

A Vision of an Ecologically Regionalist Social Provisioning Process

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Underlying all our political conventions, our frontiers, our State boundaries, our various administrative districts, is the basic factor of the earth itself. –Lewis Mumford (Regionalism and Irregionalism)

Introduction

The notion of a region is typically vague and variable. Regions can be defined, for example, by differing laws and regulations, tax and code structures, political boundaries, or simply economic activity. This subjectivity poses a problem for policy makers and activists who seek to implement and promote ecologically sustainable development beyond the confines of any one locality. To resolve this issue, regions need to be re-envisioned so that interested parties have a common ground to discuss social, economic, and ecological issues. Re-defining the region on more widely recognized terms, such as the natural environment—although as well, social and economic realities—has the potential to alleviate such implementation issues. With such regional identification, policy and economic development could be framed in principles of ecology, where the connections of human and natural activities are recognized as interdependent. Furthermore, as will be discussed, such regional identification has the potential to excite eco-stewardship as well as civic activism. Indeed, implementing and exploring the notion of an ecologically regionalist social provisioning process has great potential to address many shortcomings of a monetary production economy.

Ecological economists are familiar with these topics¹, although, still face the problematic nature of regional identification. Typically, the region is defined by research purpose rather than by commonly understood boundaries. While ecological economists recognize the importance of a more concretely defined regional definition—for example, with regard to resource planning—there still exists a problematic tone to such classification. While it is the case that there are ecological economists who

¹ See: Aliye Ahu van Leeuwen Eveline Nijkamp Peter Akgün, "A Multi-Actor Multi-Criteria Scenario Analysis of Regional Sustainable Resource Policy," Ecological Economics 78 (2012).

recognize 'regions' as including social and ecological conditions, there is still little advancement to concretely envisioning and defining them as such.

At the same time, ecological economics serves as an important discipline to take up the task of envisioning sustainable economies. This is because ecological economists define themselves as a transdisciplinary and visionary science. In the most basic sense, this implies using knowledge from a wide range of disciplines—as well as creativity—to identify, examine, and propose solutions to existing and newly arising social, economic, and environmental issues. As Constanza *et al* (1996) describe, “One of the major differences between ecological economics and conventional academic disciplines is that it does not try to differentiate itself from other disciplines in terms of its content or tools. It is an explicit attempt at pluralistic integration rather than territorial differentiation”(pg. 3). From this viewpoint, ecological economists are familiar with the notion of envisioning and see it as a fundamental component of economic, social, and policy development.

As such, this paper seeks to accomplish two things: to discuss the visionary methodology as is described in the ecological economics literature and to utilize this method to present a vision of an ecologically based regionalist social provisioning system. This paper thus begins the visionary process regarding a regional definition in line with ecological economics notion of sustainability and as well one that is based in a notion of human development and economic and social justice. Particularly, this vision synthesizes the regionalist thinking of the American social theorist and critic, Lewis Mumford. Mumford provides a compelling vision of the region as he understood the value of a holistic and ecologically based approach to human development; also believing that such an approach could lead to a cultural, ecological, and economic revival of the United States and ultimately the globe.

To undertake this task, the next section will briefly describe the visionary process as utilized by ecological economists. This will put the presented vision in context as the initial steps of developing and implementing an ecological regionalism. Following this section, Mumford's regionalist vision will be discussed. This section will elaborate the need for a deeper understanding of the region, based fundamentally upon ecological conditions as well as how humans relate to these conditions. With these insights in mind, regionalism, as a social system, will be described in terms of its economics, culture and politics, as well as approach to planning. These sections will reveal the core principles of a regionalist philosophy exploring a vision of both ecological and economic sustainability.

The visionary process

Envisioning

When working to develop solutions to difficult and long range questions and issues, the envisioning process aids the development of possible routes of action. In the most general sense, the visionary process begins with the development of ideas. This can be understood as first envisioning as many plausible paths followed by the construction of possible routes which would lead to the envisioned state. As Costanza *et al* (1996) point out, “We must recognize that action and change without an appropriate vision of the goal and analyses of the best methods to achieve it can be worse than counterproductive. In this sense a compelling and appropriate vision can be the most practical of all applications” (pg. 3). Hence, by not considering where we might want to end up we lose the chance to influence and promote ways of living, or solutions to problems, which then might only be realized in afterthought.

In the most basic sense, envisioning is a process whereby the exploration of a desired place, solution, or possible existence is undertaken. This has been described by a number of ecological economists as a pre-analytical process; in other words, where the boundaries of the vision have not been delineated. It is essentially a process whereby a problem or issue is opened up for discussion. For example, one could entertain a vision of a car-less city. It is not completely ridiculous to think that human beings could once again operate without such a form of transportation; yet, how we get there is the task at hand. It is in this sense that a vision is where we start, but more importantly where we would like to be. This process has become more of a problem for our current human existence as we realize greater complexities of existence, both social and physical. Our current problem solving methods are usually focused on implementation and modeling which creates expediency, but as stated above might be counterproductive to the original purpose. As D. Meadows points out, “If most of policy discussion focuses on implementation, virtually all the rest focuses on modeling and information. That leaves just about no room for...the establishment of clear, feasible, socially shared goals...What is our vision of the world we are trying to create for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren?”(Costanza et al, 119). Indeed, if we believe that social institutions are malleable it is of utmost importance that humans consistently consider current and future forms of associated living.

Analysis

After an initial vision has been constructed the process of analysis can begin. Analysis in this sense can be thought of as adding structure to a vision. With a structured vision an idea becomes more than simply a thought, it has shape and context. As Forstater (2004) points out, structuralized visions can be thought of as scenarios. This is an implication that the vision is not only possible, but also has the potential to actually occur. In this sense, scenarios must be based in fact; in other words, a scenario could not suggest a violation of accepted scientific laws. For example, a scenario which structured a vision of sustainability would not suggest a violation of biophysical constraints. Hence, scenarios must, “take the form of models or policy prescriptions amongst others; the general notion being that analytic scenarios are “possible route[s] leading to the vision”(Forstater, pg. 413).

Analysis or the creation of scenarios allows for the communication of visions. Communication of these scenarios, allows for a process of critique and revision. This communicative process reveals that a vision and a related scenario are not in any sense individualized; visions and scenarios are implicitly constructed of social relationships. Moreover, through communication the visionary is able to be mindful of their own emotional and experienced past, which may distract the vision from reaching its full potential. For example, one might envision a world without petroleum, this might conjure up fears and anxiety related to self preservation, in which case, the visionary might shut out the possibility for such a future state, ending the vision and analysis process. Communication allows for discussion and unveils the connected value system; again as a way to socialize the vision and scenario.

Analysis also includes a process of identification of the current institutional structure. As mentioned above, a scenario could not violate recognized facts; the same can be said of the social and cultural fabric. The creation of scenarios is directly related to the critique and identification of current processes which lead to the initial problem in the first place. This is a necessary task as the visionary needs to be able to target as well as recognize patterns so as to implement a scenario which will hopefully lead to a successful adjustment toward the purported vision. This identification and critical process also allows the visionary to communicate the problem at hand and gain support for possible change.

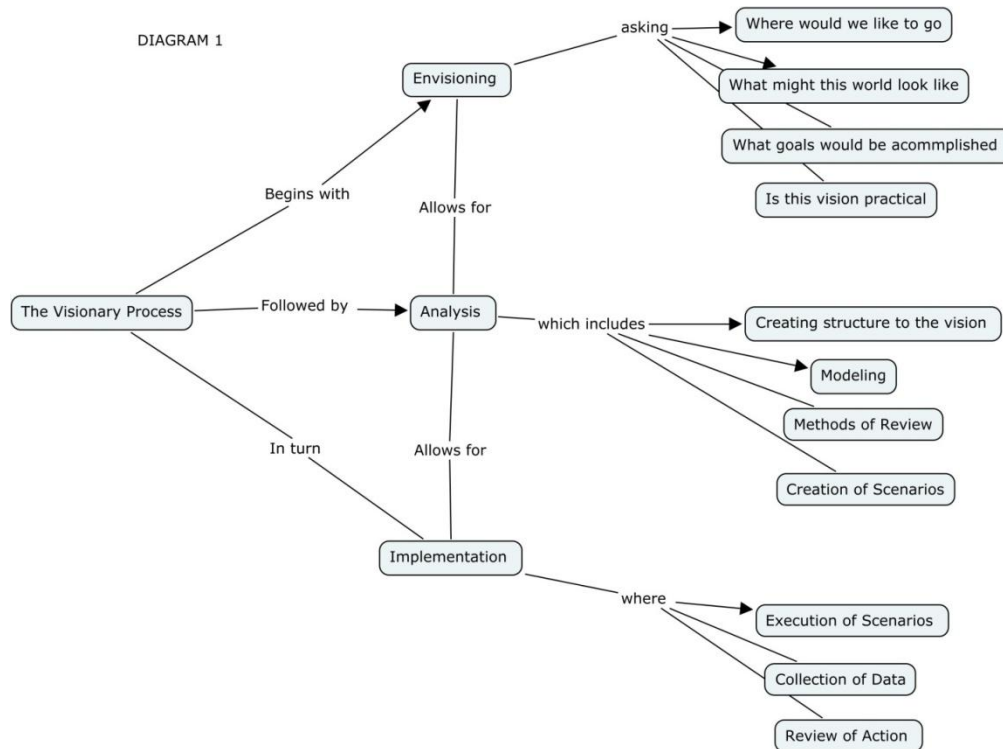
Implementation

The final component of this approach is that of implementation; the execution of advanced scenarios. This is the action component of the visionary process whereby steps are taken which will hopefully lead to an institutional adjustment. Implementation also involves a revisionary process; possibly for both the vision itself as well as related scenarios. Hence analysis is an ongoing process. Indeed, this approach is fundamentally evolutionary; there can be no absolute vision or related scenario.

The implementation process in turn allows for the collection of data, experience, and recognition of known barriers. Furthermore, the implantation process will expose unknown values and institutions which may enable or constrain the continuation of implementation. Analysis must be ongoing as implementation occurs, hence the creation and use of indicators gains significance in the implementation process. The use of indicators will also allow for greater communication and as such act as a tool in the exposition of the proposed vision. This can have the effect of creating a larger community involved in the visionary process, adding to the depth and breadth to the theoretical and applied actions.

A brief remark regarding the visionary process

As has been discussed, the visionary process is a dynamic and evolutionary (hence non-absolutist) approach to working on complex issues such as those encompassed by our economic, social, and ecological worlds. Indeed, the visionary process allows for the communication of value structures; this is how the question, *where we would like to go* becomes fathomable. As social scientists further their work towards interdisciplinarity, a process which can span theoretical boundaries will become increasingly important. Furthermore, as human beings realize that these latter mentioned issues are cross-cultural, and hence, international in nature, a method which can seek common ground will be paramount. The diagram below summarizes the visionary process and presents it as a unified framework.



With the vision of sustainability, and in this case, regionalism as a path to sustainability, the visionary process becomes even more important as well as potentially effective. The development of a unifying goal of ecological and social vitality allows for a pragmatic foundation for the discussion of policy as well as individual decision making.

A New regionalism?

While it is being presented that an ecologically based regionalism is a more recent development, there is a historical depth of theory, discussion, and application of what is called regionalism supported by those who identified themselves as regionalists. Some of the earliest of the American regionalist movements had links with artists, writers, philosophers, planners, economists, social theorists, and cultural critic just to name a few². These interdisciplinary thinkers were engrossed with the possibility of a new America defined by its regional dispersion—i.e. by ecological setting, cultural designations, folk ways and heritage, and economic base—that would provide the basis for an enriching of the ‘American experience’. Indeed, as regionalist historian Robert Dornman explains, there existed a wide array of regionalist thinking, although in general it concerned the path of American society toward a regionally defined, non-invidious economy, with a culturally rich local life experience. He states,

²See Robert L. Dornman: Robert L. Dornman, Revolt of the Provinces : The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

The region, it was hoped, would provide the physical framework for the creation of new kinds of cities, small-scale, planned, delimited, and existing in balance with wilderness and a restored and rejuvenated rural economy...[with] a democratic civic religion, utopian ideology, and radical politics. (Dorman, pg. (Xii-xiii))

These thinkers believed that the region not only provided a way to reinvigorate economic and social activity but as well ecological conditions. Furthermore, regionalism, defined as such, was hoped to form the basis of an institutional adjustment toward ecological conservation, similar to what is being referred today as sustainability. Although, ecological conservation and preservation were only a piece of what the regionalist movement hoped for.

Of particular interest amongst these regionalists is American thinker, writer, and social visionary, Lewis Mumford. Mumford, beginning his more formal writing in the 1920's, was enamored by the potential for a cultural renewal in the United States stemming from regional life. He believed that the seeds of social, cultural, and economic vigor were present in American culture and could be developed through the establishment of ecologically and socially defined geographic areas. Here inhabitants could find common ground—literally and figuratively—to create and continuously pursue balanced economic, social, and ecological living. Mumford throughout his life continued to believe in this possibility even in the face of an ever increasing atomizing, consumerist, and individualist culture. Even today—while most do not know it—these types of ideas are becoming more prominent and relevant for today's 'transitioners'³, ecological conservationists, bio-regionalists, and sustainability minded urban planners and economists. Hence, there is value in understanding his thinking, the ideas and thinkers that influenced him, as well as the work done by his associates⁴ who held similar beliefs and hopes. It is my argument that this understanding of the region is still viable, relevant, and could allow the potential for a more ecologically sustainable, culturally rich, and economically diverse economic development.

Understanding the Regionalist Perspective

The vision of regionalism as developed by Mumford can be understood as both a philosophy and practice. On the philosophical side it represents not only an ideology, but also a visionary plan for the future of human cultural and spiritual development. On the practical side, regionalism includes a plan for ecologically minded material production and distribution as well as a way to foster participatory democratic activism. It is these features that distinguish Mumford's regionalism from purely economic

³See: Joel Magnuson, [The Approaching Great Transformation : Toward a Livable Post Carbon Economy](#) (2013).

⁴ Particularly, the Regional Planning Association of America

understandings of the region as well as the plethora of regional theorists throughout history⁵. To this point, in an early (1931) article written for *The New Republic* entitled, *Toward a New Regionalism*, Mumford writes,

Regionalism as a modern social reality does not mean the resurrection of a dead way of life or the mummification of local customs and institutions; nor is it dependent upon excessive interest in the primitive, the naïve, the illiterate. It is, essentially, the effort to provide for the continuous cultivation and development of all the resources of the earth and of man; an effort which recognizes the existence of real groups and social configurations and geographic relationships that are ignored by the abstract culture of the metropolis, and which opposes the aimless nomadism of modern commercial enterprise, the conception of a stable and settled and balanced and cultivated life. (Mumford "Toward a New Regionalism", pg. 157)

With this statement, Mumford is distinguishing that the regionalism which he advocates is not in any way an antiquarian conception, based in nostalgic visions of times past, pushed for by other self identified regionalists of his day. This regionalism regards movements *forward* in human development, utilizing the techniques and advancements that humans have invented and practiced, although in ways which follow current knowledge as to their cultural and environmental impacts. As well, his regionalism is fundamentally in opposition toward the type of urbanization which has the tendency to ignore and undervalue smaller human communities as well as favor large scale and centralized production which many times has very little positive impact upon a locality other than economic terms⁶.

With a sense of urgency, Mumford understood that something must be done before the country and eventually the world would be environmentally devastated from a type of economic system which generally favors profit over human vitality. Indeed, he believed that regionalism could foster the type of social environment which would allow for a change from such a system. With a high degree of urgency and similar to our current awareness of ecological devastation, Mumford distinguishes in an (1927) *Sociological Review* article entitled, *Regionalism and Irregionalism*,

Up to a certain point, economic and social life can be conducted without regard to the regional actualities. Where there is a vast surplus of natural resources and an excess of population through rapid multiplication...both the land and the people may be wasted and the means of a sound

⁵ For example, there is a period of regionalism in the late 19th century which is focused on the transcendentalist philosophy of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. These regionalists were captivated with a romantic-back-to-the-land philosophy, literature, and artistic expression.

⁶ See: Lewis Mumford, "Cities Fit to Live In," *The Nation* (1948).

livelihood may be frittered away without the community's becoming immediately aware of its losses and inefficiencies. (Mumford "Regionalism and Irregionalism", pg. 279)

In other words, up to a certain point, humans can extract, pollute, and destroy the ecological environment to engage in economic and social activities; but these activities do not come without cost and cannot occur indefinitely. Furthering this point, Mumford says with vigor,

In America during the last century we mined soils, gutted our forests, misplaced industries, wasted vast sums in needless transportation, congested population, and lowered the physical vitality of the community without immediately feeling the consequences of our actions...The blind heaping up of population in metropolitan areas, the equally blind impoverishment, through bad marketing and an inadequate distribution of the population, of rural areas, cannot continue indefinitely....all these relations are unstable; and in the long run they cannot be maintained. (Ibid)

Sounding like an ecological economist of today, Mumford understands the ecologically un-sustainable reality of his—and still today ours—economic system. With emphasis on the blind nature of these activities, Mumford is making point that something fundamentally more planned out must precede the current processes of development. Indeed, there is an utter urgency to promote and practice a style of development which supports and conserves the land beneath it, rather than to strip, level, and establish a grid of property lines. Mumford suggests,

For a century it has suited us to ignore the basic realities of the land: its contours and landscapes, its vegetation areas, its power, its mineral resources, its industry, its types of community; or rather, even when we used these resources, we used them in a blind and heedless way, achieving merely the gaudy abstract symbols of power and wealth. We gauged prosperity by dollars and greatness by the census statistics, although, as in the burning of coal to run steam engines, more than three-fourths of the money was literally sent up the flue. (Ibid)

These basic concerns for ecological conservation and preservation form much of the regionalist perspective. Hence, the regional perspective allows and pushes for a holistic view of both the social and economic conditions which form our lives but in context with the underlying environmental realities. With adoption of the regionalist perspective, Mumford believed it was near impossible to undertake

development projects which clearly harmed such realities. In a longer but absolutely inspiring passage Mumford states,

When we acquire the regional outlook, we reverse this process: instead of considering separate products or resources, we think of the region as a whole, and we realize that in each geographic area a certain balance of natural resources and human institutions is possible, for the finest development of the land and the people. We cannot look upon coal as one thing and coal communities as another; we cannot look upon financial concentration as one thing, and numerous urban slums as quite another, we see, rather, that the crude exploitation of coal has always produced an unhygienic environment and a disorderly community, and instead of believing that this may be compensated simply by increases in money wages, we see that the need is for a different kind of community-planning....[I]ndustry, education, housing, culture, recreation, are not separable activities; they exist with a regional complex; and this complex changes, as the land itself changes from coastal plain to upland, from valley bottom to mountain top....Different conditions create different problems; different problems require different methods; different methods produce different results. In this recognition of natural diversities lies the vital and unifying element in the regionalist movement. (Ibid, 280)

With this interconnected framework in mind, the following sections will introduce: how the region is defined, economic regionalism, cultural/political regionalism and regionalist planning.

Defining Regions – The regional survey

Unlike the economically based understanding of the region typical of urban and regional economics, the regionalist perspective establishes that economic transactions are only one characteristic of any particular region. Indeed, the region can be understood as a set of dynamic interconnected relations of human beings and their ecological and environmental surroundings. As the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA)—Mumford’s main outlet for the diffusion of the regionalist perspective—define, “the region is a combined and overall cultural and geographic unity with the variety of resources to ensure a measure of self-sufficiency” (Sussman, pg. 33). While this sounds overtly romantic, Mumford makes point that, “the region is anything but ideal or abstract. Its existence resides in the facts of geography: climate, soil, and terrain, [and it is these facts which] constitute the fundamental basis of existence.[In the most basic sense,] [t]he region sets the basic material conditions that underlie economic, technical, and social development”(Luccarelli, pg. 28). The region is, as such, understood as both naturally and socially

defined. In other words there is an underlying ecological and natural basis of human patterns of settlement. The natural conditions are found in the climate, variety of plants and animals, geology, water sources, and terrain. These conditions in turn have direct influence as to social patterns such as heritage, laws, manners, customs, moral, and human history. Indeed, patterns of human settlement are in direct relation to ecological conditions

It is these basic facts resulting from the study of particular areas which reveal both what could be considered the region as well as regional differences. Hence, regional definition is based in regional similarities—in other words the things to look for and which all regions would have—but exemplifies the variations in these similarities, for examples plant, animal, soil and climate differences. These specifics form the “web of life” of the region. While it seems difficult to specify one region from the next, Mumford and the regionalist perspective reveal that it is these types of characteristics, along with human presences, which constitute regional definitions.⁷

To facilitate these regional definitions the regionalist calls upon the many branches of both social and natural sciences. As has been suggested, it is believed that the region needs to be identified by geographic, ecological, historical, economic, and social conditions. As such, geographers, sociologists, economists, historians, and planners work together to discover what could be considered a particular region. For example, “the geographer points out that mankind have not spread out in a formless undifferentiated mass, if only for the reason that the surface of the globe prevents this kind of diffusion. The major land masses divide naturally into smaller units, special characteristics the underlying geological structure, in the climate, and consequently in the soils and vegetation and animal life and available mineral deposits” (Sussman, pg. 200). Hence, the geographer seeks to examine and make point the natural breaks and transitions which are inherent to the particular landscapes. Again, this is not done in isolation to the patterns of human settlement. Regional identification is based in the idea that regions are shaped by both ecological *and* human forces. As Mumford distinguishes, “the region then, as is disclosed by the modern geographer, is a natural basis, and is a social fact” (Sussman, pg. 203).

⁷To be clear, at no point is it assumed that these definitions are absolute. The regionalist perspective understands that boundaries are social institutions, although, “natural regions, unlike political areas, have not, except in the case of islands and isolated mountain areas, any hard and fast boundaries....This means that all boundary lines in black and white are arbitrary....The lines laid down by nature are not perhaps as clear as those laid down by man; but they have the advantage of enduring longer” Lewis Mumford, "Regionalism and Irregionalism," *The Sociological Review* a19.4 (1927).. Hence, although it is the human perception of where lines exist, at least with ecological and natural conditions variations do not radically or rapidly change by humans standard of time.

It is with human association that the region takes on a social, economic, and cultural understanding. With variations in types of production, structures, and heritage, for example, regional differences and identification become institutional realities. With respect to this regional identity Mumford suggests, “the region provides a common background: the air we breathe, the water we drink, food we eat, the landscape we see, the accumulation of experience in custom peculiar to the setting, [these things] tend to unify the inhabitants and to differentiate them from the members of other regions”(Sussman, pg. 201). Hence to elaborate and make point of these regional specificities, for example, the economist studies the economic patterns, the ecologist studies the underlying natural environment, the sociologists studies the cultural and social aspects, the historian studies the paths of human relations, and the planner seeks to combine these facts to promote informed, sensitive, and rational plans of development. It is with an expanded breadth and depth of regional specification that the regionalist hopes for progressive human and ecological associated living.

The Regional Economy – A Life Economics

The regionalist economy is one in which the social provisioning process—understood as the economy embedded in a social system—is constructed to aid and advance the human and ecological life process rather than exploit, destroy, and produce waste. Mumford spent much of his career seeking to elaborate the current social provisioning process which he believed tended to ignore and undervalue the mutual aid institutions as well as human associations with nature. Indeed, his regionalist vision of the economy has much to do with the ‘technics’ perspective of his long time association with Professor Patrick Geddes⁸.

Geddes distinguishes that the types of technics—or methods of material production—have changed considerably throughout human history. Contemporary to his life was a largely coal driven industrial world which seemed to have little concern for the ecological conditions and too much concern for monetary rewards. He called this period *paleotechnics*. In a most vivid passage Geddes describes this paleotechnic world,

As paleotects we make it our prime endeavor to dig up coals, to run machinery, to produce cheap cotton, to clothe cheap people, to get up more coals, to run more machinery, and so on; and all this essentially towards "extending markets". The whole has been essentially organized upon a

⁸ Patrick Geddes was a sociologist and geographer who sought advanced regionalism as a method towards environmental conservation and protection as well as civic participation and responsibility. See: Patrick Geddes, Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment; a Selection (New Brunswick, N.J.; Rutgers University Press, 1972).

basis of "primary poverty and of secondary poverty", relieved by a stratum of moderate well-being, and enlivened by a few prizes, and comparatively rare fortunes—the latter chiefly estimated in gold, and after death. (Geddes, pg. 148)

Geddes sees the paleotechnic economic order as one which has essentially a myopic and self defeating purpose; the creation and exuberance of wealth yet at the cost and depreciation of the world in which it will be used. With seemingly contemporary examples Geddes identifies the inherent instability of the paleotechnic world. Ultimately begging for a transition towards a much more reasonable and stable social order, he states,

The life and labour of each race and generation of men are but the expression and working of their ideals. Never was this more fully done than in this paleotechnic phase, with its wasteful industry and its predatory finance—and its consequences, (a) in dissipation of energies, (b) in deterioration of life... Such twofold dissipation may most simply be observed upon two of its main lines; that of crude luxuries and sports, and the dissipations these so readily involve in the moral sense; and secondly through war... This, again, is the natural accumulation, the inevitable psychological expression of certain very real evils and angers, though not those most commonly expressed. First, of the inefficiency and wastefulness of paleotechnic industry, with corresponding instability and irregularity of employment, which are increasingly felt by all concerned; second, the corresponding instability of the financial system, with its pecuniary and credit illusions, which are also becoming realized; and third, the growing physical slackness or deterioration—unfitness anyhow—which we all more or less feel in our paleotechnic town life, which therefore must more and more make us crouch behind barriers and cry for defenders. (Geddes, pg. 149)

Geddes sees the tendencies inherent in the paleotechnic order as that which ultimately has little concern for advancement in human associated living. Furthermore, as a result of such negligence, although production may be planned at individual instances, the macro paleotechnic economy cannot support a rationally planned economy⁹. He believed that these deficiencies would lead to both moral and social decay as such instability simply does not allow for consistent human flourishing.

⁹ Whereby resources are utilized at levels and for goods which do not deteriorate the ecological environment and as well all people are able to enjoy economic stability.

Although Geddes understood that the paleotechnic world provided much advancement to human material existence, he sees—similar to many social theorists of his day—that humans have the capacity to a much greater purpose and well being. It would be through a regional social provisioning process that such realization could occur.

Mumford distinguishes the regional economy as a fundamentally different social order than that of those associated with capitalism. Indeed, a regional economy would be one which is distinguished by decentralized production, a focus on the advancement of non-invidious sources of employment, and one which fundamentally seeks protection of the ecological environment. With this vision of the economy Mumford proclaims, “we must alter our present life-denying goals and lay down the foundations for a new civilization--not a money economy but a life economy”(Mumford "Cities Fit to Live In", pg. 533)

This life economy would fundamentally rest upon the establishment and promotion of the region as an economic unit. Within the region recognized as the interconnection of economic, social, and ecological environments, cities and towns could be planned so as to promote sustainable economic conditions and as well cultural relevance. With this type of economic development, urban cities and rural towns would have the potential to have the opportunities and livelihood similar to the major cities experienced across the nation. Speaking to the future of economic regionalism, Mumford suggests, “the geographic region has become potentially the unit that the metropolis was under the past economic regime: it needs to be linked up, interlaced, and settled with a view to the new opportunities and the new conditions of life” (Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 345).

As these regional economies develop the hope would be that economies and production could become decentralized. This is to say, cities and towns within the region would seek to provide most of the necessities of life from within; eliminating the need for costly and wasteful transportation of goods. It would be hoped that with such decentralization, local life could flourish. Mumford adds, “Under a regime of economic regionalism, industries would be varied and balanced locally in order to secure a varied and balanced life: likewise the multiform, many-threaded cultural heritage that goes with such a life”(Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 345).

This is not to say that regions and the units within regions could reach a sort of equilibrium of production and consumption. Regionalism understands the variation in resources across a geographic spectrum. Hence, there is still a role to play for inter-regional trade. The main point is that if there is a possibility for

production of life necessities close to home, this should be a priority in the decision to make or buy. Mumford clarifies by suggesting,

Economic regionalism, I emphasize, cannot aim at either economic or cultural self-sufficiency: no region is rich enough or varied enough to supply all the ingredients of our present civilization: the dream of autarchy is merely a military dodge for putting a population in a state of mind appropriate to war. What regionalism does aim at is a more even development of local resources: a development that does not gauge success purely by the limited financial profits obtained through a one-sided specialization. (Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 345)

Hence, Mumford makes point that there is value in local production of goods and services beyond that of pecuniary reward. Furthermore, Mumford is making point that regional decentralization of production is not simply “bare industrial decentralization” (Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 345). Rather as Mumford is writing in a time where most production and distribution occurs in centralized metropolitan areas, his hope for decentralization is understood as the varied production of goods and services among the regions, towns, and cities. Decentralization aims at bringing life to all human settlements not simply the major metropolitan cities.

From this process, regional economies could promote employment which fulfills deeper needs of the human being; hence, beyond monetary reward. Individuals would hopefully gain a greater identity with their community, town or city, and home. Individuals having a greater identity with their home would hopefully come to understand and respect their ecological surroundings. Indeed, a sense of conservation and protection of the environment is fundamental to the regional *life* economy.¹⁰ With this in mind, Mumford illustrates a grand vision of such economic conditions,

a life economy seeks continuity, variety, orderly and purposeful growth. Such an economy is cut to the human scale: so that every organism, every community, every human being, shall have the variety of goods and experiences necessary for the fulfillment of his own individual life-course, from birth to death. The mark of the life economy is its observance of organic limits: it seeks not the greatest possible quantity of a particular good, but the right quantity, of the right quality, at

¹⁰This vision of a regional economy, although seemingly utopian, has existed time and time again in human history; the medieval village, the settlement of the eastern United States, and to some degree rural towns which established independently of a metropolitan area.

the right place and the right time for the right purpose. Too much of any one thing is as fatal to living organisms as too little. (Mumford *The Urban Prospect; [Essays]*, pg. 221)

The essence of the regional economy is to promote a style of human development and life which promotes social and ecological association. As Benton MacKaye, a long time friend and fellow advocate of regionalism, suggested, we have spent most of our existence working to develop and produce the *means* to live, yet, when will we start to work on the actual process of living?¹¹ The regional economy is an answer to this question: a social provisioning process which re-examines and re-orientates the classic economic questions of “what” and “how” to produce as well as how to “distribute”. To facilitate such a transition will take an institutional adjustment toward regional culture and politics, the subject of the next section.

Regionalist culture and politics

To facilitate a regional economy a series of institutional adjustments¹² must occur. This is necessary given that the institutional environment of, as Mumford calls, a money economy, inhibits the type of environment which regionalist philosophy promotes. Specifically, what is needed is a regional culture which is based in a notion of organicism—or connection to both the ecological and social environment in which humans live. With an organicist culture, social processes such as participatory democracy and ecological conservation would hopefully develop. In the most basic sense, Regionalists believed that with the development of these types of institutions a transformation towards a life economy could take place.

As Mark Luccarelli¹³ notes, “what is essential in regionalism is its vision of an organic order that enlivens culture. As such it is a response to the predominant modern Western worldview that has turned nature into empty space and promoted technological “solutions” that engulf the complexities of both the urban and natural worlds”(Luccarelli, pg. 2). Indeed, Mumford makes the point that a fundamental component of regional life will be a commitment to what he called organicism. This is a vision of a connection to nature which enriches and promotes the human and ecological life process while at the same time providing a

¹¹ See: Benton MacKaye, *The New Exploration; a Philosophy of Regional Planning* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962).

¹² Institutional adjustment is defined here from an original institutional perspective, for example, Marc Tool: MarcR Tool, "The Theory of Institutional Adjustment," *Value Theory and Economic Progress: The Institutional Economics of J. Fagg Foster* (Springer Netherlands, 2000).

¹³ Luccarelli is a knowledgeable scholar with regards to the regionalist movement. See: Mark Luccarelli, *Lewis Mumford and the Ecological Region : The Politics of Planning*, Critical Perspectives (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

basis for a vibrant culture. As such, Mumford believed that with an almost pious connection to nature, inhabitants of regional cities and towns would understand and endorse the importance of conservation and ecological preservation, while also using the local natural world as a source of cultural identity.

Furthermore, with an organicist based culture it could be that individuals could understand the role of evolution and change not just in the natural environment but also in social relationships.¹⁴ Mumford believed that learning to appreciate and value, as well as to maintain and foster, the natural environment as an important and ever present component of life, individuals would come to understand their role in the environment but as well a more developed picture of the life process as a whole; contributing to a progressive political life. He states, with reference to nature “the point is that our knowledge directs attention to parallel processes, parallel conditions and reactions; and it gives rise to related pictures of the natural and the cultural environments, considered as wholes, within which man finds his life and being and drama” (Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 303). With a more holistic sense of the human being and nature—essentially ending the notion of the classical liberals radical individual—humans will have the chance to become more socialized with both fellow humans and their ecological surroundings. To this point, Mumford describes what he thinks will occur when we embrace the organic world,

With the organism uppermost we begin to think qualitatively in terms of growth, norms, shapes, inter-relationships, implications, associations, and societies. We realize that the aim of the social process is not to make men more powerful, but to make them more completely developed, more human, more capable of carrying on the specifically human attributes of culture--neither snarling carnivores nor insensate robots. Once established, the vital and social order must subsume the mechanical one, and dominate it: in practice as well as in thought. In social terms, this means a re-orientation not only from mechanism to organism, but from despotism to symbiotic association, from capitalism and fascism to co-operation and basic communism.

With this powerful vision, Mumford reveals a key regionalist position: that a culture based in organicism will hopefully lead to a progressive transformation of political and cultural institutions.

¹⁴This could easily be interpreted as a social Darwinist position, for example, as related to Herbert Spencer, but Mumford expressly speaks against this position, he states, “In emphasizing the importance of this new orientation [(organicism)] toward the living and the organic, I expressly rule out the false biological analogies between societies and organisms: Herbert Spencer and others pushed these to the point of absurdity” (pg. 303. Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

With respect to this shift, Luccarelli suggests, “Mumford presented regionalism as a social theory that builds on the Enlightenment principles of democracy and self-government but goes beyond parliamentary liberalism to the restoration of civic democracy” (Luccarelli, pg. 22).¹⁵ With the creation of decentralized regional units, the seeds to a participatory democratic society have the potential to be sown and developed. It would be within regional cities and towns—where a hopefully prosperous culture and economy had developed—where individuals could become not simply an inhabitant but as well a participant in the ecological and social communities. For as Mumford suggests,

It is in the local community and the immediate region, small enough to be grasped from a tower, a hilltop, or an airplane, to be explored in every part before youth has arrived at the period of political responsibility, that a beginning can be made toward the detailed resorption of government...These people will know in detail where they live and how they live: they will be united by a common feeling for their landscape, their literature and language, their local ways, and out of their own self-respect they will have a sympathetic understanding with other regions and different local peculiarities. They will be actively interest in the form and culture of their locality, which means their community and their own personalities. Such people will contribute to our land-planning, our industry planning, and our community planning the authority of their own understanding, and the pressure of their own desires. (Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 384, 86)

Hence, as cultural regionalism is embraced and regional towns and cities develop, where individuals are able to develop a greater sense of identity with their ecological and social surroundings, it would seem inevitable that a desire to participate and become an integral part of one’s community would occur. Hence, the importance of regional planning becomes apparent. Indeed, regional planning represents the culmination of regionalist culture, economy, and philosophy.

¹⁵This view is one which Mumford may have obtained with his association with John Dewey¹⁵ and the Young Americans (also known as the Young Intellectuals), which whole heartedly supported the notion of participatory democracy. John Dewey whole heartedly supported the notion of participatory democracy. The similarity between the two’s thought makes a strong case for where Mumford gained such a perspective, but it must also be noted that this style of progressivism was common during this era (post WW1).As Luccarelli notes, From an early age, Mumford advocated “a synthesis of a politics of cultural transformation and a new science of regional geography” Luccarelli, Lewis Mumford and the Ecological Region : The Politics of Planning, pg 9..

Regional Planning-Toward ecological community development

With a regional culture embraced—i.e. organicism and democratic civic participation—the notion of regionalist planning can occur. Regional planning is fundamentally related to both the definition of the region as well as economic regionalism as was described earlier. In the most basic sense, regional planning represents the planning of production and distribution activities so that they conform to regional (ecological, economic, and social) needs and realities. In other words, a process of planning which promotes economic and cultural life while at the same time not destroying or fundamentally disrupting ecological systems. As Mumford describes in an article entitled *Regions to live in*, and in relationship to contemporary views of planning in his time,

Regional planning asks not how wide an area can be brought under the aegis of the Metropolis, but how the population and civic facilities can be distributed so as to promise and stimulate a vivid, creative life throughout whole region – the region being any geographic area that possesses a certain unity of climate, soil, vegetation, industry and culture. The regionalist attempts to plan such an area so that all sites and resources, from forest to city, from Highland to water level, may be soundly developed, and so that the population will be distributed so as to utilize, rather than to nullify or destroy, its natural advantages. It sees people, industry and the land as a single unit. Instead of trying, by one desperate dodge or another, to make life a little more tolerable in the congested centers, it attempts to determine what sort of equipment will be needed for the new centers. It does not aim at urbanizing automatically the whole available countryside; it aims equally at ruralizing the stony waste of our city (Sussman, pg. 90).

Hence, it is with the holistic view which regionalism provides, that regional planning takes an exciting turn. It seeks more than simply economic development; it equally seeks ecological preservation and restoration as well as cultural development. Indeed, with grand vision, Mumford suggests, “Our task is to replace the primeval balance that exists in a region with organisms in a state of nature, by a richer environment, a more subtle and many-weighted balance, of human groups and communities in a state of high culture” (Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 314). Indeed, regional planning could also be understood as *life planning*; “[regional planning] seeks to bring the earth as a whole up to the highest pitch of perfection and appropriate use—not merely preserving the primeval, but extending the range of the garden, and introducing the deliberate culture of the landscape into every part of the open country” (Mumford *The Culture of Cities*, pg. 331). With regionalist planning in place, the regional city becomes a possibility.

The regional city or town, the expression of regionalist planning and philosophy becomes more than just a place of residence or employment. The regionally planned place is one which provides these later things but as well a connection to regional ecology (both natural and social). One expression of the regional place is the notion of a *Garden City*¹⁶. As Luccarelli points out,

Mumford believed the Garden City could be a regional city: a new kind of modern city and creative relationship with the surrounding countryside. More than an aesthetic embellishment of urban civilization, the countryside would have a direct relationship to city. Urban life would not cease to exist would simply have a different context (actually a very old one). The natural world would be felt: the Garden City would provide rural landscapes, agricultural products, and electrical power; it would nurture architecture and literature as well as particular kinds of industry. (Luccarelli, pg. 77)

Indeed, the garden city could provide the means to realize regionalism potential and as such human potential.¹⁷

Additionally, given regionalist culture—i.e. organicism and civic participation—the garden city would help to eliminate much of the waste that is associated with more typical patterns of urban growth. For example the pollution which is associated with suburban commuting, urban congestion, and expanding utility lines. To this point, Mumford states,

On the economic side, one of the advantages of the small regional city is the saving in municipal utilities. A great part of the available capital for municipal enterprise is now sunk in our big cities in the subways and transportation systems which are so necessary to its bare physical existence; the great the size of the city, the more extravagant are the demands for these palliatives of congestion, and the more congestion do they promote, by throwing the cost of these enterprises upon the neighboring properties and forcing a more intensive use of the land...By throwing the business district within walking distance of residences, and by relying upon the automobile to

¹⁶Made popular by a late 19th century progressive by the name of Ebenezer Howard. See: Ebenezer Howard and Frederic James Osborn, Garden Cities of to-Morrow, M.I.T. Paperback Series (Cambridge, Mass.,: M.I.T. Press, 1965).

¹⁷Yet, it should be understood that Mumford realized the garden city was only one potential reality for regionally planned cities and towns. He understood that under a different institutional fabric, the garden city may not be the best approach to facilitate regionalist planning and philosophy.

serve for longer and more rapid transportation, the regional city should avoid these vast outlays. (Mumford "The Theory and Practice of Regionalism*", pg. 131)

With these economic advantages in mind and the hope that the regional planned city or town would promote cultural and civic renewal it becomes clear that regionalism understood along these lines has much to offer. Regardless of whether the regional city is found through garden city developments or another type of development which has yet to be defined, the intent is clear, "The regional city exists to integrate every function that grows out of the fact that men live and learn best--expect for short periods of crises--in communities. The primary business of a city is not to promote land values or increase the commercial turnover; its business is a social one: it is man's chief means for domesticating and humanizing himself" (Mumford "The Theory and Practice of Regionalism*", pg. 131)

Concluding Thoughts

The regionalist vision, as presented above, offers an exciting contribution to the issue of buy-in to sustainability as well as the development of an ecologically sustainable social provisioning process definition. The power of this vision lies in the organicist philosophy providing the human value system what is needed to alleviate the problem associated with political and economic boundaries. Indeed, as individuals become aware of a regional, social, and individual identity, it is thought that they will have the capacity to realize the interconnections, particularly ecological, which exist from differing localities. Furthermore, it is with the regional survey which reveals the ecological identity of particular regions, that people will be able to gain insight into their natural surroundings. Although, as the regionalist understood, it is not simply with facts and plans which will open the eyes of the people, it will take participation and a feeling of connection to the movement for widespread adoption.

This does create some complication given the existing institutional structure. Although, given the trend toward movements of sustainability and localism, the regionalist vision has the capability to strengthen and create further momentum for such activism. Indeed, these types of movements are fundamentally an expression of what a regionalist philosophy promotes. Yet, these movements are sometimes created out of fear or anxiety from existing economic and social life; this inhibits the growth of these movements. With a regionalist perspective, the motive for such social movements could be based in more optimistic and positive foundations—human potential—thereby allowing for a greater audience and participation.

It this stated potential which furthers my interest in advancing such a philosophy. Yet, to gain even greater strength, I believe that the regionalist vision needs to be further synthesized with principles of ecological economics to develop routes and plans of action. This discipline has a breadth and depth of knowledge regarding ecological sustainability as well as policy which promotes such a goal, which has the prospective to fundamentally influence public policy. Indeed with a theory of ecological regionalism, where the region is defined upon grounds described above, the capacity to inform and influence such policies strengthen.

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