

The Case for National Substate Regionalism: Visioning the Future

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Introduction

The case for national substate regionalism is abundantly clear. The American landscape is already dotted with substate regional councils with a history of maturity, growth, passion, and excitement. It is also partially dotted with substate regional council difficulties that provide a most challenging approach to twenty-first century life in America. Substate regional councils have perhaps the most precise means with which to focus attention on key issues affecting the entire nation. If substate regionalism were carpeted across the nation, it would provide new and exciting opportunities to expand the delivery of citizen programs and to represent local concerns in a structured way—opportunities unlike any seen since the adoption of the Constitution in 1789. It would continue the progress begun in the late 1950s to reinvent government through the voluntary establishment of alliances, coalitions, partnerships, or networks.

The reinventing government craze filtering across the nation, led by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler with their fascinating and instructive book *Reinventing Government*, cuts across the wide swath of governmental practices throughout the nation. It continues to expand as a major

invention of the latter days of the twentieth century. In reality, however, the reinvention of governments has taken place much longer than since the 1990s began. It was in the latter 1950s that the practice of substate regionalism entered the history books and became a new chapter in the way problems and issues can be approached in these fading years of the twentieth century. For all practical purposes, the invention of substate regionalism is the precedent for reinventing government.

There have been many examples of substate regionalism since its inception. Many practical successes, some failures, and continuing experiments impose both a theoretical construct and a pragmatic screen on the film of government pervading the delivery of services to residents of the United States.

During the height of Reaganomics, some regional councils went out of existence, while others took up the banner of entrepreneurialism and, though battered and bruised, survived the difficulties of that era. To the extent that financial support of substate regional councils diminished in the 1980s, substate regionalism reinvented itself through new and creative thinking regarding its mission, its financial base, and its work program. While divisiveness continues regarding

substate regionalism's urban or rural needs or metropolitan versus non-metropolitan functions, it has progressed and made significant strides in the 1990s.

The main feature of substate regionalism is its ability to carry out activities which otherwise would not be accomplished by individual municipalities, counties, the private sector, or the not-for-profit sector alone. Although substate regionalism was built upon the platform of government, its innovation is characterized by networking, team-netting, and the constant building of affiliations and agility. If these words echo through the halls of the private sector, it's because they are deliberately crafted on principles and functions that the private sector authored and pioneered. These words also form the apex and strength of substate regionalism and lie well beyond the concepts and symbolisms of government only.

Natural Regionalism

Another way to interpret substate regionalism is through the concept of natural regionalism. Natural regionalism is the extension of two or more people, organizations, or governments, thinking about views and impacts both individually and collectively, as well as systematically, in order to afford the conditions which enable the sentiments of the minority to represent and take into account the interest of the minority.

Natural regionalism is a continuation of the principles outlined in the Magna Carta, the Greco-Roman laws of ancient times, and the various constitutional and legislative doctrines which have been

established throughout history. The difference is that natural regionalism does not necessarily derive from constitutional or legislative law, but from the inherent rights of free assembly and public debate that have always been a cornerstone of democracy and among those freedoms granted by various leaders and groups throughout the centuries.

Natural regionalism proposes a higher order of life beyond the wisdom of the written words of legislative intent and constitutional theory. It suggests that the many levels of power and authority that override the conditions of human interaction derive not as much from political and legislative fiat, as from the inherent and expressed rights of communication and sharing which are motivated by language, custom, and the oneness by which the population and the institutions of the world derived. While it may not make a great deal of difference in the actuality of regionalism, the ability to create a regional approach based on the laws of nature in addition to, or rather than, on the laws of humans becomes a principle which may be more useful than any other.

Placing regionalism into a legislative format makes it all the more credible. Providing funding and support mechanisms so that regional councils can carry out their work becomes easier. A legislative format, however, does not make regionalism any more satisfying or important, and it is appropriate that both natural regionalism and human regionalism be powerful instruments—collectively—to enable regionalism to become an important contribution to society.

What Is Regionalism?

Substate regionalism must be viewed as a profession. Very often, however, it is portrayed as a "governmental entity," "part of the bureaucracy," "just another layer of government," or "a duplication of what already exists." It is none of these. It is new, different, innovative, opportunistic—it is a touchstone of people- and institution-focused functions that will achieve great results into and through the twenty-first century. It is more than planning, more than development, more than research, more than government, more than the private sector, and more than the not-for-profit sector. It is all of these, plus the ability to breathe new life into old structures and forms of activity which were designed for an agricultural society, honed by an industrial society, but incapable of dealing with an information society.

Substate regionalism is not thought of as a profession but should be. It is not recognized as a basic philosophy or concept but should be. It is not made of inherently designed and born regionalists but should be. It is not unified nationally through a carpeted nationwide structure but should be.

If substate regionalism had not been invented in the 1950s, it would have been invented today. In the American system of community life, substate regionalism is based upon volunteerism, utilizing federal and state grant support as incentive to local communities and the private sector to join together to reconcile community needs. These needs include infrastructure, resolution of major problems and issues affecting several jurisdictions, and planning and develop-

ment. A planning process must be developed to enjoin and network the often competing and conflicting goals and responsibilities of many types of public, private, and not-for-profit organizations.

In the near and sometimes distant drumbeats of fiscal distress, downsizing, restructuring of industries, economic uncertainties, and classic internationalism, substate regionalism's role is far more important than ever before in its "thirtysomething" history.

Scope of Regionalism

The profession of substate regionalism is etched and carved in the bricks and mortar of public and private sector investments. It is the tones, shades, and variations structured on the palette of the early leaders of regionalism in the 1950s and 1960s. The profession is the overarching dimension of single-mindedness which enables normally provincial thinkers to expand their insights toward regional needs and aspirations. It is an astonishing array of functions, services, technical assistance, and research capacities within a single organization, perhaps unparalleled within the circle of community or governmental institutions. It is the ability to be neutral, objective, a mediator, and, most importantly, a resourceful presenter of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the region.

The scope and breadth of substate regional councils is a commentary on the ingenuity of Americans to institute new ways of doing the business of government through a voluntary association of governments and private sector participants. There is no one way to plan, develop, and

implement substate regionalism. There is a need to compile and disseminate information on the various ways that substate regional councils have been organized across the nation. The task of learning and disseminating was made easier by the establishment of the National Repository for Regionalism which collects materials, reports, documents, and papers on regionalism at The University of Georgia's Institute for Community and Area Development (ICAD).

The powerful surge of substate regionalism that occurred in the 1960s may be shifting in the 1990s and into the twenty-first century toward public/private sector partnerships, where the private sector becomes more embedded and deeply involved in substate regionalism. How this is accomplished and the exact structure and form it will take remains to be determined. Substate regionalism needs the strength of the private sector and requires the delicate balance of intergovernmentalism among and between all levels of government. Substate regionalism is a more influential institution when congressional and state legislative representation is possible and is a much more powerful force through an equal partnership of public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Substate regionalism should be a unique and creative institutional framework to supplement, not supplant. It should reinforce, not be a new government. It should be a potent source of positive production, not a bureaucratic body.

To achieve this dream requires a strategic vision of where the nation wants to go and how it wants to get there. It requires new thinking beyond the pale of conventional wisdom, which says what

happened yesterday is what should happen tomorrow.

Municipalities are loaded with stress based upon the "F" word. Fiscal stability cannot be taken for granted, and local governments cannot withstand the pressures of service delivery in many regions without securing a new institutional framework. Substate regionalism means that certain programs that were traditionally provided at the local government level are now managed and administered at the substate regional level. The threats of take-over, job and prestige loss, "Big Brother," a loss of identity are all phantom images that do not do justice to the opportunities existing for substate regionalism. These opportunities include a twenty-first century concept of service delivery and program functions that has proven to be more effective and efficient than conventional means.

Nationalizing Substate Regionalism

In states where no specific legislation exists, regional councils have formed in a variety of ways including through executive order of the governor, interstate compact legislation, intergovernmental cooperation legislation, non-profit corporation legislation, regional planning commission legislation, and others. No one format fits the entire nation. In fact, arguments are made that in certain states there is no need for substate regionalism. Those states do not have enough counties, are too small, are too large and spread out, or have too many governmental agencies or bodies. Substate regionalism in relation to a national strategy can be rationalized only if an appropriate

analysis of the entire governmental structure of the United States is accomplished.

Global Regionalism

A new dimension has been added to the justification for substate regionalism—the global connection. Global interdependence has become a prairie fire phrase, inhabiting the language of diplomats, economists, and politicians. But it is a valid phrase. As the nation, thus far unsuccessfully, bids for renewed leadership in a variety of categories where it ranked first historically, new approaches for success must be identified. Clearly, in terms of economic performance, the United States is no longer at the top and has fallen behind in a number of other categories such as health and education. Substate regionalism is not designed to solve these problems. The intensity of the problems, however, calls for significant and enlightened leadership to achieve economies of scale and more efficient means of production. These efforts are already being made by the private sector when it comes to the production of goods and services.

Regionalism: Its Many Forms

Regionalism takes many forms, tones, and creative energies. Substate regionalism is different in Pennsylvania and Alaska. Its focus and priorities are different in Maine and California. In Florida, its focus may be growth, while in New Mexico it may be lack of growth. Substate regionalism is characterized as a new experiment in states such as Alaska, with thirteen relatively new regional development organizations. It remains on the

youthful side of middle age in states such as Pennsylvania, where agencies have celebrated twenty-five and thirty-year anniversaries. Regionalism may be proposed as a major force through stringent legislation, as suggested in 1991-92 in California, or it may be loosely organized or nonexistent in states such as New Jersey.

The exciting adventure of substate regionalism is being tested in America's Last Frontier. From the Bering Sea to the Great Yukon, from the Kenai Peninsula and Southwest Alaska to the Pribilof Islands, and throughout the vastness of Alaska, substate regionalism is a new economic development stimulus for the benefit of all Alaskans. Problems in the state are compounded by the view of those in the Lower 48 that Alaska is the last symbol of a national environmental movement. The opportunities to create substate regionalism as the leading edge of economic activity in the state are enormous. With extremely limited resources, a limited number of professional staff, and new policy-making boards attempting to learn their awesome responsibilities, Alaska has created Alaska Regional Development Organizations (ARDOR). With a natural resource-based economy, small population, and extensive federal and state land holdings, Alaska offers a way of life unknown anywhere else in the nation. Therefore, its style of substate regionalism may well take an entirely different format in policy approaches and program initiatives.

On the other hand, some similarities to the substate regionalism found in the Lower 48 may exist. For example, the Anchorage Metropolitan Area faces revitalization, transportation, and housing issues, and many other issues that affect

other medium-sized metro areas. In addition, Alaska has an astonishing amount of natural resources, environmental battles, water-related fishing economies, and budgetary battles that relate closely to the future of oil as an income-producing resource in the state. Imagine a state with 5.5 trillion tons of coal and little opportunity to develop this resource and market it to other countries. Imagine, however, the proximity of Alaska to the Commonwealth of Independent States and the opportunities for trade with nations who are slowly developing an evolutionary approach to democratization and privatization.

Alaska's situation is unparalleled in the experience of substate regionalism in America. It is, on the one hand, a challenge and an opportunity to showcase the benefits and assets of substate regionalism as never before seen in the United States.

This example is not meant to isolate Alaska from the other states. It is meant to describe briefly the excitement and vitality which, given a set of circumstances, can enhance how substate regionalism generates sound approaches to economic prosperity.

Irrespective of location, circumstances, growth, and economic deterioration, substate regionalism has a place in the spectrum of options available for determining the economic future of a region. Clearly, substate regionalism should and will be a model for overcoming many obstacles causing communities and regions to be uncompetitive from both an economic and quality-of-life view. In the next century, it will become even more important, in light of increasing reliance on cooperative partnerships, if the nation, its states, and constituent

jurisdictions are to be as productive and quality driven as possible.

Clarifying the Role of Substate Regional Councils

Downsizing government and/or the service delivery system is obtainable only if appropriate substitutions are secured, such as those provided through substate regionalism. Too often, substate regional councils have been looked upon as paper shufflers and agencies which endanger grant opportunities. While there is a noticeable change in this regard, much more remains to be accomplished. One difficulty, while being an asset at the same time, is that substate regional councils differ as to philosophy and responsibility in various states and regions of the country. Some substate regional councils have focused on economic development. Other councils focus on transportation and land use. Still others are built upon uniform state legislation that spells out only what is required in that state. The argument is not so much for mandating uniformity, as it is for clarifying in the minds of others what substate regionalism constitutes and what role substate regional councils should play.

The difficulty of nomenclature provides a glimpse of the complexities of this subject. Known in some areas as regional councils, in others as regional planning commissions, in others as economic development districts, and in still others as councils of government, the difficulty in explaining what these institutions are has a powerful impact on their ability to become national treasures. Some have attempted to rationalize and clarify these

institutions and their roles but no ready answer has been accomplished. One suggestion has been to call substate multicounty organizations "regional development organizations." Clarity could be enhanced substantially if the federal government were to establish an executive order, legislation, or both. This would identify substate regional councils as part of national policy and clearly delineate who they are, what their roles are, and how they interrelate with the public and private sectors.

Public/Private Sector Partnerships

Public/private sector partnerships were a hallmark of economic revitalization in much of the 1980s, and where the private sector actively participated in promoting economic revitalization while utilizing governmental funds as incentives, positive results accrued. Lessons can be learned from the massive changes occurring in Eastern Europe, the privatization occurring in several Latin American nations, and the increasing interest shown by other nations in the public/private sector model.

For example, the Appalachian Regional Development Model needs to be discussed, debated, evaluated, and utilized wherever appropriate in the United States. At the same time, the concept of regionalism needs to be stretched and stroked throughout the whole nation as a unique and structured process which can softly but effectively open new horizons as the nation gears for the twenty-first century. The ability to work *with* governments, and at the same time work *outside* the governmental arena and

marry private sector programs with governmental incentives, is a beautifully timed, sensitive, and sensible arrangement offering the benefits of governmental services to all types of populations. At the same time, it brings in the expertise and involvement of the private sector that makes the investment decisions that directly affect the people and institutions of America.

No system of government currently in vogue provides all the answers to the problems and issues of the 1990s and the twenty-first century. The most powerful and potent argument for a structural change and the development of a national policy for regionalism is the very essence of American ingenuity and growth. Whereas the systems in which many Americans place great value were arguably satisfactory in the birth of the nation, that is not necessarily the case 220 years later as the United States hurls rapidly into a new millennium.

A national strategy for regionalism, on the other hand, neither means the death of local governments nor the institution of bureaucracy. Regionalism means capacity building. It means the potential for taking a national domestic policy and implementing it through a unified structured system with sufficient latitude on the part of states to adjust to the differences among those states. It means a more disciplined approach to the normally helter-skelter, irrational rivalry between and among urban, suburban, and rural interests.

Regionalism means a much more rational and responsible decision-making process involving those issues that clearly cross boundary lines and are incapable of reconciliation at a local or even

county governmental level. Perhaps the most meaningful advantage of regionalism is its ability to bring to the table the major power brokers of the public and private sectors in a given region. While regionalism in its early days brought to the table only governmental leaders, its more advanced form allows both the public and private sectors, although to a large extent, most regional councils are still predominantly governmental agencies and are viewed in that context. If it is assumed that the private sector produces the goods and services that support the economy, the logic of a public/private sector form of regionalism becomes even more dominant.

Substate regionalism as a public/private sector partnership is a different institution than those established in the infancy of the discipline. It is not easy to convince local governmental officials that there should be equality between both sectors, and that from a structural viewpoint, the private sector should have equal voting rights to those of governmental officials. Furthermore, from a governmental viewpoint, involving higher levels of government in a voting capacity at the meeting table is not always an acceptable strategy. But these are issues detailed in scope, and with appropriate discussion, sensible solutions can be found. This is part of what may be called the prime directive strategy.

The Prime Directive

In the fictional representation of our global future as portrayed on the original *Star Trek* series and on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, there is only one prime directive. That directive involves helping

citizens of heretofore unexplored worlds in the further reaches of space without interfering in the physical, economic, environmental, and social structure of the planets of the universe. In real life, there is no single prime directive. Instead, a multiplicity of forces interact with one another through a series of increasingly complex interrelationships between people and institutions, public and private sectors, and internal and external forces. These forces determine how this planet Earth, each nation, state, region, county, local government, neighborhood, and individual forms, expands, modifies, and contributes to the multiplicity of prime directives affecting the planning and regional decision-making process. This represents the principles embedded in substate regionalism.

All of us in this wonderful profession need to rethink and rededicate ourselves to leadership and capacity building and help create a vision which will take each citizen, official, and public or private sector institution toward a long-range strategic planning continuum, helping lead the people we serve to a global mindset. We need to examine how we can rediscover and reenergize substate regionalism as a professional approach to twenty-first century life. We must enable the people we serve to be highly motivated and fully involved in every facet of planning life, whether it be economic, physical, social, cultural, educational, or environmental, and truly make the year 2000 and the many years to follow the best in the history of humankind.

Throughout history, each time period has been projected as the most difficult, most complex, and most controversial,

yet as each era goes by, we have every reason to believe that what follows may be even more difficult. The most recent era may be best characterized by the increasing reliance which every nation, including the United States, has on global interdependence and the role that economic development plays in bringing regions of the world much closer together. Despite the so-called end of the Cold War, the world has entered a new phase of nationalistic conflicts—the book of which has yet to be fully written.

Many substate regions and many parts of the world face serious new economic challenges. Total industrial restructuring of nations continues to be the great challenge of the 1990s, unlike any seen in the nation's history. The challenge for those moving into the working world and those seeking some form of higher education before doing so is to be aware of the need to emphasize productivity and quality, perhaps the two most important words in the economic setting of the twenty-first century. These prime directives will drive the economy of the nation through the next century, as competition for new economic growth continues to heat up.

A Covenant of Strength

There are many ways which regionalism can be a covenant of strength throughout the nation. Regionalism needs the union brought to the consensus table through the brotherhood and sisterhood of regional councils. There is no hard and fast rule for regionalism's success. There are covenants, however, that can cause regionalism to be a major force for the betterment of the people

whom it is intended to serve. A covenant should be a sacred trust between parties, whether written or unwritten. A covenant from a regional council perspective is that which links volunteer board members, no matter where they live, to the duty and honor of upholding regional interests irrespective of the final decisions made by the regional council board. It is more an unwritten codicil than a constitutional or statutory principle built into the written documents that encompass the concept of substate regionalism.

Regional councils cannot perform their responsibilities without adhering to the basic tenets of substate regionalism. These tenets are more often found in the historical records and experiences of regionalism than in the strict rules and regulations that guide the many levels of government across the nation.

The Ark of the Covenant, through its Biblical and legendary interpretations, became a symbol of strength, unity, and religious fervor. Its mystical powers have been portrayed in books and movies. No such legend is ascribed to the covenant of regionalism, but substate regionalism needs the same fervor, trust, and recognition that the Ark of the Covenant has received over time.

Every so often, covenants need to be reinforced and a new look taken at how professions such as substate regionalism perform. Unlike the sacred schools of antiquity that form the rich texture and historical record of the past, there are no such instruments regarding the historical pathway of regionalism, although its practices and procedures have been written down and discussed in reports and massive tomes by organizations such as the Advisory Commission

on Intergovernmental Relations. Comparing or contrasting covenants of the past with the relatively short record of substate regionalism would be unfair. On the other hand, reexamining the origins of substate regionalism and recasting a new covenant of trust between those who participate in and benefit from the practices of substate regionalism is appropriate. With the next century ahead of us, the twenty-first century substate covenant would be an appropriate accomplishment and a contribution toward the goals and ideals that are likely to burst upon the American scene over the next several years. Such an action would create new interest and involvement of people who may not be familiar with substate regionalism and would reactivate and reenergize those born into the "thirtysomething" structure of regionalism.

Covenants cannot be broken automatically and should not contain a means by which parties can easily remove themselves from the original bonds of trust forming the covenant. This separates them from most agreements formed when governments or other sectors of the economy decide to work closely together. Those agreements often include language that enables parties to remove themselves from the agreement's original intent. Given the nature of today's society, this practice will likely continue into the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, in the case of the U.S. Constitution, which has been amended many times since its original enactment, the original bond of unity which enabled it to be written and approved has remained a stable and long-term commitment to the type, form, and structure of government that has guided

this nation for over 200 years. Such an instrument of support may be the symbolic Olympic torch that carries substate regionalism to new heights in the twenty-first century.

Diversity

Regional councils have one characteristic not found in most other organizations—the characteristic of diversity. Most regional councils of any size include a wide range of disciplines and professions that, taken together, may be characterized as regional diversity. These professions represent a great many opportunities to affect in a holistic manner the great issues facing every substate region of the nation.

Beyond the professional talent that dictates the extent which regionalism can be successful, lies the diversity, or potential thereof, that characterizes the policy-making body of the regional council. Even where local elected officials make up the entire board of directors of a regional council, most elected officials are not full-time political leaders, but earn income through private sector positions. In those cases where a regional council's board of directors consists of a mixture of public and private sector personalities, diversity becomes even more useful in evaluating, developing, and carrying out plans and programs within the substate region.

This diversity may not have been utilized as effectively as it could be in shaping the future of a region. A sentiment exists that elected officials should be viewed only as such, that advisory board and committee members should be viewed only as representatives of their

advisory organizations, and that private sector officials should be viewed only in the context of the particular position they hold. In fact, almost every regional council representative wears two, three, four, or more hats through participation on many non-profit boards and through other activities. It is difficult to realize how to tap into the many forms of regional diversity that exist. In fact, one full-time staff person would probably be required just to understand and maximize the diversity factor for the benefit of all concerned.

Few regional councils have achieved everything in the way of substate regionalism. While this is true of governments throughout the world as problems persist, especially in the financial relationships between demand for services and ability to provide such services, the search for perfection continues. Regional councils pursue new ways to do business and develop a corporate mentality that often does not exist in governmental circles. Substate regionalism also creates a shadow of strength and vitality not existing within many conventional governments. Diversity is part of the reason for this situation.

There is another side to regional diversity—the selection of issues to be placed on the regional council's agenda. What resources to deploy to handle different issues is always a perplexing decision facing regional councils. Only when regional councils have a limited agenda, wherein they receive funding from a minimal number of sources, does this problem dissipate. On the other hand, even larger and more urban regional councils have limited agendas, especially where they receive large

amounts of funding for such issues as transportation or water quality. Their ability to accomplish comprehensive planning, economic development, and other functions fades in light of funding sources.

In more rural areas, there is a tendency to enhance regional agenda diversity since fewer agencies in the region compete with the role of the regional council. Therefore, regionalism and diversity are closely related to the numbers, type, and complexity of organizations that serve a given region and feel threatened by competition with a regional council.

The amazing strengths of regionalism are its ability to adapt from one function to another without losing stride and its ability to connect and network the region and appropriate parties to voice opinions and advice concerning regional issues. Regional diversity also implies the collection of views and attitudes from many different types of individuals and organizations in a given region, enabling these voices to be heard in the halls and boardrooms of regional councils. The regional role adequately and effectively brings together diverse thoughts and expressions and makes these expressions more than symbolic, meaningless utterances.

The diversity of regionalism should enable the profession to avoid being labelled as draconian. Openness, as opposed to elitism, is the hallmark of a respectable and truly professional form of regionalism diversity.

Thus, diversity comes in all forms, inhaling the fresh breath of inspirational regionalism and allowing a free and open process that does not exist in other circumstances and professions. Examining

regionalism through the looking glass of diversity provides a new inciteful analysis of a profession on the cutting edge of twenty-first century life.

Our Lives, Our Fortunes, and Our Sacred Honor

“Our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor”—these words are found at the end of the Declaration of Independence. The powerful message they convey has not diminished in the 218 years since the founding fathers lent their signatures to a document which has developed a life and legend of its own. Since the founding of this nation, with its rich heritage and strength of values of people from many lands, the time honored tradition of criticizing your own country has become a popular fashion statement. The tendency is to think that there are better ways to live, govern, and determine one’s future, or that the “grass is greener on the other side.” The right to criticize, however, is a cherished principle of the democratic system. The right to criticize without substantive facts and sensible comparisons is one which has become all too standardized across the United States.

The nation’s heritage is not at stake—the nation’s future is. This nation is strengthened by the obligations and actions that each generation brings to the table of life, flowing through the various governing structures created since 1776.

One of these structures, the substate regional council, has an obligation to inspire its communities, leaders, and public to be trustees of the founding father’s principles that are emblazoned on our

history. Regionalism is by no means the chosen and sole means for legacy transference. The profession can, however, touch a great many people and organizations and educate and explain the meaning which the Declaration’s words signify to the nation builders of the present and the future. Since substate regional councils go beyond artificial boundary lines, they can bring the views of a wider range of participants to fact-finding tables, negotiating tables, consensus-building tables, and to many venues like those found during the pre-Constitution United States.

Some words are more important than others in any given document. Pledging of “lives, fortunes, and sacred honor” may have far more meaning than the issues pervading regional council discussions today, but the values of regional councils can be associated with the source of our revolutionary-based heritage.

Trust is a key word in the intent of the Declaration of Independence. It is also a word critical to the profession of substate regionalism. Regionalists are part of the system of institution building that is entrusted with the nation’s future. Substate regionalists deal with the complex issues of employment, environmental sensitivity, housing, transportation, and the myriad issues and circumstances dictating the future. They cannot and should not be thought of as all things to all people and the solution to whatever ails the service area of the region. Regionalists can, however, contribute strongly to the nation’s ability to meet the tenets of the Declaration of Independence in seeking to improve “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

Substate regionalists reflect on the ideals of the nation and look backward into history, reflecting on how we arrived at this stage, and most importantly, projecting strategies, providing a vision, and helping implement the ideals of our heritage. Regionalists are wrapped in the enigma of rationalizing where we are, how we got here, where we are going, and who will be the winners and losers in the future. In the idealization of the future, substate regionalists seek equality and justice for all. Whether or not this is realistic or idealistic remains to be seen.

Translating the foundation of independent thought that the creators of this nation built in the Declaration of Independence into the complex world of today is difficult. Substate regional councils and regionalists across the United States can be major forces for duplicating what the signers of the Declaration achieved in the eighteenth century.

No sacred scrolls give the answers to the progress desired across the nation. Techniques and strategies can be used to help promote the best the nation has to offer. No thought was given 217 years ago, to the practice and profession of substate regionalism. What has been built into the process is a number of documents used to support and defend the innovations that occurred in the intervening years. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Atlantic Charter, the "I Have a Dream" speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and even the Magna Carta of 1216 A.D. are a collection of words and wisdom of which we need to be reminded as the 1990s close and we head toward a new millennium.

The strength of substate regionalism is diversity—a collection of opinions and views, an exciting but sometimes overwhelming array of facts and information, and a mixture of plans that envelop our collective future. Substate regionalism continues to be an important way to implement that venerable document that begins: "When in the course of human events...."

The Next Century

The twenty-first century looms just over the horizon, bringing new thrills and possible new roles for substate regionalism to the national table. Because every state differs as to how it views substate regionalism, with legislative overview provided for the profession and funding available at different levels, there is both creative diversity and chaos. Even the word planning creates a dilemma because only the heartiest of souls believes that planning makes both immediate and long-term sense. Therefore, it may be that the substate regional council of the twenty-first century steers away from that word, away from other nomenclature that is not acceptable, and away from the language of those to whom the profession is less supportive.

Councils may move toward more uniform language, providing a more appropriate backdrop to the profession in the new century. What this language may be remains to be seen, but as more services are regionalized (as slow as that process may be) and as more stress is placed upon communities, areas, counties, and regions, the acceptability of substate regionalism should become more dramatic. Regional development,

regional council, regional development organization, and generic terms of similar note are the ones to watch in the next century.

There may even be a move toward mergers of substate regional councils, thus creating larger geographic areas and boundaries in which regionalism becomes ensconced in the vocabulary of re-inventing government.

Another trend may be the increasing involvement of the private sector in the work of substate regional councils. The private sector already holds a stake in substate regionalism both from the viewpoint of benefits derived and participation on the board of directors. This role does not come easy, but it should expand in the next century.

A major factor in the twenty-first century will be the delivery of services on the part of substate regional councils. The ability of substate regional councils to deliver a variety of governmental services such as, but not limited to, drug and alcohol programs, aging, the environment, and economic development has increased noticeably. As the thunderbolt of fiscal distress reaches across every part of the nation, new ways to deliver services will be sought. Substate regional councils are likely candidates for delivering these services to citizens within the jurisdictions served.

Another twenty-first century directive will be the expanded and diverse role of substate regional councils in many facets of regional life. This includes, but is not limited to, state-directed programs which focus on a substate regional council's role, policy development on controversial issues at the regional level, and technical

assistance to both local governments and, most importantly, the private sector.

Perhaps the most generic and significant role of the regional council is the ability to act as a neutral disseminator of information, a neutral listener to positions taken by various sides, a mediator to bring options to the table for discussion, a convener to enable parties to meet and communicate, and a possible new role which few have considered—an adjudicator. Because so many disputes in America reach the level of legal action, the role of adjudicator may be one taken on by substate regional councils to provide a new structure to significantly relieve a crowded judicial system. These legal issues, that affect government, development, or other factors, are within the province of a substate regional council. The role of adjudicator might be controversial and take much insight, but it could be part of the new frontier of substate regionalism.

The most complex and aggravating obstacle to substate regionalism is the elimination of habits and philosophies which harken back to our forefathers. Local governments are established as the centerpiece of the American governmental system. Their role differs from state to state, but the generality is that these local institutions are the strength and vitality of the American governmental system. It is difficult to erase or substantively change the institutional framework of more than 200 years. It is equally difficult to encourage local governmental officials to think of the region first and their jurisdiction second. Thus, if substate regionalism is to have an enlarged opportunity in the next century, the issue

of facilitating appropriate changes in philosophy and attitude becomes important.

Another side to the twenty-first century view of substate regionalism exists. The ability to establish and implement a shared vision, a true partnership, and an electronic circuitry exists, where every part operates efficiently and with a spirit of teamwork unlike any seen in the past. While partners are considered the essence of substate regionalism, partnership has not always proven successful on controversial issues. This may explain why technical assistance on a one-to-one basis between the regional council staff and a specific local governmental organization has become a strong component of substate regionalism.


Substate regionalism in the next century should expand this type of partnering extensively to the private sector and, in some cases, to the not-for-profit sector. For example, one regional council is a designated affiliate library to the Foundation Center based in New York City. A strong element of affiliate library status is providing assistance to not-for-profit organizations in that region that seek technical support in finding foundation resources. This regional council may be the only regional development agency providing this type of service in the nation, and it is a service which could grow significantly in coming years.

Substate regionalism is a mutation of parts and pieces of local government that have stretched across the American governmental experience. It is a logical progression from an old-style format of government to a renewed and restructured basis for communitywide decision-making. There are no magical solutions to the massive problems and obstacles

facing local governments. From a twenty-first century perspective, the most ambitious and audacious program may be the considerable expansion of substate regionalism, causing public and private sector investments to be truly homogenized. The expansion of this concept should be one of the most challenging and inspirational highlights in the early days of the twenty-first century.

Singer John Denver has written many songs expressing powerful feelings that reflect a calmness and attitude which might be termed counterculture. For example, in "I Want to Live," one of the most stirring and inspirational songs ever written, he includes the following refrains: "I want to grow," "I want to be," "I want to see," "I want to know," and "I want to share." These words may be the signature theme for substate regionalists of the twenty-first century and those who follow. They share a beautiful way to think about the present, prepare for the future, and become entangled in the opportunities and challenges that each of us face as we work through employment, recreation, and domestic life. It is the essence of why we are here on planet Earth, serving to find the most appropriate means for our future.

With the passage of time, regionalism has proven its worth even more, and its place on the cutting edge of institution-building represents a rare opportunity for the nation to turn a new page in its planning and development history. A national strategy for regionalism not only is an opportunity whose time has come, but also would help place the United States in a much more strategic competitive position internationally as the nation competes in a global battle for economic

and quality-of-life survival through the twenty-first century. 

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