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# Re-regionalization: Bioregional development as a regenerative pathway

December 15th 2018  
signforsustainability

TWEET THIS

Based on an excerpt of the 'Ecological Design Dimension' of Gaia Education's online course in 'Design for Sustainability'

The Wallace Stegner Environmental Center of the San Francisco Public Library presents

# LIVING HERE

## A Celebration of Bioregions

Planet Drum Foundation Exhibit

**Exhibition**  
Sept. 1 – Nov. 29, 2018  
Wallace Stegner Environmental Center  
Main Library, 5th Floor

**Exhibit walk & talks**  
Fridays, Sept. 14 and  
Oct. 12, 2pm  
Main Library, 5th Floor

**Panel discussion**  
Oct. 11, 6pm  
Koret Auditorium  
Main Library, Lower Level



IMAGE BY GARY ALLEN

 Main Library  
100 Larkin Street (at Grove Street)  
sfpl.org

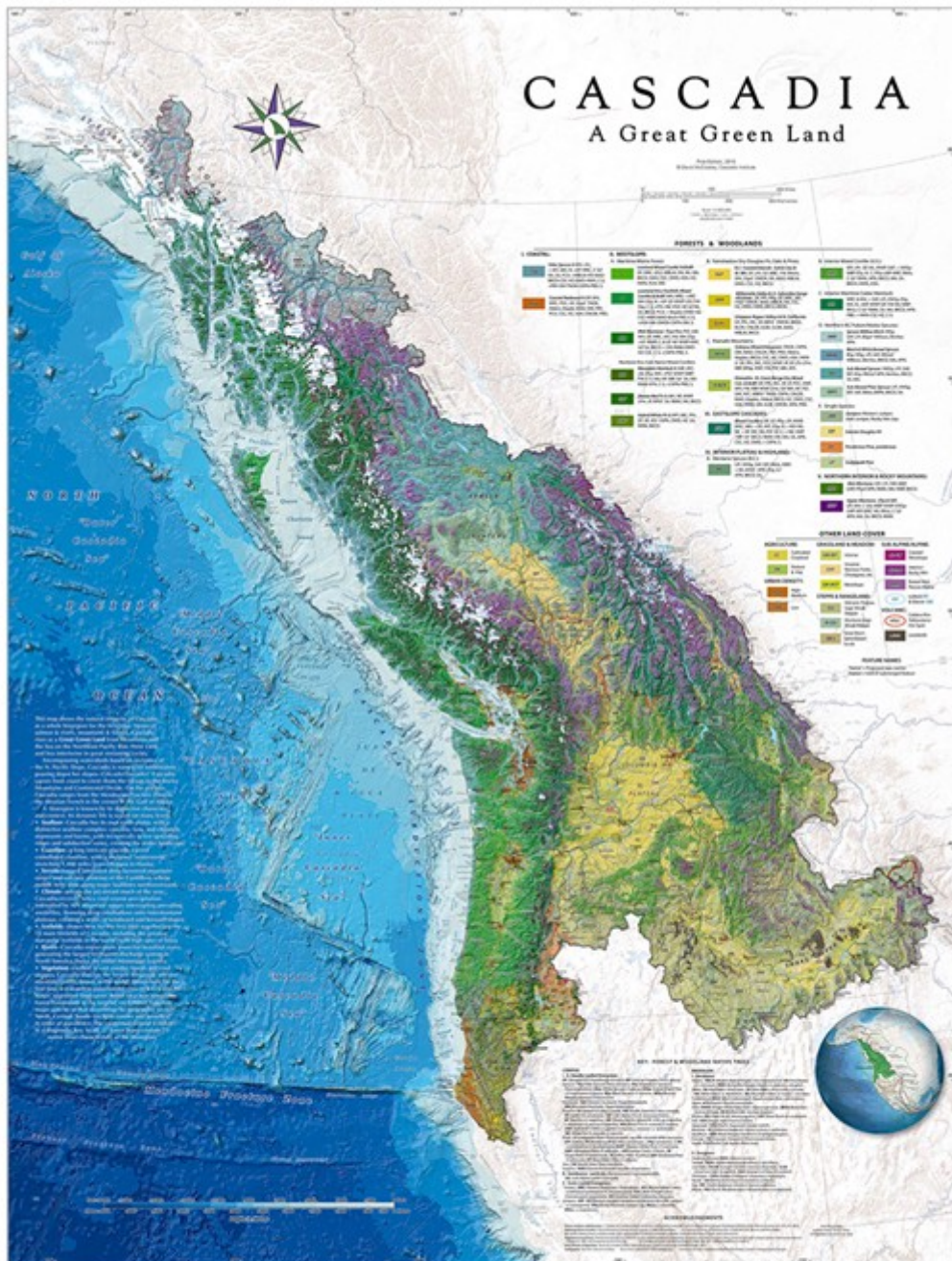
All programs at the Library are free.  
Supported by Friends of the San Francisco Public Library.

Source: <http://www.planetdrum.org/events.htm>

To relocalise effectively we need to map the productive potential of our regions and communities, including resource, material, waste and energy flows and identify threads and opportunities for relocalising production and consumption. How are we dependent on imports and what resources do we have in regional abundance?

Apart from mapping data on the bio-productivity, hydrology, geology, climatology, and ecology of the region, to identify material and energy resources that can be sustainably used and regenerated locally or regionally, communities will also have to become clear what skills, knowledge, technology, infrastructures, and financing will be needed and how to put these resources in place. Creating and maintaining a high level of knowledge and skills within the region requires investment in education and innovation over the mid and long-term.





McCloskey Map of Cascadia 2015

Map of the Cascadia Bioregion (Cascadia Institute)

Shifting local and regional economies towards increased local production for local consumption will only be achieved in complex multi-stakeholder integration processes with people taking a whole systems design perspective in a collaborative effort to create regional abundance. Such a transition will require skill, persistence and patience, yet it promises diverse and vibrant regional economies,

resilient and thriving communities, and the protection and regeneration of regional bio-cultural diversity.

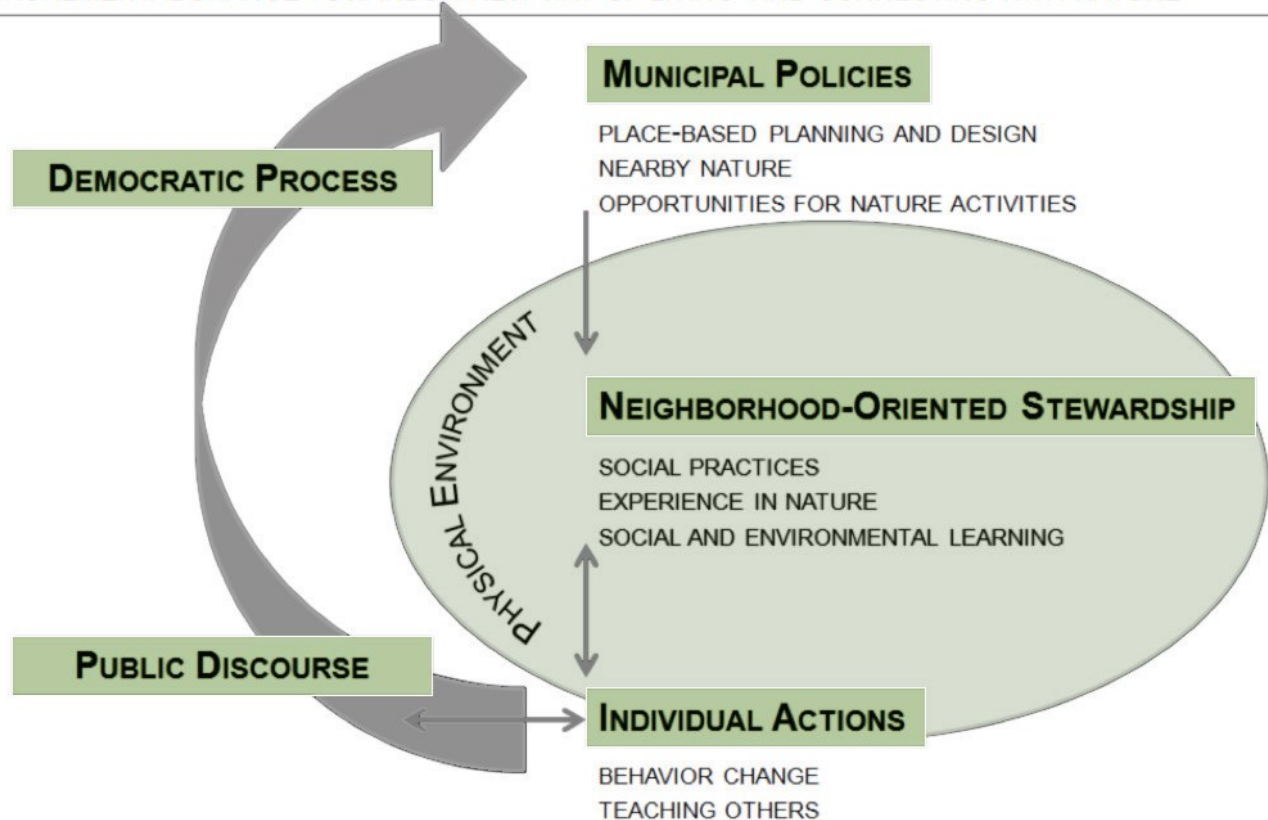
*“Oral histories and historical research can offer fascinating insights into how people used to feed, employ and heat themselves. Clearly, not all of it is relevant and collecting reminiscences carries a danger of romanticising the past and devaluing the present, but there is much that can be learned.”*

— Rob Hopkins

Learning from traditional knowledge and history can be another useful approach to identifying enterprise ideas and business models that actively contribute to the resilient, low-carbon regional economies (as a basis for global economic resilience) that we are transitioning into. Research into the economic activities that existed in one's home place and region as recently as 50 years ago can identify bio-cultural opportunities for the elegant blending of traditional knowledge, craft and local-scale production with modern decentralized (additive) manufacturing, peer-to-peer innovation and open-source knowledge sharing.

# URBAN BIOREGIONALISM

INCREMENTAL CHANGE TOWARDS A NEW WAY OF LIVING AND CONNECTING WITH NATURE

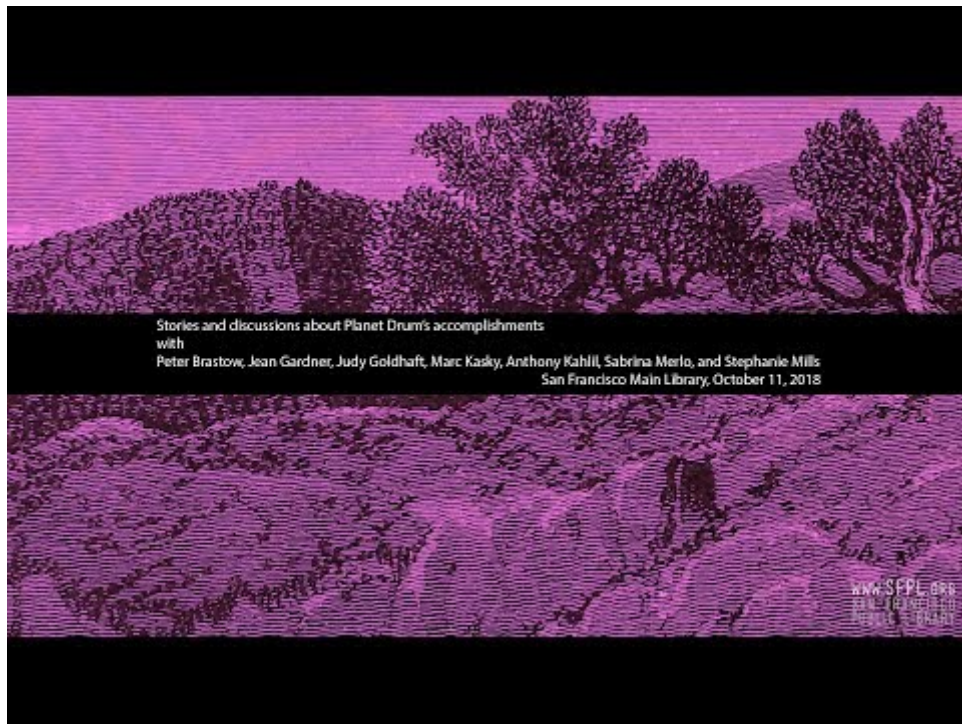


Framework for Promoting Bioregionalism in Cities (2014)

This last half-century has seen a progressive disconnection between the specific resource base of the Earth's different bioregions and the economic activities carried out there. That is, abundant fossil fuels have allowed corporations to ship raw materials to the other side of the world for processing, simply because labour costs and environmental protection standards were low there.

As we move into a low-carbon future, we will have to shift our resource and energy base from fossil fuels and mined minerals to a solar (green) chemistry and bio-resource based material culture. We are transitioning from a fossil-extraction-based degenerative economy to a bio-productive and renewable-energy-based regenerative economy. As the transition progresses, there is likely to be a much stronger relationship between a region's resource base and its economic activities—a process known as economic relocalisation.





A recent exhibition at San Francisco public library celebrate the history of Planet Drum Foundation who have been promoting bioregional development since the 1970s

Combined with the potential added by sharing collaborative access to the best and most appropriate modern technology and knowledge, the low-energy world our grandparents inhabited may provide a rich seam of ideas on enterprise activities that are likely to become progressively more profitable as the cost of carbon rises. But more than only generating financial profits, such enterprises can regenerate multi-capital abundance (see ‘regenerative enterprise’).

Not all local and traditional knowledge and skills are lost. In many places this bio-cultural uniqueness of place has been preserved to a greater or lesser extent. Our elders are walking encyclopaedias that we would do well to explore in depth and with respect while they are still with us.

The transition town movement has made research into local and regional economic history and the harvesting and exchanging of historic local knowledge and skills part of its transition methodology. It is aptly called ‘honouring the elders’. Here, recording oral histories is seen as being a vital tool for harvesting the wisdom of our elders about life in a

locally and regionally centred low-carbon economy. There are regional and cultural differences between and within the Global North and the Global South with regard to how long industrialization and globalization has had time to erode local and traditional knowledge.



CRecording Local Knowledge (West Kirby Transition Town)

Cosmopolitan bioregionalism is on the one hand elegantly adapted to the bio-cultural conditions of a particular locality and on the other hand in constant collaborative exchange at the national and global scales. Bioregionalism pays attention to the context of the different scales of design and the need for scale-linking design for whole-systems health. The circular economy approach and transition to regionally focussed bio-economies also requires this kind of cosmopolitan bioregionalism based on global-local collaboration. All of these aspects of bioregional development build on multi-layer mapping to create a whole systems understanding of the region that can inform the dialogue, knowledge exchange and collaboration required for wise regional decision making. Here are four inspiring examples of locally and regionally focussed economic development and revitalisation:

### *The BioRegional Development Group*

The London-based Bioregional Development Group has done excellent bioregional development work for almost two decades now. A lot of

their early work was also informed by studies into the low-carbon economy of the early twentieth century and before. One of its earliest projects, for example, was to revive London's formerly vibrant lavender industry. The enterprise that was created to develop this product has now been transferred into community ownership (more).

BioRegional has also developed a Fibres Programme to work with industry and farmers to establish local sustainable paper and textile production using local resources, including fibre crops like hemp and flax. This provides an alternative to unsustainable imports of wood pulp and cotton, helps create urban and rural employment in the UK and reduces the UK's ecological footprint (more). Here is a paper on zero emissions pulp and paper production using the mini-mill.

	<b>Health and happiness</b> Encouraging active, sociable, meaningful lives to promote good health and well being		<b>Local and sustainable food</b> Supporting sustainable and humane farming, promoting access to healthy, low impact, local, seasonal and organic diets and reducing food waste
	<b>Equity and local economy</b> Creating bioregional economies that support equity and diverse local employment and international fair trade		<b>Sustainable materials</b> Using sustainable and healthy products, such as those with low embodied energy, sourced locally, made from renewable or waste resources
	<b>Culture and community</b> Respecting and reviving local identity, wisdom and culture; encouraging the involvement of people in shaping their community and creating a new culture of sustainability		<b>Sustainable transport</b> Reducing the need to travel, and encouraging low and zero carbon modes of transport to reduce emissions
	<b>Land use and wildlife</b> Protecting and restoring biodiversity and creating new natural habitats through good land use and integration into the built environment		<b>Zero waste</b> Reducing waste, reusing where possible, and ultimately sending zero waste to landfill
	<b>Sustainable water</b> Using water efficiently in buildings, farming and manufacturing. Designing to avoid local issues such as flooding, drought and water course pollution		<b>Zero carbon</b> Making buildings energy efficient and delivering all energy with renewable technologies

The Ten Principles of One Planet Living by the BioRegional Development Group (Source)

Over the last decade, building on a string of successful projects, the work of the Bioregional Development Group has spread with project on various continents aiming to create conditions for One Planet Living. Here is a short video (2:47mins) on *Will One Planet Living Work for You?* The Bioregional Development Group was also a partner in the



development of the Beddington Zero Emissions Ecovillage (BedZED) with the architect Bill Dunster.



BedZED Ecovillage (London)—Source

## *The REconomy Project*

In 2011, members of the Totnes Transition Town initiative and people at Schumacher College, got together with local authority representatives and other stakeholders to initiate a local/regionally focussed economic re-development project called the REconomy Project. A working group started to map the potential for the local economy and after a year published the *Totens & District Local Economic Blueprint* (more). This plan identifies a number of risks and opportunities for local economic development.



The REconomy Centre Totnes Source

Since then the REconomy Centre has been set up as a local focal point and logistic home for the REconomy Local Entrepreneur Forum which offers regional entrepreneurs a peer-support network and facilitates regional collaboration.



Here is a short video presentation (13mins) by Fiona Ward introducing the REconomy project. For a more in depth presentation on the different successes of the REconomy project, here is a longer presentation (40mins).



In 2015 the REconomy project launched a series of very practical and informative how-to-guides on the following subjects:

- REconomy Events Toolkit (more)
- REconomy Transition Enterprise Handbook (more), and
- REconomy Transition Core Resourcing (more)

[Note from Nenad Maljković: This kept evolving since 2015, here's recent manifesto-type article by Jay Tompt: Citizen-led Economic Transition—a four point framework for guiding action.



And now there is also **REconomy practitioners**, local to global virtual community of practice with worldwide ambitions that emerged from REconomy Project—see timeline on our landing page.]

### *The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE)*

BALLE was started in 2001 by Judy Wicks and a group of entrepreneur business owners who wanted to make a difference in their communities and local economy (more). Originally focused on the North-East of the USA and in particular Philadelphia, the network now supports localist initiatives around the country. BALLE asks the question *What is Real Prosperity?*



*“Localism is about building communities that are more healthy and sustainable—backed by local economies that are stronger and more resilient. It means we use regional resources to meet our needs—reconnecting eaters with farmers, investors with entrepreneurs, and business owners with the communities and natural places on which they depend. It recognizes that not one of us can do it*

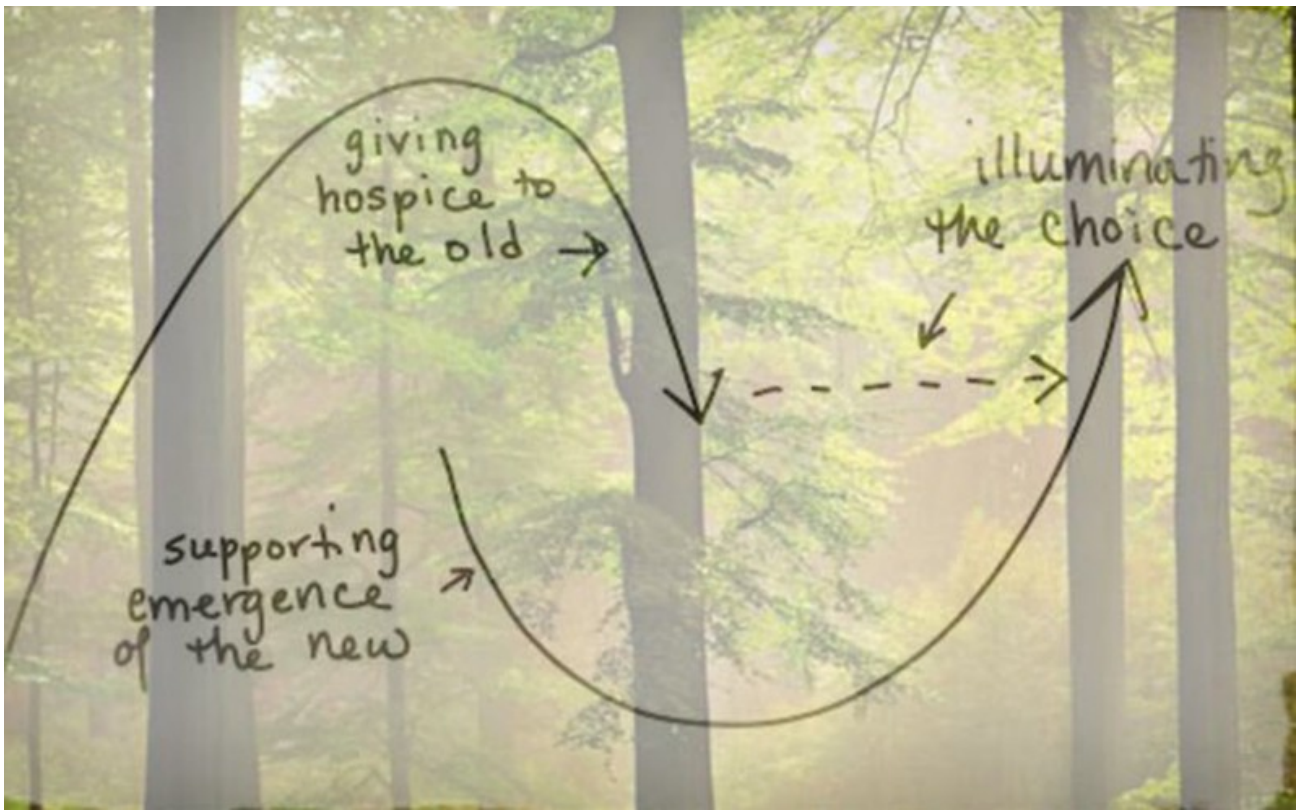
*alone and that we're all better off, when we're all better off."*

— Business Alliance for Local Living Economies 2016

Here is a longer presentation (30mins) of Judy Wicks speaking about *Local Living Economies* at the Bioneers by the Bay conference in 2012.



You can download a copy of BALLE's 2015 Impact Report [here](#).



BALLE's Theory of Change (Source)

## *The International Alliance for Localization*

The International Alliance for Localization (IAL) was founded in 2012 as a cross-cultural network of thinkers, activists and NGOs dedicated to exploring radically new visions of development and progress. You can find a full introduction to the work of the IAL [here](#). There are many synergistically related benefits that emerge from a collaborative strategy to re-localise economies within a context of global collaboration and solidarity (see graphic).





Here is a short video (7mins) of Helena Norberg-Hodge, an alternative Nobel Prize (Right Livelihood Award) recipient, and other members of the alliance explaining the urgent need for localization in a globalized world.

... [another example that is not mentioned in this 2015 curriculum excerpt, as it is of more recent origin, would be the Regenerative Communities Network connecting bioregional regenerative development projects around the world. Gaia Education has been a partner in the launch of one of those ReGen Hubs in Costa Rica in collaboration with UCI who are offering this online course in Spanish.]

[This is an (edited) excerpt from the ‘Ecological Design Dimension’ of Gaia Education’s online course in ‘Design for Sustainability’. The next installment of the ‘Ecological Dimension’ will start in mid January 2019. The material in this dimension was co-authored by Lisa Shaw, Michael Shaw, Ezio Gorio, and Daniel Christian Wahl, author of ‘Designing Regenerative Cultures’ and Head of Innovation and Design at Gaia Education.]

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