relocalization.network

Conduct a Community Inventory

A Guide for Relocalizing our Communitites

Synopsis

Relocalization starts with knowing your community. Where does your water come from? What is the basis of your community's economy? What was your locality like 100 years ago? Where is your community headed in the future?

By mapping your community's social, economic and ecological characteristics, you will have a valuable resource from which you can identify opportunities and constraints to Relocalization. Also, the very process of creating this inventory will get community members talking to one another about their shared hopes and concerns. Once completed, the information you collect can be presented to the public and to elected officials to help spur new projects and policies supporting Relocalization.

Roles

If your community does not already have an organization involved in Relocalization, you can conduct a community inventory by forming an ad hoc committee:

Committee Chair(s)	Convene meetings, facilitate and monitor the inventory process
Researchers	Gather the information
Writers and Designers	Present the information in a form that's easy to understand and distribute, such as a report or a website.

Time Frame

2 to 4 months

Tools

Telephone, computer, word processing or database software

Project Outline

Process:

1. Identify the group that will conduct the inventory and present the findings; assign roles and tasks.

2. Discuss what you want the end product to be: Who will read it? How will it be used?

3. Discuss and decide on a research plan: What is the scope of the research? How shall research data be categorized? What is the timeframe?

4. Conduct the research. If your group has enough time and interest, try to personally interview people in your community (elected officials, business leaders, community leaders) who can answer key questions, or point you in the right direction to get the information you want. Be sure to hold regular check-in sessions to address challenges, monitor progress, and, if necessary, adjust the research plan.

5. Review the research results; you may want to do this as a group, or designate individuals to conduct the review. Decide which research results to include in a report, and how they will be organized and presented to the public.

6. Develop conclusions from the research: Your data will be more useful if you draw some key findings from it that other community members can quickly absorb. These findings should point the way to actions that support Relocalization.

7. Develop a research report; choose whatever forms work best for your needs. For example, you may want develop a web-site or online database to share your information with your community, or write a formal report to present the key findings to your City Council, or both.

8. Follow-up: Use the data and findings of your research to start a new process of developing Relocalization projects.

Inventory Items:

We've suggested a structure and questions for your research, but ultimately you should use a structure that makes the most sense to your group. The level of detail of your research will depend on the resources of your group and the scope you set in your research plan.

BASIC NEEDS: FOOD

- How do people get food in your community? Where does the food in your community come from? (For example, within city limits, within the region, within the state/province, from national sources, and from international sources.)

- How is food supplied to retailers? Who owns and who regulates the flow of food into your community? (For example, modern regional supermarkets often have "just-in-time delivery" contracts with wholesalers that leave only a few days' worth of food in stock.)

- What are opportunities and constraints in your community for community gardens, farmers markets and subscription farms? What public or private bodies work with these food sources?

BASIC NEEDS: WATER

- How do people and businesses use water in your community? Who are the biggest users? How is water supplied to your community? Where does it come from, and who owns and regulates supply and distribution? Does the water utility have programs that encourage people and businesses to conserve water and use it wisely?

- Is your water system privatized? If not, are the plans or pressures to privatize it? What industries or other communities in your region may become interested in your water source in the future?

BASIC NEEDS: ENERGY

- How much electricity is consumed by your community, and where does it come from? Who uses it, and for what? How much electricity is generated within your community, and from what sources?

- Is your electric utility owned by the local government or has it been privatized? Does it offer options to purchase electricity from renewable sources? Are there utility or government programs to encourage households and businesses to invest in renewable power?

- How much motor fuel (gasoline, petro-diesel, biodiesel) and natural gas is consumed in your community? How does it come to your community and where is it distributed? What public bodies regulate its supply and sale?

- What are the opportunities and constraints in your community for procuring, selling and using biofuels? Do large employers or your municipality have policies promoting or requiring the use of biofuels?

- What are the opportunities and constraints for developing small-scale electricity generation, combined heating and power (CHP) systems, and district heating and cooling systems[1]? Does your electric utility allow distributed generation and net metering?

BASIC NEEDS: WASTE MANGEMENT

- How much solid waste does your community produce, where does it go, and what happens to it? How much of your community's waste is recycled, and where do recycled materials go? Are there facilities for recycling and reusing construction materials?

- Does your community recover any energy from its waste? (For example, some communities generate electricity via waste incinerators or landfill methane collectors.)

- How is your community's wastewater managed? What are the opportunities and constraints in your community for bioremediating wastewater?

---

[1] See the International Energy Agency's District Heating and Cooling page at http://www.iea-dhc.org/.

TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE

- How do people get around your community? (There are many different ways of measuring this, for example: How many people commute by public transit, carpool, individual car, bicycle and walking? What percentage of households in your community do not regularly use cars?)

- What are the opportunities and constraints in your community for expanding non-car transportation, such as public transit, bicycling and walking? Are there businesses or organizations that offer car-sharing or ridesharing?

- What are the dominant land uses in your community? For new developments, does your local government allow and encourage: designing for public transit, bicycling and walking; mixing of residential and commercial uses in new developments; and "green building" construction practices?

ECONOMY

- What is the current basis of the local economy? (For example, how reliant is it on commerce, manufacturing, importing and exporting, the service economy, the information economy, tourism, resource extraction, etc.) What examples of small- and medium-scale manufacturing currently exist in your area, and how does this compare to what existed in the past?

- What kinds of financial institutions serve your community? How many are locally-owned, or are credit unions or community development banks? Is there a local currency project in your community?

- What are the locally-owned businesses in your community, and what do they do? What opportunities and constraints exist for re-starting or expanding local manufacturing and retailing of basic goods?

- Are any industries in your community practicing industrial ecology[2]? Are there opportunities for local firms and governments to pursue industrial symbiosis (also known as "eco-industrial parks"?

SOCIAL CAPITAL

- What are the demographic characteristics of your community? (For example, age, race, sex, income, profession, etc.) How have these characteristics changed over time, and what are the trends for the future?

- Which members of the community are actively engaged in civic affairs? Which groups are under-represented?

- What community organizations and social service organizations are active in your community? What do they do? (For example, social clubs, religious organizations, civic organizations, community development organizations, etc.)

- What are the public institutions in your community? (For example, schools, libraries, museums, hospitals, etc.) What kinds of community programs do they have?

---

[2] Industrial ecology is a system of industrial resource management wherein wastes are seen as reusable resources. Industrial symbiosis describes the application of industrial ecology practices among multiple firms. See International Society for Industrial Ecology, http://www.is4ie.org/.

GOVERNANCE

- What is the jurisdiction and what are the key responsibilities of your local government. Who are your elected officials, and who are their supporters? What advisory bodies, such as commissions and working groups, does your local government have that are open to the public for membership?

- What are the key policies in your local government that affect energy, transportation and land use? Learn about the most important policies your community's zoning ordinances and land use regulations.

- Identify local government policies, initiatives and programs that support or work against Relocalization: locally-owned businesses; renewable and local energy; public transit, bicycling, and walking; urban farming.

ECOLOGY

- In which ecoregion[3] is your community? What are the watersheds in your community?

- What are the annual weather patterns in your community? Which months are the driest, wettest, hottest, coldest, etc.? What are the growing seasons for different kinds of foods?

- What is your community's ecological footprint[4]?

- What are the bodies of water (streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes, seas) in and around your community? Where are their sources? If they are polluted, where does the pollution come from? What animal and plant species are native to those waters?

- How has the natural landscape in and around your community changed in recent history? Where have wetlands been filled and streams moved into underground culverts? Where have lakes been created by dams, or shorelines moved by construction or natural changes? Where have hills been flattened?

- What natural resources —metals, fossil fuels, trees, fish, etc.— are extracted in your area? Where are they processed, and where do they go? Who owns the companies that extract, process and sell these resources?

HISTORY

- When was your community settled, why, and by whom? What were first economic activities there, and how have they changed over the years? What is the political and cultural history of your community?

- Was your community ever largely self-sufficient, and if so, when? How did people in your community meet their basic needs before the modern era? Were there indigenous peoples in your area prior to the current settlement? How did they live? Are there still indigenous people in your area today?

- Who and what are the historical resources in your community? Who were the key community and business leaders over the last fifty years? If they're still alive, what are their thoughts on how your community has changed over time?

---

[3] Ecoregions are areas of general similarity in ecosystems and in the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources. See http://www.epa.gov/wed/pages/ecoregions.htm for the United States and http://www.ec.gc.ca/soer-ree/English/Framework/NarDesc/canada_e.cfm for Canada.

[4] There are a number of personal footprint calculators available online, but calculation of a community's footprint is a detailed undertaking that requires targeted research. Visit www.footprintnetwork.org and www.rprogress.org for more information.

Resources

Community Asset Mapping: Tools, publications and other resources available from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html.
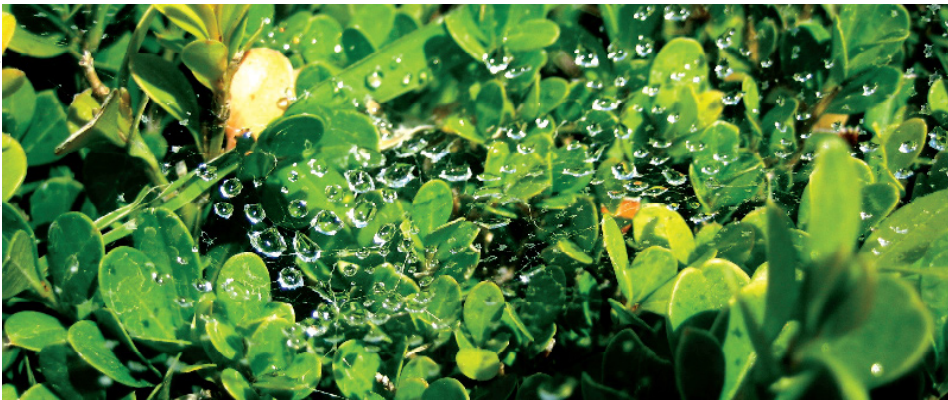
Sample Community Inventories: The City of Berkeley, California developed an in-depth, comprehensive inventory focused on sustainability, available online at: http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/sustainable/community/sustainableberkeley.html

Local Food: see http://www.localharvest.org/ for farmers markets and small farms (U.S. only), and 100-Mile Diet at http://100milediet.org/ for more on eating locally.

Local Currencies: see Local Currency Directory at http://www.smallisbeautiful.org/local_currencies.html.

Local Business: see Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, http://www.livingeconomies.org/.

relocalization.network

Get Involved

Relocalization Network Team

Post Carbon Institute

network@postcarbon.org

Tel. +1 604 736 9000

#201 - 640 West Broadway

Vancouver, B.C., V5Z 1G4 Canada

www.relocalize.net

www.postcarbon.org