaigns to democratize both state and market sectors, integrating both into a democratic civil sphere. However, it offers no ecological or cultural critique of consumption. My thesis addresses this

gap. A civil society theory that incorporated lessons about consumption and cultural transformation from bioregionalism might, in turn, have lessons about integrating horizontal and vertical strategies for bioregionalism which has not sufficiently theorized political economic strategy.

I use two concepts, "social capital" and "eco-social capital", to analyze bioregional experiences. Eco-social capital refers to social capital informed by an ethic of human kinship with the natural world. Using these concepts, I first show how ecological kinship corresponds with the conservative and respectful use of resources in aboriginal societies.

My study of bioregional praxis shows that the story telling, earth ceremonies, ecological restoration, etc. bond bioregional actors to each other and to the "community-of-all-beings" in particular places. Social and eco-social capital provides them with spiritual resources for dedicating lives to long-term societal transformation while eschewing commodity consumption. Bioregionalists' experiences and strategy support a diverse and democratic civil society which respects and cares for the natural world.

An eco-centric civil society theory would strategize long-term generational transformation in both cultural and political economic terms. Bioregional horizontal community and networking would be complemented by strategic vertical campaigns to curb the power of both state and corporations over civil society, thus strengthening democracy and a sustainable strategy for greatly reduced consumption. END

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