

Glocalization

by Skip Wenz

I call it the “glocal economy.” By that I mean the blended global and local economies in which we are all embedded.

Some of the products we consume are produced locally, and the money we pay for them circulates locally. This benefits our own communities.

Most of the products we consume are produced elsewhere, increasingly in foreign countries. While expenditures for foreign goods confer some benefits on those who produce them, they mostly enrich the top management of transnational corporations and the international financiers who invest in them.

As more of society’s wealth is transferred to these “globalizers,” less is available for everyone else. There is no motivation for those who are benefiting from this trend to change its direction, so it is up to rest of us to look out for ourselves—or, more effectively, to look out for one another.

One way to resist globalization is through “localization”—strengthening our local economies. I espouse localization, but before I discuss some specific steps we can take, I want to interject a note of caution: localization is tricky business.

External trade, the exchange of currency for goods from other locales, allows us to enjoy a much higher standard of living than we could have if we were reliant entirely on local production. Would you do without a computer or medicines? These cannot be manufactured in every small town.

Then there’s the economics of localization. In my town in Oregon, the national-chain grocery store Trader Joe’s, which is owned in Germany, sells Tom’s of Maine toothpaste for about \$3.50 per tube. Our local coop grocery store sells it for about \$7.00. While I support the coop, and might pay the higher price to support a local manufacturer, Tom’s toothpaste is owned in . . . Maine.

If I want to support my local economy, I can recycle the money I save buying toothpaste at Trader Joe’s into tips for a local who, ironically, serves me a cup of Columbian coffee.

Getting localization right entails more than going on automatic and supporting only local businesses (which is, in fact, impossible). We can only counterbalance our overly globalized economy by creating an intelligently glocalized economy—consuming selectively and modestly from the global marketplace while strengthening local economies wherever possible.

Begin by consuming far fewer imported manufactured goods, and if possible do not go into debt to purchase them. Debt is slavery, or at least indentured servitude. Goods acquired on credit give you the illusory trappings of wealth while impoverishing you and making others rich.

Along with consuming less and eschewing debt, you can transfer wealth from the globalized economy to your community by removing your money from large national and transnational banks and putting it into local banks—especially credit unions which are not-for-profit and usually invest your savings locally.

Another way to build community wealth is to create or participate in a local currency system. It is perfectly legal for local communities to issue and exchange their own currency, so long as it does not resemble U.S. Treasury bills. Local currency, also called “scrip,” can be exchanged for goods and services just like “regular” money, but it can only be spent in the local community where individuals and businesses have agreed to accept it.

Those accepting scrip can control how much they take in based on how much they think they can spend. For example, a grocery store might accept up to \$10 worth of scrip for each purchase, collecting the balance of the receipt in dollars. The store can then exchange its scrip for local farm produce or services such as accounting or carpentry. Communities from Ithaca, New York to Corvallis, Oregon

have issued scrip in recent years to help relieve cash shortfalls and build their local economies. To learn more, visit the E.F. Schumacher Society’s web site: www.smallisbeautiful.org.

The practices that strengthen local economies, such as consuming fewer imported manufactured goods and buying local produce, tend to benefit the environment by reducing packaging and transportation impacts.

To “glocalize” is to seek a healthy balance between the macro economy and that of your local community. For now, that means promoting the local economy at your ecological house.

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Skip now lives with his wife, Pam, in Corvallis, Oregon and divides his time between various writing projects and retrofitting his older home to be more environmentally friendly.

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