

LOCALIZATION: MOTIVATING TRANSITION WITH A CONSERVATION AESTHETIC

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We seek contacts with nature because we derive pleasure from them (A. Leopold, 1947)

Aldo Leopold is remembered most for his promotion of a land ethic. But in his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, he also suggests that environmental stewardship can be promoted through use of a conservation aesthetic. A land ethic, whether voluntary or mandatory, involves, in Leopold's words, "a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence," an obligation to practice restraint. Techniques exist for encouraging adoption of a land ethic. In fact, they seem to be the dominant interventions aimed at changing human behavior. Unfortunately these commonly used strategies of education, regulation and economic manipulation are rarely sufficient, sometimes unreliable and usually non-durable.

In contrast, a conservation aesthetic, which can be viewed as a form of intrinsic motivation, provides an affirmative strategy for encouraging environmental stewardship behavior. This aesthetic involves satisfaction derived from the benefits embedded in responding to, and living within, biophysical limits. This form of motivation easily goes unnoticed. This difficulty may come from the fact that intrinsic motivation is internal; its voice is quiet and easily overlooked in high-powered business and policy environments, in the glitter of modern commerce, and the vibrancy of everyday life in an industrial society. Yet examples of innately fulfilling efforts at sustainable living, shared transportation, local food provisioning and cooperative enterprises are springing up all over; likely harbingers of durable living.

In fact, being motivated by non-economic values and rewards is familiar to us all. People do many things which are wholesome and meaningful without any promise of immediate or tangible returns. Only recently has research focused on using this direct yet gentler means of encouraging the adoption of behaviors compatible with durable living. Data from over three decades of research provide insight on intrinsic satisfaction (see, for instance [1], [2] and [3]). These data indicate that people derive a series of distinct satisfactions from environmentally-appropriate behavior. The satisfactions are quite specific involving, for example, competence, frugality and participation. Furthermore, there is a strong and meaningful relationship between these satisfactions and specific environmental stewardship behaviors.

These findings have theoretical and practical relevance. Our theoretical understanding of why people bother to live within biophysical limits may be improved by investigating more than extrinsic inducement. Attention should be given to the personal satisfactions which people derive from the very same activities we so often try to manipulate them into doing. The

practical benefits involve the potential for intrinsic motivation to initiate, but more importantly, maintain or help restart commitment to environmental stewardship.

The theme under discussion here concerns deep, lasting contentment about durable living. The behaviors involved are vital to our individual and community survival (e.g., always learning new skills, being resourceful, helping others). It is thus essential that we not only be capable of carrying them out, but also find them satisfying to do. They are, in other words, intrinsically reinforcing. Individuals who did not find such endeavors satisfying would presumably devote less effort to them and hence be less effective. In this sense these patterns of satisfaction confer an adaptive advantage on the individuals who possess them, and to the communities these individuals inhabit. Thus, we might expect them to be relatively widespread within the population. They might of course take on different forms in subgroups of the community; nonetheless the hypothesized role and ubiquitous nature of such motives make them worthy of exploration in the context of localization. And to the extent that they lend themselves to being linked to durable living, the fact that they may be widespread makes them of crucial interest regardless of the energy and material descent path society ends up following.

But localization offers an even deeper version of this motivation. One form of human greatness is living life-as-a-work-of-art [4]. Transitioning rapidly to a much less energy-intensive existence will require that we weave together new and old skills, values and goals. As we do so, there will be opportunities for us to create new behavior patterns and then to reflect, at the end of day or week, on the effect and pattern of our accomplishments. Localization may entail a more ordinary, workaday existence but with extraordinary outcomes and deep reflections.

If we are to localize well then we must change much about our everyday behavior. Many of us will need to develop new competencies, creatively and repeatedly solve energy and resource problems, and develop new ways of interacting with our neighbors and friends. Fortunately, humans find the related pursuit of competence, frugality and participation to be intrinsically satisfying. This may be particularly true when we are tackling problems that are genuine and meaningful. Simply put, the creative efforts necessary for effective response to the emerging biophysical reality contain their own rewards.

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