

A Transformation of the Sense of Belonging

Daniel Christian Wahl

Daniel Christian Wahl, author of *Designing Regenerative Cultures*, is one of the leading catalysts and thinkers of the movement for social and environmental regeneration. He works around the world as a consultant, educator and activist with NGOs, businesses, governments, and change agents.

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I was struck by a comment that Joseph Murphy made earlier about us being isolated from a sense of belonging. Our ancestors lived with a deep sense of belonging to the places they were custodians of. And more than that they believed themselves to be expressions of these places, rather than owners. If you believe that you own the place where you live, it's a commodity and you lose any sense of belonging and being a part of place.

When we talk about imagination and social regeneration, we are talking about a transformation in the sense of belonging, reconnecting to the belief that when functioning at your highest potential you are an expression of the place where you belong – a healing, nurturing, custodian expression of that place. Regeneration is a pattern that is profoundly linked to how life creates conditions conducive to life. Life has made this planet more abundant for all life through diversification and subsequent integration of the generated diversity at higher levels of complexity, more often than not through collaboration. , . So, we are talking about reconnecting and tapping into the deep taproot of awareness that we are life, making the place where we live conducive to more life. That's really our evolutionary role.

We basically need to come home to place. The only way to restore a sense of belonging and jump back into healing the social, ecological, and regional economic spheres is through falling in love with the places that we inhabit again and going into the journey of re-inhabitation.

Over a hundred years ago Patrick Geddes wrote a book called *Cities in Evolution* where he put forward the idea that any town or city needs to be planned in a regional context. The only way to create regenerative cities is to connect cities deeply into the hinterland, following the path of the watershed from mountain to sea. Then we can pay attention to where development can happen and where it can't happen to preserve biodiversity and the vitality of local ecosystems.

The starting point for identifying a bioregion is the watershed of a local river. But its important not to get too hung up on boundaries because in nature boundaries are fluid places of connection. Carol Sanford, one of the wise elders in the regenerative movement speaks of emotional attachments to a region as a 'lifeshed'. We will all have had the experience of driving away from the place where you live and at a certain distance (crossing a forest or a river or a

little hill) realizing that 'I'm away ... out of the shire'. That's our bioregion – the human scale place where we can focus our healing capacity and our will to be of service. It is a geophysical territory as well as a shared terrain of regional consciousness.

Once we focus our will on the specificity of people and place, and we work on enabling individual and collective potential, then we can most fully express our own individual gifts and potential in service to the larger context we live in: our team, our society, and also the place. In the context of focusing on social regeneration it's important not to be trapped by mental categories that make us work on social, ecological, and economic issues in separation. The reality is that they are all connected. Regeneration is about giving people a new sense of meaning through companionship not just with the human family in a unique bio-cultural context, but with the whole community of life in that particular place. The only way to heal the planet is place by place and in community!

Almost 200 years ago Goethe said that he who doesn't see nature everywhere sees her nowhere in the right light. When I sit with that thought for long enough, I come to an uncomfortable place where I have to admit that all the technology on the planet is also part of nature. And that includes the extremes that I don't like. Nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons, for example, are also a part of that transforming biophysical unity that is a manifestation of consciousness informing matter.

In a beautiful small book, *Saving Appearances*, Owen Barfield wrote about the original participation in life shared by all indigenous people with their deep connection to place providing their sense of meaning and connection. Walking through the forest and seeing a light beam hitting a dewdrop is experienced as seeing a fairy diamond, a direct meaningful communication from the more than human realm. Our indigenous ancestors and elder brothers live in original participation in the wholeness of Life, rather than seeing nature as something that is separate from the observer. Then, through the period of the enlightenment, we came to see through the lens of the Cartesian subject-object separation. This wasn't some detour from true knowledge, and we don't need to just turn around and go back to that original participation. We need now to enter a new synthesis – what Owen Barfield referred to as the phase of Final Participation. On this next turn of the evolutionary journey we have to ask how do we harvest the best of modern technology and the insights brought by the age of separation - the Anthropocene - and move swiftly into the age of 'interbeing' - or the Symbiocene (as Glenn Albrecht calls it)?

The interesting thing is that the rise of increasingly destructive impacts of technology and of the end of the era of empire happened at the same time we were becoming conscious of the planetary situation. We saw this beautiful pale blue dot from outer space, and fell in love with earth, seeing what a precious jewel it is. All of those earth Systems sciences, Gaia theory, James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis's important work – all of this brought a re-enchantment through science of our relationship with Earth.

This leads into a deeper understanding of regeneration. Several thinkers, including Carol Sanford, speak of four modern paradigms operating simultaneously at the moment. One is the classic neo-liberal capitalist approach to an economics of extraction. Another, recognizing that the extractive economy is creating problems, seeks to arrest the disorder and hopefully do a bit better. The next paradigm is to bring good into the world - net-positive impact - which is wonderful. And finally, is regeneration which is one step further than doing good. Without denying the other three paradigms, regeneration is about building capacity in the individual and the collective – and through the collective, building capacity in place, the wider collective. This fourth paradigm works with the community of life, not just the human community, as it expresses its potential, its essence, and its uniqueness, in ways that contribute to the healing vitality of the whole. The focus is not on the outcomes or solutions, but on our capacity to be humble conscious participants in the evolutionary process.

I invite everybody to look at their region, and spend half a day making a list of all the good projects going on there. Everything, not just ecology projects, but also social, economic, people caring for elderly people – everything! In each place there are things going wonderfully right, where people are really caring and building regenerative culture. But they are not yet seeing each other as part of a movement. Once this begins to coalesce, people will see that the guy working for the elderly and the guy working on local re-wilding or cleaning up the local river are part of the same impulse of life coming back to life.

Instead of focusing on problems regenerative work focuses on the potential of place and community and people. The way to integrate all the knowledge of original participation into final participation is to let the power of each discipline (sociology, psychology, biology, geology) tell us about our region so that we can learn. Let the poets and dancers and musicians make us fall in love again with place. And then we can live into our potential as a healing species again.