

ReLocalizing Your Urban Lifestyle

How to ReBuild Community Connections

by Joanne Poyourow

“Relocalization is not an If but a When.”

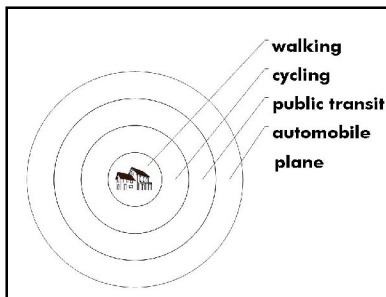
-- Aaron Nuline

<http://www.poweringdown.blogspot.com/> 9/11/06

ReLocalization is a really Cool concept in this age of global warming. As we contemplate how to achieve lower carbon emissions, CFL bulbs and recycling are great starts. But the real answers lie much deeper. Reducing our carbon footprint will mean – quite frankly – significantly reducing the amount of fossil fuels we burn.

We must become mindful of the power we use – both electricity and engine power. Reducing our carbon footprint means we’ll reduce our travel radius. Use cars less. Reduce the distance food and goods need to travel from production to consumption. Bring it all much closer to home.

Consider for a moment Bart Anderson’s diagram of concentric circles drawn around your home. This diagram allows us to consider what resources are accessible within our travel distance, using different forms of transportation. As the circles draw inward, the modes of transportation become less fossil-fuel intensive, thus simultaneously less greenhouse gas intensive.



Superimpose upon this diagram the concept of sources – who supplies our food, goods, and services? (see large diagram on last page). Are we relying on huge multi-national corporations, or are we supporting local businesses? What services are we using from the public sector (city, county, state, federal), or from community associations (clubs, churches, volunteer groups, etc.)? How much could we be producing ourselves, together with family and friends, in some form of urban

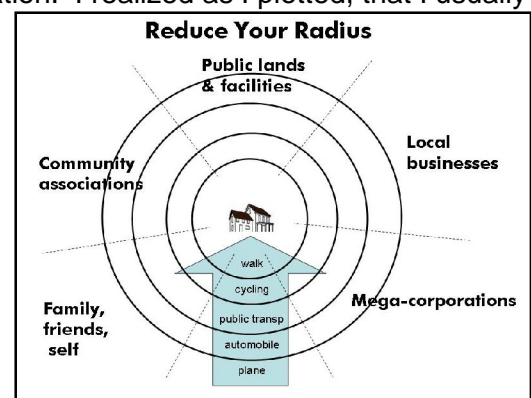
homesteading?

Think of your rounds for the week. Grocery shopping, errands, school and office, the usual grind... plot yours on the big diagram provided. For me, Vons is within walking distance, but it’s a mega-corporation. Inner circle, bottom right. Our family uses both the Los Angeles and the El Segundo public libraries, one accessible by bike, and one only by car. Public sector, two different rings.

When you’re done plotting your rounds, it’s evaluation time. How can we improve? How can we ReLocalize?

1. Reduce Your Radius. Moving from an outer circle to an inner circle reduces the fossil fuel consumption / greenhouse gas emissions of your transportation. I realized as I plotted, that I usually visit my extended family by using the car. But it *is* possible for me to get there by public transport – and it would be one ring better. Returning to the library example above, for my family to use the library within walking distance would be preferable, because it’s on an inner circle.

2. Localize Your Sources. A great example is local food. You walk into Trader Joes and pick up two bottles of wine, one from Australia and one from the California Central Coast. The one from Australia traveled halfway around the world, by means of fossil fuels, in cargo ship or airplane emitting greenhouse gasses the entire route. The bottle from Central Coast traveled much less. Yet so often



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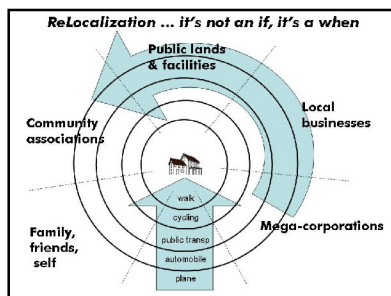
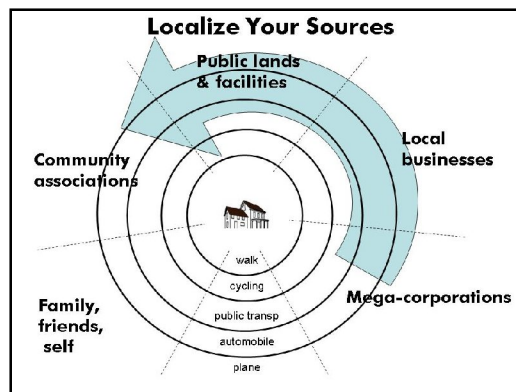
we think nothing of grabbing the Australian one, because we perceive it as “cheaper.” Cheaper takes on different meaning when we consider more than simply the cash in our pocketbook.

In January, that out-of-season red bell pepper came from Chile. To reach your market basket, most likely it took a ride on a jet plane. Can you forego the “I want it now”? Wait to eat fresh peppers until late summer, and savor a delicious local one sun-ripened in Oxnard or Irvine, at far less expense to our atmosphere, and thus our children’s future.

Multi-national corporations operate on the concept of globalization, obtaining raw materials and assembly labor wherever these are cheapest to the bottom line. That bottom line doesn’t include the environmental impact of fossil fuels consumption nor greenhouse gas emissions.

In transitioning to a less-fossil-fuel-intensive world, we need to consider the **embodied energy** – the quantity of energy required to manufacture, package, warehouse, transport – for every single item, from food to clothing to building materials. Seek items which have less embodied energy.

Local food and locally produced goods require far less transportation costs than imported. Veggies bought at farmer’s market, with less transportation to market, little warehousing, and no packaging, have very low embodied energy when compared to their conventional cousins at Vons.



On your diagram, Localizing your Sources appears as “unwinding” the mess. Thus ReLocalizing your lifestyle is represented by a spiral – simultaneously “unwinding” and moving inward on the diagram.

The ReLocalizing diagram can be used for planning as well. Where should I take my next vacation? EcoTravel in Costa Rica? Bicycling Laguna Beach?

Here we smack up against culture change – the idea of entitlement. When a friend brags of jetting off to Paris for a week, current cultural norms say I should act impressed. But in this age of global warming

awareness, I find myself thinking about how our twisted notion of appropriate vacations is raping the environmental future of our children and grandchildren. Regardless of how “eco” that hideaway might be, regardless of how many “carbon credits” the traveler might buy, air travel remains one of our potent greenhouse gas polluters. Our society regards frequent flyer miles as a bonus, when they should in fact be a scourge. Thus I invite you to re-think: seek better alternatives for anything on your diagram which falls to the “plane” exterior of your concentric circles.

As we spiral inward, a curious thing happens. We draw closer to home. Our sources draw closer to home. Home, our little Place on the planet, regains its preciousness. Suddenly, our neighborhood, our neighbors, become important again. The connections, severed by the distance and dash of the age of the automobile, begin to rebuild. We begin to reconnect, with our city, with our block, with new friends we’ve met just across the street or over the fence.

- Get involved with groups close to home.
 - Adapt tastes to what is available, not what the media advertise.
 - Do chores via the phone, Internet or postal system.
 - Explore the local ecosystems and natural history.
 - Try making what you need at home (food or music for example).
- Bart Anderson, “Adapting [Permaculture] Zones and Sectors for the City.”

ReLocalization Resources

- "10 Reasons to Eat Local Food," http://fogcity.blogs.com/jen/2005/08/10_reasons_to_e.html
- "Why we must give up flying," by Nicholas Crane. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/main.jhtml?xml=/travel/2006/07/29/etnofly29.xml&page=1>
- *Superbia: 31 Ways to Create Sustainable Neighborhoods*, by Dan Chiras and David Wann
- Diagrams adapted from: Bart Anderson, "Adapting [Permaculture] Zones and Sectors for the City," *Greenest Before Dawn* http://www.cwo.com/~bart/essay/s/z_s_urban.htm

Urban Bicycling Resources

- "How to Not Get Hit by Cars: Important lessons on Bicycle Safety" by Michael Bluejay <http://BicycleSafe.com>
- "Owning the Road Rules: Sane biking in a car-crazy world" by Julie Hanus, *Utne Reader* May-June 07 (not available online)
- *The art of cycling : a guide to bicycling in 21st-century America*, by Robert Hurst. Book available through Los Angeles Public Library
- *How To Live Well Without Owning a Car*, by Chris Balish. Book available through Los Angeles Public Library
- Bikely.com and RouteSlip.com allow users to plan, map, and share their favorite routes.

Reflections on Sustainable Transportation

From "Our Sustainable Transportation Day" by Joanne Poyourow
<http://legacyla.net/transformation/?p=127>

I've realized that abandoning the automobile will mean several things:

1) **We've fallen in love with Home.**

In contemporary Los Angeles, the pressing number of "things to do" - from working outside the home, to dining out, entertainment, children's activities, etc. - leaves most houses in our neighborhood standing empty.

Boredom is the state of longing to be elsewhere than where one is. When Home is calling powerfully, Away holds little attraction. Falling in love with Home means that our Home contains enough interest and vital activity to sustain all family members, body, mind and soul.

2) **We've built community connections.**

Local has meaning for us now - local friends, local markets (the local farmer's market), the local library, local community networks.

Fractal studies teach us that minute portions of the universe contain reflections of the whole. Our local community can contain everything we truly need - friends for all family members, sources for many of our ongoing needs. It's up to us to seek them out, find them, fold them into our habits, and adapt to them.

3) **We've trained our bodies for a more physical life** - walking, biking (with accompanying carrying, lifting).

Yes, you could argue that bicycle transportation is not necessarily available to the very young, the elderly, or the handicapped. (But most of us are not physically limited - why then are we still tied to our internal combustion engines?) For those who are limited, I invite you to get creative. Burlys and tagalongs for the juniors. Tricycles, tandems and more for adults.

Can't carry packages? Check out communities and subcultures which are already adjusted to bikes (Santa Barbara and Portland subcultures) and the diversity of baskets and frames people have already created. Solutions exist - find them, use them.

4) **We've reformed our time concept.**

Instead of three minutes to get to the library, I must now allot a half hour. My youngest child's stamina governs the number of blocks and the number of destinations we can cover. The urgency of "I want it now" and "I want it all" have melted away. There is joy in the doing, satisfaction in the present moment, delight in the wind in your hair. There are priorities, choices, and heartfelt Value in the selections made.

We cannot get to multiple venues near-simultaneously. But we have learned that we no longer want to. We've said ENOUGH, we've consciously stepped aside from the rat race: Been there, done that, no thank you. For at least that one precious day, we've lived closer to the lifestyle of which we dream.

ReLocalization ... it's not an if, it's a when

