

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** We're now at a point where we don't have any guarantees anymore and you need to find pathways that both offer a path towards healing, both of communities, of social cohesion, of people's relationship to place and people's relationship to each other. You need to have a path towards resilience in the face of disruption.

[00:00:19] So that's local provisioning as much as possible. All of those are also a potential path of transforming the way that people interact and relate to the system.

[00:00:34] **Nate Hagens:** Today, I'm joined by a leader in bioregioning and regenerative thinking, Daniel Christian Wahl. Daniel and I have known of each other for 20 years, but this is the very first time we've spoken. He is one of the catalysts of the rising regeneration movement and the author of *Designing Regenerative Cultures*.

[00:00:53] He works as a consultant, educator, and activist. Activists with NGOs, businesses, governments, and global change agents. Daniel has degrees in biology and holistic science, as well as a PhD in design for human and planetary health. His work has influenced the emerging field of regenerative design. Daniel has spent over two decades studying, teaching, and living in bioregional and regenerative ways of being.

[00:01:22] In this conversation, we discuss his experiences, how they've shaped his present work and life on Mallorca Island off of Spain, as well as how these concepts apply at the individual and community level, including how healing local biospheres can help heal the entire system. Additionally, if you are enjoying this podcast, I invite you all to subscribe to our Substack newsletter for free, where you can read more of the system science underpinning the human predicament, and where my team and I post special announcements related to The Great Simplification.

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[00:01:59] You can find the link to subscribe in the show description. With that, please welcome Daniel Christian Wall. Daniel Christian Wall. After all these years of liking each other's LinkedIn posts, you are, you and I are finally meeting face to face.

[00:02:16] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Thank you for inviting me, and it's really a pleasure to have this opportunity to have a chat.

[00:02:21] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, so this could go a million different directions, but your work now is focused on regenerativity, and we've discussed regenerative agriculture a few times on this show. but your work goes beyond that to what you call regenerative culture. So, so let's start there. what does it mean for a culture to be regenerative?

[00:02:49] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** In order not to confuse people, because a lot of people think of regenerative cultures as something new that we now need to define, like in a utopia that then needs to be created. I just want to anchor. A couple of things, like. Regeneration is not a new concept. Regeneration is a core pattern of life itself.

[00:03:12] To call regeneration a concept would be saying respiration is a concept, digestion is a concept. yes, there are concepts, but there are also biological processes, and so is regeneration. It's happening in every cell of your body right now. Bones have regenerated themselves in the last seven years, and every ecosystem is in a constant process of regeneration.

[00:03:35] And we as a species wouldn't be alive today if all our indigenous ancestors that were place based cultures in the bioregions they emerged from had not been regenerative cultures previously. So we know how to be regenerative, how to be positive keystone species in the environments that bring bring us forth to the point that we make them more biodiverse, more bioproductive, more abundant, and we use our human intervention that is often a disruption as a creative disruption at scales that actually make the system flourish rather than destroy it.

[00:04:20] And so for me, a regenerative culture is one that tries to come back home to place, to come back home to context that stops trying to solve a world

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problematique or a meta crisis or a poly crisis or anything and tries to handle complexity by looking at the specificity of real people, real place, real context, real climate, real aquifer, and Suddenly, by stirring into the skit and meeting all these problems in the context of a specific place, you have a sort of Kuhnian Gestalt switch where the problems suddenly show up as real potential, because you see what non manifest potential in that region is still inherent, and it's that healing process of how we bring ourselves back home in what you call The Great Simplification, where we reconsider what is actually necessary and what is not.

[00:05:17] part of our consumer culture that we now believe is necessary, but it isn't, and how we once again become custodian keystone species in the ecosystems that brought us forth, to the point that we stop thinking of them as our territories, but we think of ourselves as expressions of that territory It's a return to a kin centric worldview.

[00:05:44] you can't be a regenerative culture if you think that there is an objective other out there to be exploited and manipulated and controlled. it's only when we re enter into that participatory worldview of understanding that we're very much of this world, that we can responsibly participate in it again, and that needs our shift of perspective back into the community of life.

[00:06:12] **Nate Hagens:** Well, as you know, I largely agree with that. I have a lot of questions, including one would a kin centric way of life be feasible for 8 billion humans? but I'll defer that for now and ask you what are some examples of fundamental ways we would need to change in order to interact with and relate to the environment in a, in a more regenerative way as you described?

[00:06:41] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Well, for one, I would say that we've not entirely without

[00:06:51] intention have tried to tackle the climate change issue through a reductionist element like carbon that was very easily parable with the agenda of digitalization of everything and so somehow we wove responding to climate change and driving ever increasing digitalization into a necessary thing around carbon in order to create another casino economy around carbon trading and offsetting and lots of not transparent measures.

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[00:07:30] If we had explored Our role in rebalancing global climate regulation mechanisms through water cycles and had begun to look at life again, like every individual tree has a water cycle, every forest has its own little hydrosphere that it creates, every larger landscape watershed has its own little hydrosphere that it creates.

[00:07:59] a hydrological cycle that is a mini cycle within the larger cycle. And in order to heal the larger cycle, we need to heal the smaller cycle. It's the same thing that I was saying earlier, that in order to solve the problem, you actually have to solve it in the small, and you don't then scale up the solution, you just heal place by place, and that heals systemic health, or brings systemic health back.

[00:08:26] And so, we would need to heal our hydrological cycles at the local scale, which means healing the soils, so the soils can retain, water again. We would heal, have to heal the rivers, bring back the forests, bring back the grasslands um, all these natural, like the biggest ally that we have in getting through these tumultuous three, four decades that we don't know whether we will get through is life itself.

[00:08:53] But we now need to set the points so life itself can help us. And that means, paying attention to healing local ecosystems, and re regionalizing our basic need provisioning. And that's a massive innovation opportunity around re regionalizing production and consumption attuned to the bioproductive resources available in a particular reason.

[00:09:23] So the platform technologies might be the same, but the resources going into it might be rice husk or bamboo in Asian countries, pine or whatever biomass in European or North American bioregions. And in that. It's literally undoing some of the brittleness that we've created in the push of globalizing everything and making everything more energy intensive because we ship everything around the globe unnecessarily.

[00:10:04] And We're chasing scale, scaling up if we turn back to really looking at what technologies to use and how in order to provide people within a bioregion with the core basic needs of energy, water, some form of transport, education, a

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fiber resource and, and a diverse diet. And, of course, this is not some kind of parochial falling back into survival units.

[00:10:36] Of course, we'll have global trade and we will need global trade to have the enabling technologies developed that would help this, re regionalization. I think it's the operationalization of your Great Simplification is to bring it back home into the context of communities and bioregions. And yeah, that's a long journey ahead and it's encountered all of the legal systems and global trade tariffs and all the things that we've created in the last 50 years.

[00:11:09] **Nate Hagens:** So you're saying that instead of having some technology or vision and scaling it around the world, you start with an understanding, and a shift in consciousness, and you have a vision. local responses, depending on where you are in the world, and those aren't necessarily interconnected, but the aggregate of all of them brings us more towards a regenerative culture, yes?

[00:11:39] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Yeah, I mean, you've been in these forums with government and stuff as well as when I follow you on LinkedIn, like if you take the same conversation with like the Ministry of Defense, and how do we respond to climate change? It's the only way to build the systemic resilience into the system. If we know that we're moving into a world of cascading collapses and massive disruptions, the only way that you can avoid that, like people will suffer.

[00:12:09] But. If we now do what our species is the unique contribution as life in the bigger ecosystem, we're just a cell in a larger body, but our cell, this human capability is the capability of anticipation and foresight that we don't know whether other species have to the extent that we do. And if we anticipate that the current economic system and many of the systems we've built over the last 200.

[00:12:37] 500 and 1000 years are about to transform profound way, then the best way to create resilience is to create redundancy, which means that core provisioning of water, energy, transport, food needs to be in a scale linking way provided as close to home as possible. But not exclusively.

[00:13:03] **Nate Hagens:** So here's the problem that I see or the challenge.

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[00:13:08] Let's say there are millions of people that totally understand and agree with what you're saying. And they would like to have redundancy and locally produced food, water, shelter, basic needs, transport, but then other people have their redundancy met by the potential energy and stored fossil fuels and the complexity that they.

[00:13:32] still offer us, even at a recognized impact on the biosphere and increasing cost and unfairness, won't that that other culture that's relying on the potential energy that is at a flick of a switch at our fingertips or a, digital transfer won't people prefer that until they have no other option?

[00:13:57] In other words the things you're talking about are desperately needed in coming decades. But by the time the majority of people understand the framework you're presenting, the options will be fewer.

[00:14:13] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I mean, what you've just described is my life in the last 25 years. And I know you, you know that too.

[00:14:20] Like it's no fun to say, I told, to be able to say, I told you so in 2002 or 2003, like. For an academic, it might be to say, oh yeah, I, but, it's actually really frustrating. Yeah. So in, in that sense just because it will take a while for people to wake up and it will be like we're already at, not at five to 12, but at 25 past one, and.

[00:14:48] If we take until dawn to wake up, we're probably not going to survive but we're now at a point where we don't have any guarantees anymore anyway, and you need to find pathways that both offer a path towards healing, both of communities, of social cohesion, of people's relationship to place and people's relationship to each other.

[00:15:17] You need to have a path towards resilience in the face of disruption, so that's local provisioning as much as possible. And all of those are also a potential path of transforming. The way that people interact and relate to the system, and it needs to be more attractive to be in that relationship with deep, analog.

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[00:15:44] being, then the kind of disembodied world that we, where we like to be on zoom calls and, solve the global problematique or, or lose ourselves in, the metaverse. Uh I think that as you yourself speak about so much some of that other alternative will, to my mind, lose some of its, wind in the sail, as climate change will make it more and more clear that we can't burn more carbon, and as, if we take that long, these resources are non renewable, they are increasingly scarce, and I don't need to tell you that.

[00:16:29] **Nate Hagens:** A viewer I met just recently. at an airport came up to me and said, I have so many questions and they were making fun of the fact that apparently I always say that which I don't even recognize that I always say that. But in this case, I have so many questions, Daniel. so is, it possible that there could be a scout team or a bunch of nodes around the world that recognize what you're saying and could get ahead of this and could that scale, I know you're affiliated somehow with the global eco village network.

[00:17:05] And I met Amina Bal when I was in India. and they have like thousands of eco villages around the world. Are those acting as a third attractors for people? Or what are your thoughts on that?

[00:17:18] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I mean, there's so many well meaning networks that are trying to build sandboxes where. aspects of what we're trying to birth is being lived in the present.

[00:17:32] That's this, I think more and more we need to, like part of why we're so trapped in not creating the truly new is that we're still thinking in transition means from we're here and we need to transition to this other world. And it's always a sort of, it's a relationship to the future that is disempowers us with regard to our agency in the now.

[00:17:57] And there's this notion that a friend of mine, or two friends of mine, Bill Sharp, who also worked on Three Horizons, and Tony Hodgson, who's actually the co originator of the Three Horizons they speak of something called the future potential of the present moment. And for me, all these kind of, like, I've been with the Global Ecovillage Network for 20 years.

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[00:18:18] I lived at Fyndhorn, I ran Fyndhorn College for years and brought universities to the, one of the most established ecovillages in Scotland. And for a while, I believed in the story that they were kind of living the new culture and implementing them. that's where I learned that the village scale isn't enough.

[00:18:38] That's where I, lived, and not intellectually, but in a lived way, understood that bioregional approaches are the enabling constraint around which you can do things. They're not a solution. They're still ecovillages are, to some extent, privileged people hiding away from confronting the mainstream culture by co creating a better, more amenable culture amongst themselves.

[00:19:12] And then they're surprised that they very often fall out because most of them are, have slightly anarchistic tendencies questioning the status quo. And just because that's the one thing they have in common, they think they can create communities together. And which is wonderful. And I've learned a lot.

[00:19:28] They're pressure cookers for human development. And then I don't think they're like, they were like, there's an interesting. Historical thing here. when. Danella Meadows started the Balloton Group and wrote that early paper of the Balloton Group about the need for regional learning centers to bring people back into solving what I was just talking about, basically.

[00:19:58] Solving the word problematique in the true context, in the real specific context of a particular region, and that needed a new kind of observatory and a new kind of learning center. for the region, about the region. This, one of the main funder behind the Global Ecovillage Network and Gaia Education is a Danish, Canadian guy called Ross Jackson, and he was part of the Ballot Group, and so the strategic use of the ecovillages that already existed at that point and the bringing together of them into first the Danish network and then the European network and then the different secretariats around the world in national networks.

[00:20:45] And the original vision of making the more established ecovillages like Auroville and Crystal Waters and Fyndhorn and a couple of others, the farm living and learning centers where people could practically learn about alternatives, basically living a great simplification in the modern age and improve life's well being and improve the impact on the environment.

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[00:21:15] that vision was there, but somehow in the I don't know when mid

[00:21:21] **Nate Hagens:** 2000s. Humans were involved.

[00:21:23] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Yeah, somewhere in the mid 2000s, humans were involved and funding got scarce and all sorts of things happened. and it's still, I mean, you know, it's like failures contribute hugely.

[00:21:36] And while many of these projects are failing, I mean, Albert Bates, who was one of the early members in the farm in the U. S. recently shared how the farm is turning into some form of suburbia and people are putting up fences and he's kind of going, what happened here?

[00:21:57] **Nate Hagens:** I'm thinking about having him on to talk about biochar, which is a topic I've not, discussed.

[00:22:04] Another topic that I've not discussed, you've mentioned several times here, which is bioregionalism. so in a regenerative you know, movement, how do localism and bioregionalism fit in? And maybe for our viewers, could you define what bioregionalism is first?

[00:22:23] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** One of my mentors, Satish Kumar gave me this little warning.

[00:22:27] The Schumacher

[00:22:28] **Nate Hagens:** Institute.

[00:22:29] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Schumacher College in Devon in England. Yeah. he gave me this little thinking help regarding the use of any word that has ism at the end. He said, every ism creates a schism. So I don't like talking about bioregionalism. it's bioregioning or bioregional way of relating to the landscape.

[00:22:56] And that is. our species survival pattern. We have always lived as a bioregional species for 99 percent of our species journey. The, kind of,

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[00:23:08] **Nate Hagens:** and, fossil fuels is what kicked us off of that.

[00:23:12] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Exactly. well, early use of agriculture, settlement patterns, the shift towards the power over rather than power with system that happened with the onset of city states agriculture, and then the use of.

[00:23:26] raw materials in a different way. But, but bioregional, the bioregional movement rebirthed in a number of places. Like in Europe, it was Sir Patrick Geddes, who was one of the biologists who became the first. Founder of the Discipline of Town Planning. He taught at Dundee and wrote a book in 1910 called Cities in Evolution, in which he suggested that every city should be planned in the context of its what he called the valley section, which was from the mountains down to the sea, the watershed that the city was And it, it needed to build its basic provisioning on that.

[00:24:10] And he actually was the first person to then map that area around Scotland in that way, in different layers. And that created overlay mapping that Ian McHarg then further developed and that later developed by into GIS, the global geographic information system. And so that's, on the one side.

[00:24:31] And then in America, you had the Planet Drum Foundation and Peter Berg and Raymond Dusman and these guys together with the poet Gary Snyder start and then David Hanke in, in Arkansas. They were in the 1960s and 70s by regional movements that were also reconnecting to indigenous land use patterns and land like territories.

[00:24:56] And the first bioregional congress in the US, I think was in, I would come up with the wrong, I think it was early 1970s, if I'm right. And for me, what it's best described by Michael Tomaschall's definition, which is a bioregion is both a biogeophysical terrain and the terrain of consciousness.

[00:25:26] **Nate Hagens:** How, so?

[00:25:27] What does that mean?

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[00:25:28] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** It's, if you think of the place you grew up in, and if you close your eyes and you make a kind of journey from that house away, by bicycle, in your dad's car, or whatever. There's normally a feature in the landscape, crossing a bridge, a ridge, a canyon somewhere, where there's a sort of felt sense of, okay, now we're leaving the shire and we're out there in the real world.

[00:25:55] And likewise, when you come back, there is that feature in the landscape. That's the territory of consciousness that for you defines a region. And. And we all have that.

[00:26:06] **Nate Hagens:** We all have that feeling. And all our ancestors presumably had that feeling.

[00:26:11] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** And likewise, when you, I just came back from a visit to my hometown, that's why we postponed the conversation.

[00:26:19] And I learned a lot about, from a man that for 35 years, ran the project that has led to the rewilding of the river Isar, which the town Munich is on. And the political nightmare was to get that through the system and all this. But the way he, because he's from the source all the way to past Munich, he has been in every single village along that river for decades talking to the people about their relationship to the river.

[00:26:48] And so he knows exactly from each village and each region how they kind of go, well, over there, well, they're not us. In most places, particularly in rural places, we have a very clear It, and it doesn't mean a othering of others. It the boundary is a boundary of relationship building and of self identity building.

[00:27:11] and it's that kind of boundary that we actually need as a sphere of meaning that enables true collaboration at a human scale. And, so that's the terrain of consciousness that that is actually still present in all landscape. We're losing it in many and. as we're losing languages that are specific to landscape and dialect or actually real languages of that place, we lose a lot of the encoded information of the story of that place.

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[00:27:39] I mean, one of the core things about regeneration is, in terms of People asking, how is working regeneratively different? And this is coming from the work from, Carol Sanford is you cannot work regeneratively if you don't work place and culture specific. So the work has to not just come out of the story of place as it's being told through the humans.

[00:28:02] It also, the place itself, the geology, the hydrology, the climate has to inform the work.

[00:28:10] **Nate Hagens:** If we consider from the mountain to the sea and the way that the water moves and the communities built around it and if we consider that each place should look at the resources it has to go towards a regenerative future.

[00:28:29] There are some places that only exist because of fossil fuels and cheap energy allowing them to, and their own regenerative capacity is not only low because there is no river from the mountain to the sea and in many cities around the world. So does regenerative and the things you're talking about imply massive movements of people immigration, et cetera.

[00:29:02] what are your thoughts on that?

[00:29:08] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I mean, massive movements of people the forecast and reality of Planet Earth. And yes, that is a really big question. As people try to heal the bioregions that they're in, even if they become successful, there will be disruptions of all sorts. And part of that will be the pressure of people coming in whose bioregions, the healing of whose bioregion has failed because it was too late.

[00:29:44] And that is a moral challenge and a question of how we as a species are capable of dealing with that. and, it's, to some extent, the rite of passage of our species where, what, what path we choose in how we deal with that. but it's literally, I think we're trapped in the scientific.

[00:30:10] paradigm to the point that we kind of have a blind spot in even shining the good work of science onto the possibility of how life's synergetic processes and synergistic processes could actually really surprise us if we go into this deep healing

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of place and capacity building in Meet basic provisions and also the deeper nuanced conversation, how we would, in order to enable that, create a higher ground as a, globally, to say what are the key mining and high technologies that are still needed in a, and an enabling of this radically re regionalized system.

[00:31:07] And of course, I'm not, I'm, fully aware that there's so many things where you kind of go, there's so many vested interest in the system, so many big power and industry players and, so on, fat chance this is going to happen. At the same time, because you were earlier asking about networks, there are already existing networks that are working on building this collapse resilience back into the system, and they're pretty well funded, and some of them are from the right my mind, right intentions.

[00:31:41] Others are coming more from a sort of billionaire with a three story bunker survivalists, or like, like preppers on steroids funding, that kind of stuff. but,

[00:31:56] I mean, how, do you? do your work knowing what you know.

[00:32:02] **Nate Hagens:** with increasing difficulty because this isn't a single issue podcast, as you're aware, everything is connected, and a lot of people care or focus about climate change or social justice or international activism, or whatever it is. And everything is dependent on this ancient sunlight and our monetary claims and our global system of just in time commerce.

[00:32:30] And as this sunlight dwindles and becomes more expensive, it's going to change everything. I. I don't have an easy answer for it. How? Okay, I'll tell you the truth. The truth is, I handle it and I cope by hosting conversations with bright, pro future humans like yourself, and that gives me a boost of oxytocin and serotonin to carry on, but it is really difficult.

[00:33:00] I mean, this is a musical chain chairs sort of moment. And like you said, it's a rite of passage. It will be, we're going through a rite of passage for our species. It's a species level conversation. We know where we came from, how we got here, what we need, what we're doing. At least we have the ability to know that.

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[00:33:21] so I hope that there's an emergent changing of people's consciousness that comes from your work and mine and a lot of people that we know and that creates something that we can't yet spell out or articulate. that's, my current thinking

[00:33:39] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** on it. Yeah, it's interesting because I, also noticed that, I mean, Goethe famously, he said a lot of really wise things 200 years ago.

[00:33:46] And one of the things he said is that it's really difficult to speak about the new without the old. the language of the old bringing the old back in. And, I just see that in the, all these movements, like there's so much blending of, well, I like this vision of a regenerative future or regenerative present, but I also like to be at the same time.

[00:34:10] tech entrepreneur, and I'm horny about AI, and I need to blend it all together, or no, I know how to use cryptocurrencies to make all of this financeable, and it just becomes a kind of real freak show of weird blending of memes.

[00:34:28] **Nate Hagens:** Could we have a weird freak show of a culture for a couple more decades where there are regenerative spots in the planet that are not only doing things bioregionally, but their, their preferences and consumption and behavior habits are adjusted.

[00:34:49] along along with the implications of that and simultaneously across the mountain and another valley are the tech bros and the crypto things. Can those coexist? or, are they mutually exclusive?

[00:35:03] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I probably, I mean, they probably will. The future is already here, just unevenly distributed, and there's a lot of terrible dystopias going on everywhere already every day.

[00:35:16] And there's also some wonderful, kind of, utopias, good worlds going on in different places. I sit personally, I sit on, like, sometimes I find privileges hard to carry when you know what you know. And, because ultimately we're still very

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comfortable and can make a living doing what we're doing. And yeah, I have that same coping mechanism.

[00:35:44] Like my group therapy is also talking to interesting people and feeling I'm not alone. There are other people who actually care. And even if they don't think we still have a chance, they still believe that doing the right thing despite makes a difference. It makes a difference how we go out. And to, bizarrely, I think, if enough of us, all of humanity, reaches the point of maturity, of caring more about life and less about individual lifespan or our species survival, and we find our peace with maybe living the end day of a relatively young species.

[00:36:30] I think exactly in that point we will find the maturity to develop the patterns that will take us into not dying an early death as a species.

[00:36:40] **Nate Hagens:** I love that. I mean, we're, I mean, what's at stake is really, we're moving from a human centered worldview to an earth centered worldview. And that happens one human at a time, I guess.

[00:36:51] And if we have a critical mass of that, then better decisions and better examples might be out there.

[00:36:58] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** There's a beautiful little book that if you haven't read it, I recommend it highly. It's called Saving Appearances by a guy called Owen Barfield. This small little book, easy read, one day read kind of thing, written in the 1960s, Oxford University Press.

[00:37:17] And he was an Oxford scholar that also was close to the anthroposophical Montessori movement and so on. And in this book. what he means by saving appearances is the same as the phenomenologists or David Abram and all these people are talking about, like, we need to get back in the body, back into the awareness of how the way we see the world, the organizing ideas we take, the stories we tell actually makes the world show up to us in a certain way.

[00:37:45] It's, reality isn't, like, experiences of reality is not a one way process. There's no opening of eyes and there's this objective world just coming in. There's

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something going out. the ideas with which we make sense of all of this. And Owen Barfield speaks in this book about an arc of humanity, and he speaks about those all indigenous cultures and their wisdom, their kin centric worldview is a participatory worldview, you're in the world, you are the world.

[00:38:17] Nature that there is no world word for nature because nature isn't, another. That's he calls that primary participation. it's this, the shaman who walks through the forest and sees the light hitting the dew drop and there's a little spark and he knows that was a communication and that was significant.

[00:38:38] And he doesn't say, oh yeah, that was a light beam hitting the thing. And it's a physical manifestation of light being broken by a utero. that's primary participation.

[00:38:49] **Nate Hagens:** Also maybe called embodied participation, maybe.

[00:38:53] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Well, yeah, I'm just saying what he calls it. And then you talk about the separation, the age of the enlightenment, the world as other and what that brings science and technology and the capability of being detached enough.

[00:39:09] So you actually heard your own skin, your own larger being and, exploit its resources. That's the culture we're in. And he basically says there is a final participation stage that is a healing of those two. And twice now, as we were speaking, I find that's the sort of framing that he brought up ages ago of how do we come back in, that we understand.

[00:39:36] And science tells us. That, of course, everything is fundamentally interconnected, and that, of course, the mind is, whether you look at Heisenberg or Bateson, or all of those people, or Maturana and Varela, they're all talking about that. It's just that science in its popular form, hasn't caught up to the true insights of complexity science, that this is a participatory, dynamic wholeness in which we're embedded, or dynamic complexity, and everything is an interaction in it.

[00:40:11] So we are participants. It's based on Poincaré's three body problems from a hundred years ago. Every system that has more than three interacting variables

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is a complex system and is mathematically non linear and fundamentally unpredictable and controllable unless you limit the time space or the time or locality.

[00:40:34] And If we take that insight seriously, then more control, more prediction, more manipulation through more data, through bigger data sets, through bigger, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, is more of the old system. The insight is, you can't predict and control it, so the new purpose for science should be teaching us to, intelligibility, not prediction, dancing with the system.

[00:41:06] How do we really understand the system? And that has to be in the granularity of a specific place and context. It can't be global conferences about global problems, more global abstract definitions, and then bring in the engineer and designers and have a solution hackathon, and then bring in the investors and have a three minute pitch and then scale it up.

[00:41:28] And then when it arrives in place, oh, it doesn't fit. That's it. How surprising. It's like Einstein the definition of madness, doing the same thing over and over again, being surprised that it's leading to the same fucking result.

[00:41:47] **Nate Hagens:** So, on, on your road to this work on regenerative cultures, I know you often use the term unlearn.

[00:41:56] To unlearn the worldviews of our current dominant culture and interact ways of interacting with the world. what does it mean to unlearn and what does this look like in your own personal life?

[00:42:10] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Yeah. I was gonna go there anyway because that's the only way I can talk about it. Basically, I became a biologist because I loved Good on Humboldt, I grew up in Germany, and, I somehow thought it was still possible to be a natural philosopher and kind of be just enthralled by the awe of how it all fits together, not by taking a deep dive into one hemoglobin molecule and write a PhD on that. and so. I went into science and did a degree in biology and zoology, oceanography, and evolutionary science, and studied a lot of marine mammals in Santa Cruz, on Unuevo State Park with Bernie LeBoeuf, watching elephant seals, largest, longest, marine mammal life history study, and spending

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lots of time on an Indian midden watching elephant seals during the breeding season, and then seeing how little of that three month experience was expressed in the data set I collected, and how much was just Occam razored away.

[00:43:33] It just felt like a big animal going in and one fillet coming out, and the rest being discarded to use as a brutal animal. I use metaphor. But basically, I just got disheartened with science and then couldn't leave the marine environment, became a scuba diving instructor for a while, realized that hedonism wasn't a solution either.

[00:44:02] And then I found out about Schumacher College that I mentioned earlier. That's where my unlearning really started. I guess my interest, because when you mentioned ancient sunlight, what's his name again that wrote the book? Thomas Hartman. Thomas Hartman. That book was after I had this diving instructor time, which was kind of at least 18 months, 24 months of not reading a single book and being very much in the physical.

[00:44:28] And and, and, and, Then we ended up, like I had this vision of starting an eco village and environmental education center in southern Spain, and my wife, now wife, and back then girlfriend and I ended up in the Alpujarras in southern Spain with this hippie dream, long hair, VW bus, looking for an old thinker, wanting to start the permaculture community, and we ended up taking care of a friend's olive grove for a summer and had this eccentric English couple, And they gave me Hours of Ancient Sunlight as the first book that I read.

[00:45:10] and then through that book, because Neil Donald Walsh, the guy who wrote Conversations with God wrote a forward in that book. And suddenly at the time I was very much on a spiritual seeking thing. I read read all these conversations with God books, and, that was real inflection point in what, 2001.

[00:45:33] where I realized that I wasn't ready yet to build this environmental education center. And through that time, that's when, I then did rudimentary internet research, when the internet was still spitting out kind of strange looking printed documents. and I read a lot of Joanna Macy, Fritjof Capra, John Seed, and through that found that all of these people were teaching at Schumacher College.

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[00:46:02] And then I realized that people would, there was actually a team of people doing a master's in holistic science, addressing all the things that I didn't like about science. And so they, like, James Lovelock was teaching there, Robert Sheldrake was teaching there, Henry Bortoff, the student of Bohm, was teaching Goethean science there, Margaret Cohen, also a Goethean scientist David, we met, I met David Suzuki Carl Henry Koberb Amory Lovins you name it, and I met them in human scale, like at a, in a small English countryside cottage of the Dartington Estate, where there were never more than 30, 35 people in the building. And very often, our master's group were nine people, three teachers, and then the visiting teachers. So the dial, the depth of dialogue, four hours a day of being with all these people, that's where learning and unlearning happened at the same time.

[00:47:00] And also, a sort of embodiment of cleaning the college together and preparing food together and all of that.

[00:47:10] **Nate Hagens:** So before we get to the bioregionaling and the watershed and the change in value systems that would require that, could such an educational experience that you went through at Schumacher College, could something like that be scaled today around the world?

[00:47:31] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Well, I've been basically for 20 years trying to do that in one way or another, not scaled in a kind of, oh, let's find unicorns. billionaire who wants to do some karma cleaning and throw 300 million at something and, oh yeah, let's scale it. I don't believe in those solutions anymore. I actually think they're a bloody waste of time.

[00:47:58] but what I've seen that Gaia Education, that the, Educational arm of the global eco network we spoke of that was founded in 2005. I bumped into them at a conference at hor, which was called Restoring the Earth in 2001, where people doing earth regeneration projects in ecosystems around the world.

[00:48:23] 250 people came together at HOR for a week with John man Cherry, who was working for Unip at the time, and we declared the 21st century, the first, the century of Earth restoration. With 220 people. And in that conference there was a brief preview of some of the team of GA education of what they were working on.

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[00:48:45] And it matched one-to-one, what I was working on with my master's thesis at Omaha College. And that's when my relationship with them started. And then when I finished my PhD on design for Human and planetary health in 2006, the funding councils didn't have any understanding of what I was working on.

[00:49:05] It was too transdisciplinary, and I was in an art and design school, but it was all scientific, and so I just couldn't get any funding. And I used my last funding to go to Findhorn and do the ecovillage design education course. That was the very first one they were running, and it was a training of trainers course.

[00:49:23] And I wasn't necessarily as interested in what they were teaching, because I thought I knew that material quite well, but I was interested in how they were teaching it in an embodied, practical way in an eco village. And since then, I've basically helped over the years. They took that course online with that, they brought a lot more content in, and basically my PhD was written into that.

[00:49:48] And they've worked in 55 countries on six continents, and in places like Brazil, there's a whole layer of connection between the different cities of networks that have gone through this course. There are people that meet each other and say, Ah, you're a Gaian. you also did that course. And then the level of conversation jumps to a whole different conversation because you don't have to more people will tell them what you know, because you know what they, you have a shared background.

[00:50:23] And so that's one example. And then I've worked with a number of educational outfits and right now a friend of mine, Tobias Lute at ETH Zurich, which is the seventh ranking university in the world, quite respected, kind of the MIT of Europe. we're bringing the same kind of unlearning, relearning, valuing indigenous knowledge, bringing in different ways of knowing and warm data into a top science and engineering university with this designing resilient and regenerative systems MOOC series, so anybody can do it for free.

[00:50:58] And then there's also a certificate of advanced studies and a master's in advanced studies. And. So I keep believing that education is the leverage point to make this happen, and I've been working on it for 20 years, and I've had moments of literally talking to a San Francisco based dot com billionaire.

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[00:51:20] about, oh, just after my book came out. And he asked me, people tell me you have all the answers. And I said well, they haven't read my book. There are 250 questions in it. I'm not offering answers. If anybody says to you they have all the answers, I would be careful about that. And That's not how it works in America.

[00:51:40] In America, you just say, sure, yeah, give me the money and I'll show you all the answers. And then I was asked the question, so where do you think is the biggest leverage point? And then I said education, and the answer came, oh, that's too slow. And that's precisely where we're fucking up, because that's why we do what Bayo Akomolafis says so beautifully in his question, Maybe the way we respond to the crisis is part of the crisis and that's, what I see over and over again.

[00:52:12] People think because they were successful in creating a unicorn in the dot com world that they know how to scale and how to implement things rather than trust that what is needed is so close to the ground that they can't Get it at reporting. It can't be mega funds of through a hundred million at this vision.

[00:52:35] It needs to be trustee, locally deployed money that like there's some funders now that are starting to identify local agents that know the local system and then just build trust with that person and then give that person almost like a flow fund to fund small and unconventional projects in context.

[00:52:58] **Nate Hagens:** Have you heard of local peace economies?

[00:53:01] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** No, but that sounds good. Yeah,

[00:53:04] **Nate Hagens:** that, that's an example of that in the U. S. So when, you talk about unlearning and teaching and some of the efforts you mentioned, Is it older people that want to shift, like you mentioned Fyndhorn, that they've experienced all this in their careers and they see the the logic and veracity of what you're saying?

[00:53:30] Or are there young people, 22 years old, that are absolutely clear that our current global High carbon pulse society, his days are numbered and so they want to move in this direction. what is the the distribution of students in, in your teaching?

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[00:53:53] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Well, it's shifting a lot over the years.

[00:53:56] And that's also part of, like, I always remember that when I finished my PhD, my second PhD supervisor was John Todd, like a real elder to this movement who, together with, Yeah, so they, founded New Alchemy Institute in 1990, no, 69. Yeah. And I, visited them in 2006 at Cape Cod, at their house, and there's actually a video of the conversation on YouTube, and I asked them.

[00:54:27] So what has changed from you writing the briefing paper to the 1972 conference on the environment in Stockholm? And, like, have we actually moved an inch forward or have we just moved further into the abyss? And of course we've moved further into the abyss, but the big change that has happened, that they talked about back then, is that, well, when we started, We were 35, 40 people and we all knew each other by first name and were globally connected through telephax and phone calls and letters now there are massive movements that are rooted and give nuance, different language and approach to this, these impulses in pretty much every country or most countries around the world, and that still marginal, maybe, but they're there.

[00:55:20] And in terms of what I see with the profile of Gaia education, the educators, the people designing the program somehow thought people would take these courses. to start ecovillages. But very soon it became clear that people were just interested in well being and right relationship and appropriate participation at that kind of scale.

[00:55:46] And so most of the profiles were people that were kind of social entrepreneurs and community workers and kind of community activists, consultancy, organizational development type people who really wanted to work with. their context and their local community. And, it's, lovely to, and it was different in different contexts because it's so wide.

[00:56:10] Like there were programs in Bangladesh and programs in Senegal. There's a national, you know, ministry for eco villages in Senegal, and the eco village mode of development is the national development plan. So there were interesting things happening there, but what I've seen, like, for example, now with the ETH course, the MOOC was so successful, that normally when you open up a

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MOOC in the first year, a massive open online course, run on this edX platform that is trying to make a quality education accessible to everyone who has internet access, normally you build it and then you run it with 30 or 50 of your mates.

[00:56:57] You just offer them a free run and say, please go through it and give, us some feedback. Well, we just threw it through ourselves in the deep end and announced it and made it public. And we had 2, 500 people from 101 countries. And that, community has now grown to over 7, 500 people in 130 countries, and they are extremely diverse.

[00:57:23] so it, something is changing.

[00:57:25] **Nate Hagens:** Do you think that the impulse and the demand for that is more about people craving community than it is about knowledge about some more sustainable future is, the impulse. I want to be with people that make sense of the world and see what I'm seeing and learn and travel this together.

[00:57:47] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Yeah, that's a good point because I do like the demographic profile of the echo chamber. is slightly different in different contexts. And for example, when I, a couple of times, was invited to Jeremy Lin's Deep Transformation Network, you kind of look at the people and you realize it's a, large group of retirement aged North Americans who are kind of, instead of watching a bloody telenovela or something doing, spending their evening being with human beings in conversation.

[00:58:27] somehow engaged in something meaningful. so there's definitely some of those people, but you also mentioned young people. I, there's a huge uptake of this regen village, that and regen, and people trying to kind of create this. There's a, in Portugal soon, there will be a gathering of the tribes that is some form of reinventing burning man in Portugal.

[00:58:53] you know, with a bit of a regen paint on it. and I'm not, I'm saying it's slightly tongue in cheek because I don't think the motives of everybody involved are fully to serve the movement, but there, there are, that the interest is vast. The problem with, there is actually one cultural current I do see, post pandemic, that

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people are suddenly interested in community and eco village type stuff again, but it's being rebranded as regen village or whatever.

[00:59:28] And the danger I see, and that's why I think it would be lovely if you invited Albert Bates on your show, is that we are missing some of the vital wisdom of the elders who have run 40, 50, 60 year real world experience experiments. Of course, the world has changed in that time, but there's still a shedlock to learn from that.

[00:59:52] **Nate Hagens:** So, do you fear or do you see that the word regeneration is starting to be misused like sustainability or even climate change or fractional reserve banking or some of these terms that have become so used that the real meaning is being lost?

[01:00:10] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Yeah, the, it was vicious. The, way it came in really fast as early as 2018.

[01:00:20] Um, I can't remember what it was. There was some kind of big marketing agency actually published a report that was called regeneration, the new sustainability. And when I saw that, I was like, oh wow, they're really getting onto this killing of the meme, watering down of the meme, making it understandable because there are too many versions of it.

[01:00:42] Very fast. And particularly in the agricultural industry, like you've got the big Monsanto, Cargill, BASF, they're all got into it more seeing an opportunity here. Ah, there are people now doing this stuff that everybody thinks is the next thing after organic, but it's not regulated yet. So why don't we get in on it?

[01:01:03] And then we can sell it to people and, blah, blah. So there's definitely a lot of misuse of the word. But at the same time, if we anchor it like I did at the very beginning, in life itself, and as the survival pattern of our species, Homo sapiens, then I think there's still a lot of promise in it being a kind of unifying um, um.

[01:01:32] process that enables people to make that shift towards healing places and healing context again. So doing place sourced work rather than system change work.

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[01:01:46] **Nate Hagens:** No, I agree with that. but the more you really look into the concept of regeneration and trophic cascades and net primary productivity, the more the reality of of the disconnect between our current scale and something that is you know, regenerate of a bowl over centuries and decades ahead becomes like really stark.

[01:02:12] For instance, in addition to all the hundred million barrel of oil equivalents per day that we use of ancient sunlight, humans are appropriating 35 to 40 percent of all the net primary productivity hitting the planet and directing it to our endeavors. I did a paper 15 years ago. I'm sure the math is almost the same, but a forest in the United States or in Europe regenerates or grows around 2.

[01:02:43] 6 percent of its biomass every year. So from the sun and from the soil and the rain, a large tree will expand by 2.5 percent give or take. So that's the interest. so when we talk about regeneration using. Some human technology combined with the natural flows of, of Earth's systems, it's it's a smaller amount of yearly and daily interest.

[01:03:13] so that is a, that's a wake up call if you really research it.

[01:03:19] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Well, I mean, the thing is. We need to pay attention to the centropic effect that what, is

[01:03:28] **Nate Hagens:** that

[01:03:29] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** it's that if we do most of the hard data on growth rates and so on are in monoculture systems or focused on specific species in a, in a kind of very every, like all context removed, we're just doing a study of this species.

[01:03:51] And when you actually work with systems in this, nurturing the diversity in the system, actually with periodic pulse, disrupting the system in order to create signals in the system that say, we need growth again because we've just been pruned. Those Exudates of the sub root system actually make the entire forest grow faster and more.

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[01:04:24] and, also help the, plants to be healthier and more resilient. And the density of rootstock and the mycelium networks that they can then build, create increased communication between the trees, which creates increased resilience against pests and all of that. it creates resilience because the trees can actually.

[01:04:44] use that internet of connection under the ground to, to shift vital elements across the system. And most of our data that, that kind of engineering style goes into this, well, yeah, all this talk about like Bill Gates is famous for always going on about you can't solve the problem by planting trees. it's, yeah, if you think like a computer geek, you can't, but if you understand how.

[01:05:16] Ecology works. You can, eh, because it's not just about planting trees, it's about healing salts, it's about mycelial networks. It's about restoring grasslands and water. it's all one healing process, and it's actually at the same time, healing every single cell, the microflora of our guts, of our mouths.

[01:05:37] It's, a salutogenic, a health generating approach to how we fit back into the system. And in that, I believe. Of course, we need many more people to manage those systems. They will not, and this is the danger that in the bastardization of regenerative agriculture, there are the geeks that say, oh, it will all be drones and there will be robots and harvesting and we all just be whatever, playing cards while It's just, you know, the techno fantasies that people promise.

[01:06:13] But a regenerative system is a system that understands that we can reinvent our education system. We can reinvent work. We can solve well being issues and human connections. We don't need dating agencies anymore and everything. If we connect people into the joy of taking care of a thriving ecosystem of an agroforestry landscape where I can't tell you how much joy it is for me and my family and how much health to just have nine chickens and eat healthy eggs that are still warm from being laid every morning.

[01:06:53] Since then, I can't eat eggs anywhere else anymore.

[01:06:56] **Nate Hagens:** I do the same. That's why I was late for this podcast. 'cause I have two baby chickens and I was trying to protect them from the Guinea

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fowl. I, wouldn't have it any other way. So. So you and your family are doing a my understanding is a regenerative forestry project on Myorca where you live.

[01:07:15] Can you, what was the inspiration for that? How's it going? what are your hopes and dreams about that?

[01:07:22] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** It's, Well, I mean, 20 some years ago, when I was in that phase of my life in the Alpujarra trying to set up that eco village in southern Spain, I heard myself say a lot that I would love to live a life in which somewhere between four to six hours a day I could do intellectual work, writing and connecting with people and learning and all of that.

[01:07:47] And somewhere between four and six hours a day, I could do physical work of connecting with place, with landscape, with nature. Wood with real analog, engagement. And it's actually really difficult. I even went to the ecovillages, hoping that must be the ideal place to have that lifestyle. And again, specialization is for insects, but it came back in.

[01:08:16] the people who were good at finances in the ecovillages were in the finance department, spending their time on the computer doing their accounts, and the gardeners were in the gardening, and there wasn't a creative mixing of it in a way. So yeah, for me, Having through the privilege of, an inheritance from my father who died three, four years ago been able to become a custodian of 6, 900 square meters of this beautiful island.

[01:08:50] I finally had an opportunity to do the work of entering into deep relationship with a place. And it's so, it's like, it's a hyper object in the sense that it gets more and more complex, the deeper you look into the detail of it. it's, first, I was busy planting trees, 350 trees by now. but then you, Build relationships with each tree.

[01:09:23] Maybe not everyone makes it, but it's been a very good survival rate so far. Some of them were very small trees, some of them were larger trees. But after three years, you have a relationship with the land, you begin to see the efforts. I've found a source of spent organic, mushroom growing substrate.

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[01:09:43] So after they harvested mushroom flushes and then they composted all of that, I got lorry loads of the stuff from about 30 kilometers from here because in my fifties and I can't start from zero and build up the soil over the next 50 years. and to see what happens when you bring.

[01:10:06] organic matter and nutrients back into the system and see how it works when you align the trees in such a way that in the high sun of two o'clock in the afternoon, they shade each other and then in between the trees, you build, grow the vegetables. It's just, for me, it's been great.

[01:10:28] Really remarkable, not just as a agrofiness and becoming fit again and coming back into my body again and balancing all this zoom based online work and all that, but it's, been a deep personal re inhabitation process, like really re inhabiting my body, growing roots literally in this place, building a relationship to the climate, the patterns, It's, been magic.

[01:10:57] And, yeah, we're, in the middle of it. The forest is slowly taking shape. It's it's a lot more verdant as it was. I'm, a bit overwhelmed with being a father, renovating a house. And doing all this work at the same time because it's more than one human being can really whoop. But yeah, it's, a privilege.

[01:11:20] It's a privilege.

[01:11:21] **Nate Hagens:** I hear you. How many kids do you have?

[01:11:23] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Just one. We, like after 21 years of not being able to, having kids together. Ellis and I were surprised by now almost seven, almost eight years ago. And so we have a daughter who turns seven next Monday. And so what what is your daughter learning before she has to unlearn?

[01:11:47] **Nate Hagens:** that's different from the other students in, Spain, her age, might you speculate?

[01:11:56] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Poor, little creature. speaks four languages at seven because her mother is English. I'm German. We live on Mallorca and there's

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Spanish and Mallorquin or Catalan. And she's at a school that is a local school that speaks Catalan and Spanish.

[01:12:13] So yeah, she, she speaks. She's now finally getting into the easy sailing phase where we're not adding another language every couple of years. But also her intimate relationship with these chickens and the way she really communicates with them. And this is a bit of a chicken whisperer. She can handle them much better than I can.

[01:12:38] and. having birthday celebrations where all the little ones plant a tree together and then she can meet that tree again and again and can see that tree that she planted on the sixth birthday on her seventh birthday looks very different. And so all those things I think are um, positive learnings, and she's in a great school that, that is, there's no exams, no classes, all project based very much focused on emotional literacy and not getting to be worried about whether you start reading with one or with one and a half, like in the first year or the second year or whatever, but that's it.

[01:13:24] I don't know, do you have kids?

[01:13:26] **Nate Hagens:** I do not, other than my cultural children from the University of Minnesota, no biological ones.

[01:13:32] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Because you do notice when you send them to school, how insidious, even in an alternative school, the societal norming, is and how it's a fine balance because you can't say, Oh, that's terrible.

[01:13:48] I don't want her to be brainwashed in that way. Pull her out. I mean, how are you going to be in a dysfunctional world where everybody's crazy and you need to understand the collective insanity to some extent. Otherwise, you're the crazy person and you can't engage at all. And so it's not fair to not socialize at all, but at the same time you do have to be careful what comes in.

[01:14:10] And I had a, when, I first really struggled with this of realizing how, as my friend Manish Jain provocatively likes to question, maybe education is the worst crime against humanity ever committed. That's a sentence that is worth sitting with.

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A couple of times because it sounds too radical, but when you really think of it, there's a lot to it.

[01:14:39] **Nate Hagens:** Is it education or is it this particular type of education? Because your whole last 20 years is about education.

[01:14:48] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Of course it's the, it's what we call education in the, education system invented in the first industrial revolution in Victorian England and exported through colonialism all over the world.

[01:15:02] the system where you produce the factory workers, the, cogs for the machines of industry, the, sitting in roles and repeating by rote information, competing against each other, singling out disciplines and skills Sorting the population into the mind workers and the hand workers that kind of system, I think, has a lot to answer for with regard to effing things up.

[01:15:36] but yeah, I had a conversation with Nora Bateson when, I was first, first really worrying about, like, I knew I couldn't also homeschool. Like that's just too much . and she said that the way she worked well with this, with regard to her daughter was this notion like, what's the pny or something?

[01:15:59] the wife of in the, like, in the, Greek mythology while he was on his long journey where he couldn't come home to Ithaca. Everybody wanted to get married to his wife. All the princes were kind of saying, Oh, he's never coming home. We want to be married with you and have your Ithaca for us.

[01:16:20] And the way that she kept them at bay was she was knitting a scarf and she said publicly that I will take my time I'm still waiting for my husband and I'm making up my mind about who to marry and I won't tell it until the scarf is knitted and she was in public all day long when she was having these meetings always busy knitting the scarf in an order to give This was more time.

[01:16:46] At night, she would undo the scarf of what she'd knitted in the morning. And that's the metaphor of, you send your children to school where they get knitted, and then you have to spend the evenings and the weekends and the

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holidays unknitting. And it's helping me Dance that dance with education and my daughter.

[01:17:08] **Nate Hagens:** That's great. so earlier in the episode, we talked about dystopias and you mentioned there were some OITOPIAS. could you maybe give our listeners a couple of examples of things that have surprised you that you were excited about that are moving in a positive direction around the world somewhere?

[01:17:29] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Well, because we talked about bioregioning I find it really Encouraging that is coming back big time in many different contexts even at very high levels within the kind of UN system, people are beginning to understand that there's something to the regional scale but much more on the grassroots or regional scale.

[01:17:54] network level there are, whether it's across Central and South America, in North America, in Canada in parts of Africa, in parts of Europe, Asia, there are movements defining their watershed, their context in which they will make their stance to become regenerative in that place. And whether it's.

[01:18:21] the Regenerative Communities Network that John Fullerton founded through the Capital Institute that then sort of evolved, and then a lot of people like Stuart Cohen from, the Buckminster Fuller Institute, and, and Isabel Carlyle from the Bioregional Learning Center in the UK, and a number of friends have just, they're just running this what's it called, bioregional conversation, a series of, of um, webinars, where they basically have people from these different bioregions share about their experience and how they work, and there's the beginning to build some form of supportive course that, that would help people who are trying to work bioregionally do that, and, In a kind of parallel way, there's lots of parallel attempts, like, for example, the Common Land Foundation in the Netherlands, Willem Verweder, who was the head of IOC in the Netherlands for 20 years.

[01:19:25] He took a year out after stepping down from that job and then wrote the book. A sort of paper which he called the four returns framework, and then he fundraised and built an organization which is now very strong called common land, and they're working at landscape scale in the intersection between social, ecological, and economic regeneration but through the landscape.

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[01:19:55] Healing and they use the theory you and invest quite significantly in building the, social networks in a region to work on what they call the return of inspiration as the first return. And foco focusing that on ecosystems restoration. And so going into the practice, not just talking about it, even if it's in small contexts, builds working together.

[01:20:23] So it builds human social returns and ecological returns, because you actually are doing some tree planting and healing work together. And Then, if you foster that long enough and you show that when the vision is concrete of how could we bring this landscape back, how could we support this aquifer, the important bit here is that it's a thinking that is ecosystems thinking, so it's over 25 years, and that was the key thing that Willem did so well.

[01:20:53] beautifully, is that he actually turned big funders down when they said the classic we'll be with you for the first three years and then we'll revisit whether we're still funding you. He said, okay, I don't care that you offered me a million. If you're not with me for 25 years, I'm not interested. And that's, phew, And that approach is really helping.

[01:21:16] Like, it's really working. And, what he's now able to do, because he's seven, eight, nine years, ten years into the story in some landscapes, is that he's, he can actually make an argument to show It wasn't mad to spend half a million per landscape to do the social process, the theory you with all the stakeholders, because that built the network, the associations, the cooperatives, the new entrepreneur, your fabric that then allowed it.

[01:21:46] Ecological and social returns to really flourish. And look at this, you only have to be patient for six or seven years. And now economic returns are actually starting to come into the region. It's the local economy is kickstarting.

[01:22:00] **Nate Hagens:** Here, Um, so as I predicted. Off camera, I didn't get to half of my questions, but let me ask you a two part question for the viewers who are watching this who are all around the world.

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[01:22:17] what sort of steps, first steps would you recommend if they intuitively recognize the importance of bioregionalism and localism and doing things in their place? what are, some first steps that you could recommend?

[01:22:35] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I think. And I'm still at the beginning of this, because I'm in a weird space that I've chosen a bioregion that is not my native bioregion.

[01:22:45] I was born in Munich, and I'm working with a group of people that are doing bioregional regeneration of the Isar Munich bioregion, which is interesting to see. in my body feel how differently I can be in that group, but the simple fact that I'm, I was born in that bio region and that I have all these early childhood memories along that river and went to a monastery school up that river and all these kind of, it immediately gives me sort of a standing and a participatory Allowance in that system.

[01:23:21] Whereas here on Mallorca, it's a culture that has been invaded by so many different places around the world. that, it's very different to engage with the Mallorquin and trying to help the system here, but to answer your question quickly,

[01:23:36] **Nate Hagens:** maybe the first step is to move back to where you were born.

[01:23:40] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Well, I don't think so because we all have like I personally spent a lot of time like all my childhood with my grandmother in the Mediterranean and all the holidays and so I was also imprinted on the Mediterranean. My passport is German, but I never felt German. I actually felt it was weird to go back there.

[01:24:04] So I feel I am in the place that I feel most at home in, but of course I have to accept that on this particular island people will never really see me a hundred percent as somebody who's from here. But I think for anybody who wants to start the process of what we're Peter Burke and Gary Snyder called re inhabitation.

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[01:24:29] Coming home into the body, coming home into community, coming home into the bioregion is about paying attention. It's about having interest again in the detail, not having this way of seeing that, ah, yeah, a tree, general label, all trees, I've seen trees before, so you don't see the tree in front of you, you don't even care what type of tree it is.

[01:24:55] Just like I. I studied biology, but I've learned so much about trees in the last three, four years that I realized the entire landscape. opens up like a book opens up when you learn how to read, when you, understand the trees. Yeah, it's a, ah, and that I've walked in this world for 48 years and now I can read it.

[01:25:21] And it's that kind of coming home, whether it's tree, water, ancient stories, the, local fairy tales, the, way that names talk about, What happened at that place, the deep kind of aboriginal knowledge of that place that is beyond what the culture that currently calls itself the local culture is. It's deeper than that, and by finding that, you can find that in every place fall in love with the place again.

[01:25:53] **Nate Hagens:** It sounds like almost an animist perspective.

[01:25:57] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Basically, we need to come back to an animist perspective, because otherwise we won't treat our larger body

[01:26:08] in a way that doesn't hurt it, because you have to be an animist to understand that what I do to this world, I do to myself, to some extent, and I think if you deeply understand the complexity of what's coming out of science right now and how it is all interrelated with regard to microbiome and soil and all of that.

[01:26:35] You begin to see that it is actually somewhat more parsimonious, to use the scientific term, to assume that life and consciousness. is primarily present in everything, then that it emerges ex nihilo at some point in the system. And so, it's just as scientifically valid to understand life as a planetary process that manifests through species and individuals, but is one whole unfolding in Bohmian way than it is to map that complexity through individuals and species and their characteristics.

[01:27:24] I'm not saying that science is false, but we're not looking at the other side of the coin, which is what James Lovelock and all those people tried to build, and

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what somehow Earth system science is inviting us more into, and soil science is inviting us more into, and medical science, and now even quantum field theory is making us.

[01:27:48] basically understand that the story we tell about the nature of reality is highly limited and limiting.

[01:27:57] **Nate Hagens:** So second part of this question in addition to giving advice to listeners on how to You know, be more connected to their place. What, about the town and city councils around the world that have kind of high status, successful people that were voted or elected or volunteered to be part of that?

[01:28:19] But they're part of the economic superorganism with all the modern complexity and inventory and supply chains. And how could someone in that position start thinking about regionalizing and, more localization? and preparing their city or their watershed if they adopt that perspective ahead of when they will have to.

[01:28:45] Do you have any words of advice for that sort of listener?

[01:28:49] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I think that the work of Patrick Gittes on town planning, and there's actually a wonderful Retake on that by a guy called Haba Gidi who worked for the World Futures Council, and they published a little booklet that is freely available on the internet called Regenerative Cities.

[01:29:10] So if you put World Futures Council regenerative cities. And in that, he describes the move from Petros to Polus as a thinking tool. And, he shows how a sit city can actually do all the kind of closing the loops and so on to make. It's international trade dependencies a lot. less, and build these vital relationships of the city to the hinterland.

[01:29:38] And this goes beyond just building regenerative, sustainable, salutogenic cities. It is actually vital to health. It's vital to food security. It's vital to disaster preparedness. it, it has so many, it's, vital to avoiding the kind of mess that your country is in right now, because the Disenfranchising of the ruralities by the city elites leads to the uprising of demagogues like your once and possibly future

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president um, It's like, if we want to, it is a creative way of taking the energy out of the sails of the ultra right people that are fishing for these disenfranchised people.

[01:30:31] Because if you come back to bioregion and place, and you clearly distinguish yourself, we're not creating a bioregion for us against others. You really bring it in, like, This bioregion is richer because of the diversity that is now here. Also, our diversity of opinions and different nationalities in this bioregion is part of life's diversity and therefore part of the creative potential of this place.

[01:30:57] In that framing, we can build city and rural development that is much more inclusive to everybody who's there, that engages them, that creates new job opportunities, new opportunities for production and consumption in a regional economy, that buffers against the volatility of the now increasingly volatile global economy that, if you haven't noticed, is in its last 24 years.

[01:31:25] we can briefly talk about why I think that is. If you want.

[01:31:30] **Nate Hagens:** not 25 years, 24. Yeah. Please briefly talk about why that is.

[01:31:34] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I mean, it's, just that I've noticed that when guy education first put out the online course, and in, in that course, we've had a really radical critique of the growth economy and how money is structured and how what's the core of national economies need to grow it at minimum of 3 percent per annum.

[01:31:56] It's to do with creating money out of nothing and creating differential interests for deposits and loans. And in that process, basically what's shifted, and the first person I heard say this, and it made a lot of sense to me, is Arnold Latke, who wrote this book on post capitalist philanthropy recently.

[01:32:23] when. In 19, in 2010, I would give talks and critique the growth economy. A lot of people would just dismiss me or still completely outright. I was one of these radicals, forget it. But 2015, that had already changed quite a bit. and more and more people were talking about degrowth and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

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[01:32:44] But what's now interesting is that if you talk to a complete arch growth economist and you ask him the question, do you think that? The global economy or the national economy of the United States is going to double in the next 24 years. They will look at you and kind of fall silent and will basically say, I really don't think so, if they're honest.

[01:33:10] And that is indirectly admitting that we're in the last 24 years, because if you have an economy that grows at 3 percent per annum, you get doubling within 24 years.

[01:33:20] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, now I get it. I agree with you. The next doubling is not going to happen. No. Um, yeah. So This has been awesome, and I I will publicly say that I want to have you back.

[01:33:36] I do have a few closing questions, though, that I ask all my guests, so you, gave some advice on regionalizing and localizing, but do you have any other advice to listeners who are carrying the burden of all this knowledge like you and I are? just in, in their lives. what, could they do?

[01:33:57] any behaviors or patterns or rituals or suggestions that you have?

[01:34:01] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** It's interesting. On the one hand, I want to put in parentheses, the one has to be really careful to give advice because things come out of context and, and it's so easy to give advice from a position of privilege that can be quite offensive to a lot of people.

[01:34:24] I live, I mentioned earlier that one of the sort of epistemological aikido I do in my book is that I don't summarize each subchapter with a bunch of bullet points and say, here are your take home points. I actually purposefully turn them into questions. So at the end of every subchapter, there are a bunch of questions, and it adds up to about 250 questions throughout the book.

[01:34:52] And Because of that, I often get asked, so can you leave our listeners with some questions? Okay, let's do that. And what I often answer is that there is an ancient triethica that you can find in almost every indigenous culture around

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the planet. The whole way of council, circle work, and of passage work often hinges on those three questions.

[01:35:20] Does it serve myself? Does it serve my community? And does it serve life? And the interesting thing there is that in our world, there will be some listeners who go, what? The first one is not very eco social, whatever. That's the ego speaking, blah, blah, blah. But you can't serve the collective and you can't serve life.

[01:35:44] If you don't serve yourself, if you think you have part from it, and so, but, and the important bit is to not only ask one of those three questions, the important bit is to get into a daily practice of when you have to make a decision that affects how you live your life. and how you act to find two good answers on all of those three levels.

[01:36:08] And if you can't find answers on one of the levels, then to really think about whether to go ahead with that. I think that's, like it, it worked for our ancestry. in many places to ask those questions.

[01:36:25] **Nate Hagens:** That's an excellent response to that. How would you change that advice or supplement it for the young listeners of this program in their late teens or early twenties starting to learn about or trying to unlearn what they've been taught?

[01:36:41] what, advice do you have for them?

[01:36:43] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Again, my echo chamber seems to suggest that they're actually really tuned in in many ways and they understand that the system is being counted out. And it's a weird. thing to be in when you're that age to kind of go, Hey, wait a minute, didn't you promise us if we work it at school, we would get somewhere in life.

[01:37:06] and at the same time, I think that there's a huge opportunity to, create the world in a, new way with. with a closer relationship to place and, and community. And in this, the, kind of more privileged young people listening, which I'm most of them probably taking this opportunity of that phase of life to really learn skills that aren't just intellectual but are also embodied skills, to pay attention

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that you don't just have it all up here, but that you can actually do something, whether it's woodwork or whatever, carpentry or whatever is of interest.

[01:37:52] And the other dimension, which is more of a call for, please help, is, I have realized that if we want to spread this meme of our innate capacity to create regenerative cultures and this kin centric participatory worldview, if it's only two old guys with over educated backgrounds and PhDs like the two of us talking about it, that's not how culture shifts.

[01:38:21] We need to The artists, the musicians, the dancers, the graffiti artists to do this stuff. We need a form of activism like Banksy stuff that just hits the system in a really creative way in every street corner with its own, like, holding a mirror up to how perverse this world is that we supposedly call normal.

[01:38:48] and I, yeah, so, so, enjoy the kind of youthful activist, um sabotage the system energy and be creative, like, and I want, to hear the regenerative culture rap.

[01:39:02] **Nate Hagens:** If you had a magic wand and there was no personal recourse to you or your reputation, what is one thing you would do to change human and planetary future trajectory? There's so many places that one could go there. I mean, what do you mean by one thing that is actually feasible to do?

[01:39:21] Well, a lot of the things that we think in our minds would help the future, we can't do them because of the political hierarchy and the rules and the social ceiling of what can be said, so if you didn't have to worry about any of that Could you speculate on one macro change, even if it's not practical?

[01:39:48] And the reason I ask this is to act as a Overton window, mind expanding question from different guests who've thought a lot about this, where, ultimately are the leverage points, whether they're popular or not. And I just wanted your, you know, Quick take on what is one direction that could, if it were feasible, even if it's not, actually result in massive change for the better.

[01:40:15] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** I think it's where we look for answers and solutions. And it's written into the Torah with the Golem. It's written into the Bible.

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It's written into Marlowe's and Goethe's Faust. It's written into the famous Zauberlehrling, The Wizard's Apprentice that Goethe wrote and Disney made a little cartoon out of.

[01:40:45] It's in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Over and over again, we're warned that our cleverness, our way of looking at the world and then turning that into technology, so that the power of science and technology can create a self fulfilling prophecy, a suction that can actually, where the t The magic runs away with the wizard's apprentice and becomes like a major problem. And I think we, the way we talk about technology and the way we still believe that technology and AI and all these kind of things, let's just bend it. Let's just use it. We can do stuff with it and all the potential and all of that. I think that's where we really need to reach a new maturity of not doing something just because we can.

[01:41:50] Because we can do all sorts of fucking things, but we need to have the maturity of saying, yes, we can, but we won't. And we need to find the maturity of a system that enforces that. I mean, you've talked a lot with, Daniel Schmachtenberger like that whole, how do we control and create memorandums on certain tech hopefully you're right.

[01:42:14] And we run out of energy before that tech becomes ubiquitous, because if it does work. F U C K.

[01:42:24] **Nate Hagens:** Well, we actually have magic wands right now. the, carbon pulse has afforded us to do so many things, which we do because we can, like you just said. So what you're really making an appeal for is wisdom over cleverness.

[01:42:39] And and I happen to agree. This was fantastic. I am going to have you back on some roundtables. if you do come back on an individual episode in the future, can you speculate on one topic that you are passionate about that you would like to take a deep dive on that's relevant to human futures?

[01:43:00] Obviously, education and agroforestry are things you're, working on, but is there one topic that you could suggest?

[01:43:08] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** Health, health and salute, to Genesis. There's a

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[01:43:14] **Nate Hagens:** guy

[01:43:15] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** called Aaron Antonofsky who in the late 1960s developed an alternative theory of health that I think is vital to build the meta framework to the response we have.

[01:43:28] That's why I wrote my PhD in 2006 on design for human planetary health rather than design for sustainability. And in that I argued for salutogenic design, and I'm beginning more and more to understand that. When people talk about regenerative design these days, and the bioregional pattern, and all of that, like, talking about planetary health and salutogenesis and health as the emergent property at different scales within this nested wholeness of which we are expressions, that could be a really interesting one.

[01:44:01] **Nate Hagens:** Let's do it. Let's do it.

[01:44:03] **Daniel Christian Wahl:** And if you have the time, I would love to, because I would like to put the Who's speaking and who's asking, wait to the other side and, ask you a bit uh, a few questions about your work. would you be willing to come on Voices of the Regeneration sometime? Yeah?

[01:44:23] Great. Oh, perfect. I'll send you an email about it.

[01:44:26] **Nate Hagens:** Happy to do it. So nice to meet you finally. And we're, very aligned, my friend. And To be continued. Thank you. If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform. You can also visit thegreatsimplication.

[01:44:45] com for references and show notes from today's conversation. And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our Discord channel. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens. Edited by No Troublemakers Media and produced by Misty Stinnett, Leslie Batlutz, Brady Hyan, and Lizzie Sirianni.