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OPINION

The power of sustainable materialism

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Environmental activism has shifted away from the notion of post-materialism, the idea where people will inherently impact the environment less as their basic needs are met, to that of sustainable materialism.

The term, sustainable materialism coins the effort of people across the globe attempting to change how they interact with the environment and supply basic needs from the environment in light of recent social and ecological realizations about the industrialized world.

Sustainable materialism is founded on the idea that people have taken battling the world's growing environmental concerns, from global warming and climate change to pollution and air quality, upon themselves. The pluralistic setting in which this has occurred is not centered around a specific social problem or environmental concern such as climate change, but rather incorporates numerous movements in a broad context that share similar end goals.

The most intriguing analysis in this line of thought is the concept of transition towns and the ability of many local movements to operate outside of the industrialized circulation of power as well as their commitment to the increasing submersion in what they call the non-human. The non-human realm is understood as nature and natural ecosystems, and for sustainable materialism, human submersion in the non-human realm is imperative to engaging in a sustainable lifestyle.

Transition towns or transition initiatives are organized grassroots projects that attempt to manage the adverse effects of climate destruction and economic instability by promoting autonomy through

sustainable living and building ecological resilience. These efforts are a direct response and critique of
✕ economic growth and reliance on fossil fuels.

They play an important role in the locally driven social and ecological political transformations going on today. Transition towns are also physically creating new economies that work for the people that participate in them, not the CEOs and mega-circulators of industrialized, modern capitalist economies.

Through community and employee empowerment, engagement and cooperation, sustainable economies are being designed outside of the corporate market economies. This movement, while deemed by many as radical socialism, is nothing more than true democracy and should be treated as such. Examples take shape in many places, often most notably in Britain, going as far as literally changing currencies like the Exeter currency.

What becomes abundantly clear is that people want to act in a sustainable manner. Relentless, obsessive, material consumer based economies are not necessarily what the people want. In fact, economies focused on the collective, ones that shy away from measuring a person based on his or her monetary value or a society on its annual growth, can and will thrive in the future.

Equally imperative in the development of sustainable materialism is the immersion in the non-human. The development between humans and their identification with the larger ecosystem or their connectedness to nature is crucial to sustainable materialism.

Some assert that humans are in the processes of mending their severed ties and understanding of nature, something literature for decades has cried out for.

Moreover, humans and their immersion in nature is a driving force behind these local movements transforming the political and economic atmosphere in present day. Rather than the need to dominate every aspect of life, a key ingredient found in post industrial market capitalist societies, sustainable materialism is actively recognizing the larger ecosystem that humans operate within.

Sustainable materialism is present and powerful. To some, it is empowered community ownership, collective communal ownership that goes local. To others it is the creation of an entirely new economy, the overthrow of an oligarchic capitalist system through the establishment of true democracy.

But regardless, they both aim to achieve the same ends.