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A VOICE FOR BIOREGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY, EDUCATION AND CULTURE

SPRING 2011



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PHOTO BY MAGGIE WEADICK

Five articles from our readers on  
down-to-earth, practical, sustainable  
ideas that can be implemented soon



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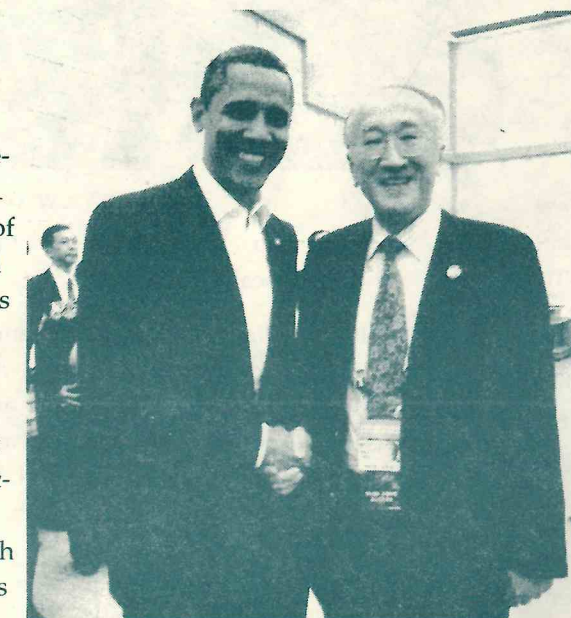


## Despite Political Agenda – Globalization is not Answer

*This is the first of five articles recently submitted to the Pulse in response to our request for ideas about a practical model for an ecological society with real solutions for all of us to use during the next two or three decades. We asked "What would be the features of an ideal ecological society? How would it be just and socially equitable? We need more down-to-earth, more practical, more sustainable ideas that can be implemented soon." We need ideas that would be useful in many different bioregions.*

By Richard Evanoff

Does the earth really have enough resources to allow everyone to achieve the same high standards of living currently found in developed countries such as Japan and the U.S.? Ecological footprint analysis shows that while the amount of ecologically productive land and marine areas available for each person on earth stands at 1.8 global hectares (gha) at present, the average person in the



YOKOHAMA, 2010 APEC – PRESIDENT OBAMA AND THE JAPANESE TRADE MINISTER

United States has a global footprint of 9.0 gha, meaning that approximately five planets would be needed if everyone were to have the same lifestyles as Americans.

Poor countries such as Malawi, Haiti, Nepal, and Bangladesh, on the other hand, have per capita footprints of only about 0.5 gha., an amount which is insufficient to provide for even basic human needs

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## The English Parish: The Perfect Ecological Society

By Michael A. Lewis

A working model for an ecological society already exists, quietly ticking along, biding it's time. It's always been here, overwhelmed by the dominant corporate consumer society, carrying on nonetheless—the gently persistent reminders of a cultural past in balance with local environmental conditions.

Our ecological society is experienced on a human scale, fettered by the distance we can comfortably travel on foot going about our daily business, the farthest distance we can hear the church bells from the local church, the farthest distance we can see from eye level to every horizon. Our sense of belonging to this place grows from our perceptions of

the place we call "Home."

In England, this space is called the parish, consisting of a village, with its social, economic and political centers, surrounded by agricultural land, farmsteads and lightly managed wild lands. The parish exists within the environmental community of its wa-

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## Bioregionalism is a Workable Alternative to Globalism

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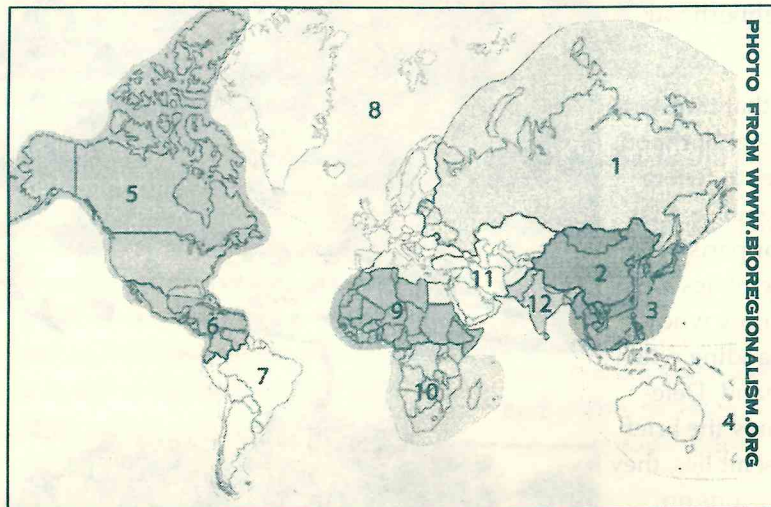
Whereas humans used a little over half of the earth's biocapacity in 1961, we are currently using the equivalent of about 1.4 earths and overshooting global carrying capacity by about 44 percent. It now takes about 18 months for the earth to regenerate the biocapacity humans use up in one year.

U.S. President Barack Obama was recently in Japan (where I am based) to attend an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Yokohama. One of Obama's objectives was to promote a new Free Trade Agreement involving nine Asian countries, including Japan, that would cut import tariffs and allow the U.S. to double its exports to the region over the next five years. It is hoped that a "Trans-Pacific Partnership" with these nine countries would eventually lead to a wider free trade agreement among all 21 APEC countries.

While the Japanese media has for the most part been strongly promoting a new free trade agreement, there is also strong opposition, particularly among farmers, who fear that it would open the country to a flood of imported food and undermine agricultural production in Japan. An estimated 3,000 farmers converged in Tokyo to protest the free trade agreement, claiming that it would result in the loss of 3.4 million jobs in Japan, a decline in agricultural production by as much as half in some areas, and the destruction of local communities.

In the Edo Era (1603-1868) Japan achieved an almost totally self-sufficient economy, in which virtually all of its basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, energy, and other goods were supplied from within the Japanese ar-

chipelago. Trade was intentionally limited to a few Portuguese and Dutch merchants on the tiny island of Dejima in Nagasaki. At present, however, Japan is an enthusiastic supporter of globalization, exporting manufactured goods to the global market while importing more than 60 percent of its food, the highest rate among developed countries. To offset the fact that Japan does not have enough land to feed its present population (which is roughly ten times what it was during the Edo Era), the



BIOREGIONAL APPROACH CAN UNDERLAY CONTINENTS

country has recently bought 100,000 hectares of land in Brazil to produce soybeans and corn, and 12 million additional hectares of land elsewhere in South America and Southeast Asia to produce food directly for Japan instead of having to import it from overseas suppliers. Such practices are also engaged in by other developed and rapidly developing countries, including the U.S., Korea, India, China, and the wealthy Arab states.

It is not difficult to see that the primary beneficiaries of free trade agreements are a small minority of the earth's people, particularly multinational cor-

porations, which crave access to the world's dwindling supply resources, abundant cheap labor, and potentially lucrative markets. Globalization concentrates economic wealth and political power in the hands of an elite minority, while undermining the ability of ordinary people in both developed and developing countries to meet their basic needs in ways that are both ecologically sustainable and socially just. The dominant development paradigm is based on the idea that human well-

being can be defined in terms of adopting consumer lifestyles, social justice can be achieved by helping the poor "catch up" with the rich, and ecological sustainability can be insured through new technological breakthroughs that do not dis-

rupt ever-expanding levels of economic growth.

The dominant development paradigm has clearly been a colossal failure, even on its own terms. Despite the fact that development assistance increased from \$1.8 billion per year in the early 1950s to more than \$60 billion per year at the end of the 1980s, the gap between rich and poor actually increased during that period. In 1960 the richest 20 percent of the world's population had 30 times more wealth than the poorest 20 percent; at present the figure is 75 times more. The ratio

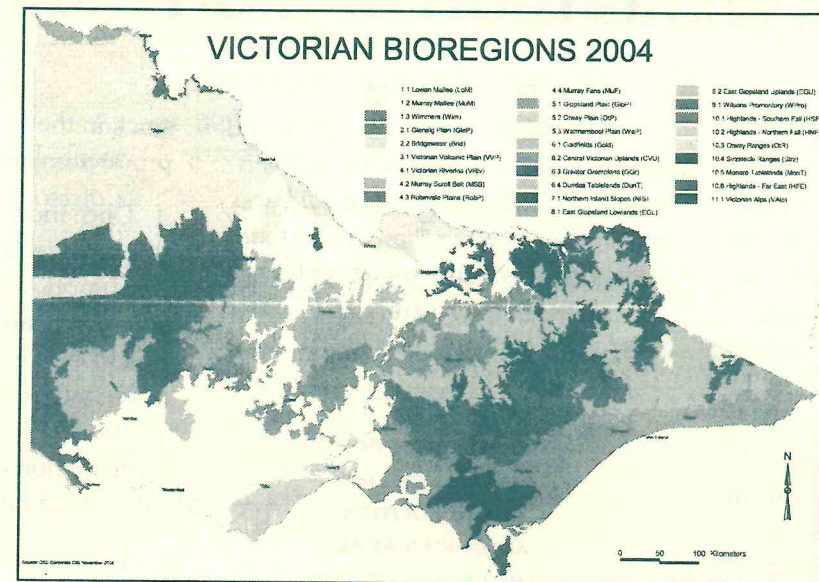
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## Bioregional Approach Lends Itself to Many Political Bases

between the richest and poorest countries was only 1.5:1 two hundred years ago. Despite four decades of concentrated efforts to "develop" the third world, the percentage of total global income received by the poorest 20 percent of the world's population actually fell by more than half, from 2.3 percent in 1960 to 1.1 percent by the end of the last century, with 1 billion people seeing a decline in real incomes

during the period 1980-93. By comparison the richest fifth of the world's population receives approximately 82.7 percent of the world's wealth. The richest 250 people in the world now have the same amount of wealth as the bottom 3 billion, representing 40 percent the world's population, while the wealth of the three richest families in the world is equal to the combined GDP of the 49 poorest countries.

Globalization can be seen in this light as the primary mechanism by which affluent countries are able to live beyond their ecological means. Ted Trainer, who has written penetrating critiques of current development models from a limits-to-growth perspective, concludes that the first world "... does not constitute a model that can be achieved by all people, that it is only a possibility for a few so long as the majority of people in the world do not attain it" (*Abandon Affluence!*, Zed Books, 1985, p. 3). The ecological economist, Herman E. Daly defines "overdeveloped countries" as those



BIOREGIONAL APPROACH CAN SCALE TO MICRO PARCELS ON VICTORIA ISLAND

"...which have per capita resource use rates that could not be sustained indefinitely if all people in the world consumed at that rate," correspondingly the aim of development policies should not be "... to convert underdeveloped into overdeveloped economies, but to convert both into steady-state economies at population and wealth levels that are sufficient for a good life and sustainable for a long future" (*Economics and Sustainability: In Defense of a Steady-State Economy in Deep Ecology*, ed. Michael Tobias, Avant Books, p. 96). To be equitable the burden of reducing consumption should not fall on the poor who are presently "underconsumers" but rather on those who are "overconsumers."

The poor in developing countries are increasingly rejecting the idea that their resources and labor should be used to subsidize the overconsumptive lifestyles of affluent individuals in both the North and South. Development theorists have correspondingly looked for alternative development paradigms

based on increased self-reliance, direct participation in the development process, and greater autonomy as means for people to achieve their own self-development rather than to rely on outside assistance.

Bioregionalism, with its emphasis on fostering economically self-sufficient and politically decentralized communities has much to contribute to these discussions. Raymond Dasmann

(*Environmental Conserva-*

*tion*, 5th ed., John Wiley and Sons, 1984), one of the originators of the bioregional perspective, used the term "biosphere people" to describe cultures which exploit resources from other environments and cultures in order to support a higher standard of living than they could maintain otherwise. The term "ecosystem people" is used, by contrast, to describe cultures that are able to live comfortably and sustainably within their own local environmental conditions. While ecosystem cultures have been the norm throughout most of human history, current trends towards globalization encourage people, particularly in developed countries, to become biosphere people, i.e., to consume more resources than their local bioregions can sustainably provide. The result is that those living in exploited bioregions are often left with insufficient natural resources to provide for their own basic needs.

One idea, which could form the basis for an alternative bioregional de-

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## The Global Dimension of Bioregionalism

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velopment paradigm, is that communities can "delink" themselves from the global economy as a way to achieve greater political autonomy and economic self-sufficiency within the ecological limits of local geographical regions. Such delinking would sever current relations of domination and dependency, and thus allow each culture the freedom to pursue its own course of economic and social development, but it would also involve building societies and economies which are largely self-sufficient in material terms, with limited trade between regions.

Two positive results would follow from delinking the economies of the developed and developing worlds. First, rich countries would no longer be able to sustain their wealth on the basis of the exploitation of the labor and resources of poor countries, but would need instead to stimulate their own local economies in ecologically sustainable ways. Second, poor countries would then be able to use the labor and resources thus freed to pursue their own sustainable forms of development.

This process would involve a drastic decrease in per capita consumption in the North but allow for a modest increase in per capita consumption in the South. If Northern decreases were carried out in an equitable fashion, the extravagant and luxurious lifestyles of elites would be totally eliminated while consumption levels would still be sufficient to maintain a basic minimum standard of living for all.

If Southern increases were carried

out in equitably, the end result would be much the same. Thus, lifestyles in both the North and South would arrive at levels higher than are currently general in the South but lower than are current in the North.

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**THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE-PLACE POLITICAL ALLIANCES AT ALL THE LEVELS FROM A LOCAL WATERSHED TO A CONTINENT.**

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While such a move would undoubtedly involve giving up consumerism as something to be enjoyed by the rich and aspired to by the poor, it would nonetheless redirect the economy away from the production of luxury goods towards providing better education, health care, and basic living conditions for the majority of the earth's inhabitants. Jobs would not be eliminated but rather created by such a process. Moreover, by making durable, repairable products working hours could be reduced to as little as 20-24 hours per week.

Such proposals are entirely feasible once societies shift from the production of low quality, socially useless, and environmentally destructive goods which do little more than increase corporate profits towards the production of high quality, durable goods that meet genuine human needs. The result would be a dramatic increase in leisure time for all, which would enable people to creatively enjoy their lives instead of simply being

stuck in the rat-race of never-ending production and consumption.

Once individuals free themselves from the treadmill of production and consumption and adopt simpler lifestyles, they are in fact in a better position to explore the richer possibilities of human experience. Culture as well can flourish once it is based on active participation in creative activities rather than on passive consumerism.

Bioregionalism's aim of fostering cooperative, self-sufficient economies, decentralized forms of political-decision-making, and forms of symbiosis between cultures and bioregions which allow for both diversity and a sense of community is an idea that can be applied not just locally but also globally. One task for bioregionalists should be to seek out dialogue and to form alliances with others around the globe who share similar concerns.

As Peter Berg writes, "There are opportunities for life-place political alliances at all the levels from a local watershed to a continent (and eventually with other continents' assemblies)" (*Envisioning Sustainability*, Subculture, 2009, p. 169). The goal, I believe, should be to achieve a world in which everyone has the means to enjoy a high quality of life in a socially just and ecologically sustainable manner.

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*Parts of this article have been excerpted in revised form from Richard Evanoff's recent book, Bioregionalism and Global Ethics: A Transactional Approach to Achieving Ecological Sustainability, Social Justice, and Human Well-being (Routledge, 2011).*

## Subsistence Practices and Sustainability

By Fred Cervin

We humans will either acknowledge that we are a part of the earth, or we will continue to move toward our own extinction. Consciousness of our participation in the earth's dynamic life processes cannot emerge so long as our everyday lives continue to be ordered by the rituals of domination.

For five hundred years and more we humans have been moving away from the practices of subsistence; i.e., obtaining our livelihoods directly from our own places and from the natural productive life of the earth, and toward. . . consumerism. Instead of getting our food and clothing and housing from the land under hand and foot, or from the nearby woods, or from the sea . . . we obtain what we need through the distancing media of advertising, long distance transport, impersonal private syndicates, prison-like factories, and money. Everything in our economic lives tells us: you don't really belong here. You are separate and apart from the earth and the creatures of the earth. You are part of a World System which is the Lord and Dominator and Decider of the fate of all the earth.

Our relation to earth is one of mining, extraction, total objectification. At the present time we are engaged in a great collective project of asset stripping. Time spent away from everyday rituals — in wilderness — may restore a sense of being here as a part of the earth — but only partially and only temporarily. Soon we return to our usual routines, which reinforce the identity of an industrial person in an age of nihilism, for whom anything

goes; and we ourselves become but products of the Modern World System.

Since we no longer touch and realize the earth as a self-sufficient living system, it is very difficult to sense our own dependence on that system. As "normal modern people" we almost inevitably and unconsciously transfer our loyalty and feeling of dependence to the Modern World System. It would seem, in practice, that there is no alternative. Those who still try to "get in touch with Mother Earth," are romantic, backward looking. In today's usage, "romantic" has become a swear word.

But our loyalty to the World System is a suicide pact, a covenant of death for our species.

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**BIOREGIONALISM IS A WAY AND AN ENSEMBLE OF PRACTICES WHICH WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO THE EMERGENCE OF A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY. THERE CAN BE NO SUSTAINABILITY WITHOUT IT.**

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There is a way to move against this frightening monster, which has such a terrific life of its own these days. We can begin to move toward subsistence. We need not envision moving all the way back to, say, the Middle Ages . . . or even farther back to hunter/gatherer ways. All that is necessary is to change direction. Our present way of life is like someone adding each day one more brick to the prison we have all been building unconsciously. In contrast, we could remove one brick each

day. It is our daily practices which we take for granted and perform automatically that are these bricks. We can begin, little by little, to change our practices.

To become sustainable we must transform our economy into many local economies. We must shorten our lines of supply and reduce our dependence on non-renewable fuels, by re-localizing.

Living in place has its disciplines and tasks, its practices. On the day that you take a shovel and, with your own hands, dig up a piece of ground to plant a vegetable garden — you are moving toward subsistence; hence moving against the stream of totalizing commerce and technology. On the day that you begin to build a pantry, taking back from the corporations the task of providing for yourself and your loved ones or buddies — you are moving toward subsistence. On the day when you begin to think and work deliberately to increase your own and your community's emergency preparedness, no longer believing that one of Big Brother's little helpers will take care of you if something happens — you are already moving toward subsistence.

It is time to unplug, time to withdraw our faith from the World System upon which we have been and remain so shamefully dependent. This system is unstable and unreliable. Lose your faith in Progress! Progress is destroying the earth as a fit habitat for humans. But how can we turn again to the earth in an authentic way? Spending your vacation in a "natural area" is not enough. We must change our lives,