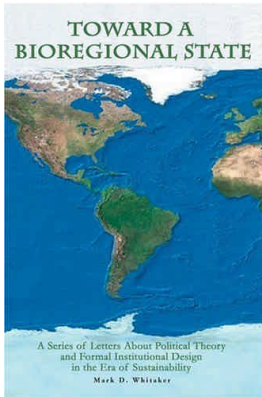


Toward a Bioregional State



International Sociological Association's World Congress of Sociology, Durban, South Africa, Summer 2006.

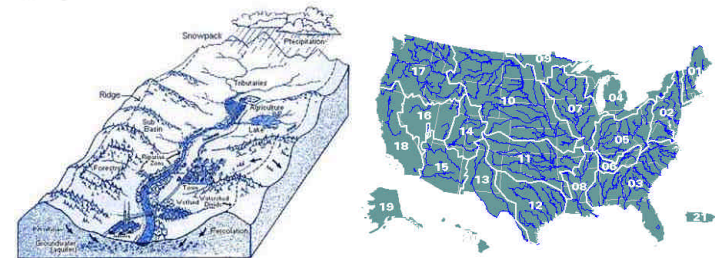
Presenter/Author: Mark D. Whitaker, author of *Toward A Bioregional State: A Series of Letters on Political Theory and Formal Institutional Design in the Era of Sustainability* (2005, ISBN: 0595346146)

The first attempt at proposing "green constitutional engineering" as a route towards sustainability. (Elaboration below; read 25 pages for free.)

Session: Environmental Justice for Sustainable Development

Talk: "An Introduction to the Bioregional State: Adapting Enlightenment Political Theory and Formal Institutional Design for the Era of Sustainability"

Environmental sociologist Mark D. Whitaker is a comparative historical researcher on the politics of environmental degradation and sustainability. *Toward A Bioregional State* is his novel approach to development and to sustainability. He proposes that instead of sustainability being an issue of population scale, managerial economics, or technocratic planning, an overhaul of formal democratic institutions is required. This is because environmental degradation has more to do with the biased interactions of formal institutions and informal corruption. Because of corruption, we have environmental degradation. Current formal democratic institutions of states are forms of informal gatekeeping, and as such, intentionally maintain democracy as ecologically out of sync. He argues that we are unable to reach sustainability without a host of additional ecological checks and balances. These ecological checks and balances would demote corrupt uses of formal institutions by removing capacities for gatekeeping against democratic feedback. Sustainability is a politics that is already here—only waiting to be formally organized.



Bioregional democracy (or the Bioregional State) is a set of electoral reforms and commodity reforms designed to force the political process in a democracy to better represent concerns about the economy, the body, and environmental concerns (e.g. water quality), toward developmental paths that are locally prioritized and tailored to different areas for their own specific interests of sustainability and durability. This movement is variously called bioregional democracy, watershed cooperation, or bioregional representation, or one of various other similar names—all of which denote democratic control of a natural commons and local jurisdictional dominance in any economic developmental path decisions—while not removing more generalized civil rights protections of a larger national state.

CONCLUSION, BIOREGIONAL STATE POINTS:

So the points left out of Enlightenment democratic theory are:

- (1) the empirically durable human-environmental contexts of all governmental arrangements,
- (2) ideas about the state as an economic developmentalist organization,
- (3) the issue of the innate geographical particularities of citizenship and political concern,

(4) ways to check and balance gatekeeping powers of informal political parties on the state, and

(5) that political power is more than the formal state—it is exercised in conjunction with scientific, financial, and consumptive/economic organizational power as well.

The four types of checks and balances:

(1) the more typical Western democratic theory issues that discuss only "formal-to-formal" institutional checks and balances; more are required for a sustainable bioregional state.

(2) Additionally in the bioregional state, three other levels of checks and balances are required: other "informal-to-informal" checks and balances entirely ignored in existing democratic theory that assure a competitive party context of informal factions is durable and kept in place formally, because only heightened party competition assures that the full electorate (instead of only the partial electorate) are valued, and that party corruption can be checked.

(3) Furthermore, the other level of checks and balances required are the "informal-to-formal" checks and balances that keep particular informal election outcome issues from being allowed to influence and bias the formal frameworks in unrepresentative clientelistic ways. This means having a flexible formal framework that interacts to check and balance against the several particular informal election outcomes, to assure that the "informal to informal" checks and balances between parties are maintained in operation in all situations instead of demoted. This type of "informal-to-formal" is seen in both formal institutional design issues (like the flexible cameralism and flexible executive branch issues described in more detail in the Constitution of Sustainability) as well as in the voting framework (proportional representation with a majoritarian allotment) that makes sure that all parties are forced to compete for 100% of the full electorate instead of being able to operate by excluding large numbers of the electorate because of the gatekeeping of the political agenda by party frameworks.

(4) The fourth check and balance framework is organized around ecological and consumer issues: ranging from securing public consumer choices against an enforced corporate imposed consumption of singular items, to enhancing ecological feedback from particular geographic areas as a method against less representative developmentalism.

Six points about the bioregional state:

1. The false sense that the state is only a 'social' organization; the bioregional state is a developmental organization and a political feedback mechanism for making developmentalism democratic and sustainable.

2. States are always situated within particular ecologies or across particular ecologies.

3. Nothing called an abstract or individualized citizen in practice: citizenship and its politics are historically bioregional and watershed specific, influenced by human health, ecological, and economic externalities that are shared ecologically and which impinge upon the people and ecologies involved.

4. A people's selfinterest is additionally geographically specific and protective of a particular geography, leading to an environmental proxy based politics where human health, ecological, and economic externalities from ecological degradation are effected in human political pressures.

5. An environmental proxy based politics is part of the human condition, instead of a novelty of the 20th-21st century. It has only been expressed through other discourses and manners in the past with the ideas and techniques available.

6. In terms of the bioregional state, affirmative institutions are ones that are designed jurisdictionally to be ecologically aware and facilitative of the particularities of environmental proxy politics—influenced geographically in its orientation by bioregional and watershed variegation. Formal state institutions historically have been created under "political slack" instead of full representation because all existing states have been hinterland based. In the past 50 years, the removal of the hinterland changes the political dynamic towards inexorable environmental amelioration pressures in formal policy and formal institutions because it changes the pressures of informal politics from exit to voice, facilitating more environmental proxy politics.

Locations for reading:

www.amazon.com (table of contents, Chap. #1-#3, random full book search, reviews) or

www.iuniverse.com (foreword, introduction, table of contents, Chapters #1-#3)