

Principles of Localization: A Highly Tentative and Incomplete List

Definition: Localization is a process of social change brought on by unavoidable declines in available energy, as well by diminishing natural resource and waste sink capacities. Attention, individual and collective, is oriented toward direct relations, social and biophysical.

Economies center on locality yet are embedded regionally, nationally and internationally. Politics organize locally in the first instance, regionally, nationally and internationally in the second.

1) Diversity of Localities Principle: Each locality should solve as many of its own problems as possible and do so in ways suited to its own biophysical and social conditions. This will be a source of societal creativity.

Corollary--Oxygen Mask Principle: Localizers should organize their own local food and water supplies before re-organizing the country or the world. If higher levels of authority are needed to ensure local provisioning, then one organizes at those levels. Otherwise, one looks inward to local capacities, local infrastructure and local needs.

2) Semi-permeable Boundaries Principle : Localizers should deliberately construct boundaries for the two-way flow of materials, money, people, and ideas. That flow must be managed so as to maximize the integrity of the local system first. Where flows cannot be so managed, higher levels of organization must be established.

3) Place-based Decisionmaking Principle: When critical life-support systems are at risk, key decisions should reside with those who demonstrate a connection and commitment to place, not with those who are placeless.

This “residential” principle says that people who live and work in a community are more likely to represent community values, be dependent on the coherence and durability of the community in place, and know that place.

Corollary #1 -- Internal Dependence: Government(s) should give preference to businesses that demonstrate a structural dependence on the local economy.

Corollary #2 Minimal Money: Participants in a localizing process should minimize the role of abstract financial instruments, even money itself, especially to the extent such instruments connect to large-scale, centralized systems (e.g., the global banking system) and disconnect people from the communities and ecosystems they depend on.

4) Subsidiarity Principle: Decisionmaking should be at the lowest possible level, that is, as close to affected peoples and direct resource use as possible.

5) Security/Subsistence Principle: A locality should subsist, as much as possible, from the produce—its food, shelter and transport and associated water and energy—of that locality and its immediate region, and should take measures to ensure such production for the long term. The objective is human security—material and social—rather than revenue generation or profit.

6) Artisanal Principle: When productive, locally-oriented enterprises--“businesses”, private or public or common, profit-making or not--develop products for trade, that production should

- i. find a scale of production optimal to a locality or collection of localities, that is, a scale that is minimally dependent on external supplies and markets and maximally dependent on local labor, natural resources, finance;
- ii. build in brakes on expansion or contraction that otherwise militates against optimal scale;
- iii. develop skills first, technologies second, and minimize technologies that replace people and their special skills;
- iv. look for “inefficiencies”—measures that limit short term gain in exchange for long-term secure production and, hence, human security;
- v. find seasonalities, intermittencies, and constructive ambiguities to build variability and innovation into the business structure; and
- vii. minimize commodification and the role of money and maximize relations—human, natural, communal—that are simultaneously social and commercial, problem solving and problem defining.

Corollary--Potato Principle : When commodities are produced for trade (internal to the locality, and external), they should be deliberately chosen so as to 1) lend themselves to only local production, processing, storing, consuming and/or disposing, and 2) be ill-suited to long-distance transport and long-term storage.

8) Land Access Principle: Access to land for self-reliant provisioning (e.g., food, water, sewage, fuel) is a fundamental right and should be institutionalized at all levels of government and governance. Land for self-provisioning is a public trust and should be so treated, legally, politically, and economically; it should not enter into market relations.

9) Clay Road Principle: Localizers should build resilient, locally adaptable systems of transport, water, food and energy. The superstructure—e.g., cars and trucks, railroads, boats, barges—is less critical than the infrastructure—the roadbed and waterway. Likely results of locally provisioned infrastructure are slower transport, less exotic foods, and less water and energy consumption overall, on the one hand, and more reliable systems on the other.

10) Walkabout Principle: Because localized economies will focus their productive energies internally, localizers must counteract insularity by institutionalizing exploration, whether it's travel to the next community over or around the world.