

HIGHROAD FELLOWSHIP REPORTS

STORIES OF REGENERATION

Introduction to Principles of Regenerative Development

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With the WNY Environmental
Alliance



ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

The ILR Buffalo Co-Lab advances an equitable economy and democratic community, collaboratively integrating scholarly and practical understanding to strengthen civic action.

Since 1946, Cornell ILR has played a vital role in Western New York, working in partnership with businesses, unions, government, education and community organizations to build an economy that works for all.

High Road Fellowships were launched in 2009, in collaboration with community-based think-tank Partnership for the Public Good. They connect Cornell undergraduates with practitioners and creative community leaders who are driving change in the local economy.

Fellows are in Buffalo, NY for eight weeks in the summer, working on projects through their host organization.



Stories of Regeneration

Introduction to Principles of Regenerative Development

Western New York has a rich legacy of development. Situated against natural resources such as Lake Erie and Niagara Falls, the region has long been a hub for innovative ideas, advancement, and governance. In particular, Buffalo's history is a unique one, with stories full of opposites. From its fame as an industrial hub to its infamy as an industrial wasteland, it has seen both the best of times and the worst of times. With such a tumultuous past, it is difficult to see where the city of Buffalo and the region at large currently stand. Are we still looking to heal the wounds inflicted by decades of neglect and abuse, or are we standing on a brink of a Buffalonian Renaissance? The answer to this question is, in many ways, both. We have the chance to build up our home and help Buffalo once again reach its full potential, but we must also acknowledge the existing systems of inequity and ecological harm that result from a long history of unwise development. We can't move forward without remembering where we came from.

Through practices of regenerative development, we can build an economically, socially, and politically viable Buffalo for the many generations to come. **Regenerative development**, as opposed to extractive development, is a guiding principle for development that dictates that we develop only that which gives back to the environments, communities, and cultures that it impacts. Working to create an economy and society that benefits the larger population, regenerative principles rely on holistic thinking and actions. We can enact change that is beneficial for the society at large by taking into account the interrelated nature of environmental, social, economic, and political resiliency.

There is a long tradition of regenerative perspective and practice in our region. The Haudenosaunee of Western New York lived, and continue to embody, the principles of

regeneration. This confederacy of six nations governed themselves under the **Great Law of Peace** and the **Law of Regeneration**. The former is the basis of a participatory democracy, grounded in the authority of the people and their responsibility to care for one another and their common home. In line with the Great Law of Peace, practices of retribitional justice are replaced with those of restorative justice to help diverse communities peacefully address conflict, heal harm, and collectively govern through healthy, collaborative relationships. The Law of Regeneration calls for an active, collective practice of self-governance by diverse people that builds on their bioregion's collective strengths to cultivate long-lasting prosperity. The Law of Regeneration requires three fundamental principles and practices: **1) seventh generation planning**, **2) giving thanks for the web-of-life that sustains us**, and **3) the law of the seed**, designing with nature to support ecosystems. In combining cultural values of gratitude and sustainability, the Haudenosaunee cultivate practices which contribute to the natural world around them. These principles guide ecologically responsible development and fair allocation of resources.

Members of the WNYEA are working to once again bring the Haudenosaunee principles to the forefront of discussions on the environment, economy, and society. Through "Stories of Regeneration," we hope to lift up this critical work being done in the Buffalo Niagara community. Our stories feature five key campaigns and initiatives led by WYNEA members and partners:

1. The Our Outer Harbor Coalition,
2. Scajaquada Corridor Coalition,
3. Stella Niagara Conservation Efforts,
4. Youth and Climate Justice Campaign, and

5. Collaboratory for the Regenerative Economy (CoRE).

Each of these projects reflects the movement towards a more just form of governance and participatory action, as they directly address the needs of community stakeholders. By revitalizing our environmental assets, we not only enrich the natural world around us, but we also find new ways to engage the human population with their ecological heritage. This improves the vitality and wealth of the region as well as the habitats of all beings who co-exist in these spaces.

About the Project and Author:

“Stories of Regeneration” is a project that showcases practical applications of regenerative principles in the Buffalo Niagara region. It was created by the Western New York Environmental Alliance’s 2018 High Road Fellow, Ashni Verma. As part of this process, Verma has conducted fieldwork and research in order to bring the voices of community leaders to the public at large.

Entirely new to Western New York, Ashni Verma has spent this summer immersing herself in all things regeneration. Her time in Buffalo has changed her perspective on how important an interdisciplinary view of issues in environment, politics, and economics is in creating solutions that benefit the whole of society. She hopes that this comes through in her work and emphasizes the need for broader communication across sectors and disciplines.

Introduction to the Our Outer Harbor Coalition

It's a humid, hot day in July, but I'm able to feel the breeze and hear the chirps of birds and the quiet splashes in the lake. Walking along the path, I'm surrounded by trees, flowering plants, and all sorts of animals. It's truly hard to believe that I'm right at the edge of a busy large metropolitan city. With all the natural beauty around me, I could easily be miles deep into some forest in the middle of nowhere. But, just beyond me lie all the attractions of Canalside, the towering Skyway, and even City Hall. Although the Buffalo Niagara bioregion is rich in diversity, most people have limited access to the rich resources of the region. Buffalo's Outer Harbor may hold the key to connecting citizens to their natural heritage, but it continues to be threatened by plans for development that sacrifice irreplaceable, publicly accessible, natural landscapes for short-term profit by private interests. The Our Outer Harbor Coalition is working to preserve this greenspace for the public, protect the natural habitats for hundreds of species, and increase the wealth of the region by developing our assets sustainably.

Visitors to the Outer Harbor as recently as ten years ago would likely have been unable to see the space for the beauty and tranquility it provides. From the time Margaret Wooster of the Our Outer Harbor Coalition (OOHC) was a child, it was nothing more than "a burning dump". People would routinely drive up to the Outer Harbor to get rid of their construction debris. Little more than a glorified wasteland, this land went largely ignored by the city and state. "Nobody was looking at the Outer Harbor as anything but an eyesore." What, then, makes the issue of the Outer Harbor so incredibly important now? How did this stretch of land go from an area that nobody cared about to the subject of one of the most heavily contested debates in the city?

The Outer Harbor has revealed itself to be a mecca for wildlife and a cornerstone for our natural heritage. Even when unrecognized by most, the Outer Harbor was declared a

Globally Significant Important Bird Area. Jay Burney, of the Friends of the Times Beach Nature Preserve and Pollinator Conservation Association, has spent his whole life studying the migration patterns of birds. He considers the Outer Harbor “one of the most important sites on the Great Lakes.” Key birds, fish, and pollinating species rely on the Outer Harbor as part of their migratory flight patterns. Situated uniquely against Lake Erie, the harbor provides these species space for a much-needed break on their annual pilgrimage across the world. And, in attracting so many animals, the Outer Harbor also becomes a nexus for native plant growth and sustainability. This is extremely important for the region at large- by maintaining the vitality of this stretch of land, we improve the overall vitality of the ecosystem.

The Outer Harbor isn't just a natural asset – it's also a source of great economic and cultural wealth. A healthy, ecologically diverse environment is a desirable feature that attracts both people and capital to the region. As Burney says, “the public's greatest asset” is “our connection to nature.” The maintenance of fresh, clean air improves the vitality of the region; the sheer experience of being able to sit in such a quiet, tranquil area creates peace of mind. People want to live near places like the Outer Harbor; the easy access to greenspace and all the benefits that go along with it make places more desirable, which in turn increases financial wealth and capital. Residents of the Buffalo Niagara region have a unique opportunity with the Outer Harbor to access the Great Lakes so close to the downtown area.

While very clearly an important part of Buffalo's landscape, the Outer Harbor continues to be threatened by new development projects. Many developers see the region as largely vacant land, perfect for the creation of new residential buildings. But this view does not take into account the costs of such development to the community and to the habitat. Not only will new developments here harm the native plants and animals that depend upon the Outer

Harbor, but it will make the whole area largely inaccessible to all members of the community. Few will be able to afford the elite housing on the waterfront, and even fewer will be able to enjoy the beauty of nature if the land is made private and commercial. If we don't design on the Outer Harbor with the principles of public engagement and public trust in mind, we will end up tearing down the natural infrastructure in place in order to erect buildings that encourage inequality and sprawl. This land belongs to the public. To build that which only benefits the few would betray the principles of sustainable development on Buffalo's landscape. An ideal vision of the Outer Harbor is one that is permanently protected by and accessible to the average citizen and other beings who use the waterfront.

This all begs the question: what can we do to protect the Outer Harbor? How do we ensure that the green space remains free and open to the public? The answer lies with the work of the Our Outer Harbor Coalition (OOHC) and other community stakeholders that fight for inclusionary zoning laws. From its beginning four years ago, OOHC was united by a common goal to protect public land on the Outer Harbor. When faced with development plans put forth by the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) that encouraged urban sprawl and endangered wildlife habitats, the coalition united with several other community organizations to promote regulations in the new Green Code. Passed in 2016, the new Buffalo Green Code is the first zoning code passed since 1953, and actually accounts for the issues which plague our twenty-first century city. WNYEA worked tirelessly to structure this legislation in a way that promotes holistic development, and OOHC formed around these ideas as a defense against threatening projects on the Outer Harbor. The passage of the Green Code was a huge success for the Our Outer Harbor Coalition, as it protected many of the lands it sought to protect. As Lynda Schneekloth of WNYEA says, "zoning is a vision of what your city should be." We have created

our vision- now is the time to safeguard it. As we move forward, it is vital to keep this principles in mind so that the steps we take to develop on the Outer Harbor protect wildlife and their habitats, preserve public land for the people, and create an example for future development projects that also promote the sustainability of such spaces.

The story of the Outer Harbor represents a larger movement to protect natural lands against unhealthy development. It is a tale of the people who deserve access to their natural heritage, of the myriad species who rely on the rich bioregion, and of the fight for sustainable development in the Buffalo Niagara region. But, first and foremost, it is the story of a very special stretch of land that is regenerating *itself* after being treated as an industrial wasteland for decades. The Outer Harbor needs protection from unhealthy development plans so that it can continue to grow, act as a haven for wildlife, and provide sanctuary for humans in the midst of a very crazy world. We have been made stewards of a land that is only now recovering from years of abuse and neglect. To stunt the growth it *has* undergone and subject it to more industrial turmoil would have negative impacts for bioregion, the city, and the people at large.

Youth and Climate Justice

How often do our communities think about the world that your children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren will live in? It's hard to picture the world in 50 years because we can't even see how it will look in 5. The twenty-first century has accelerated change in technology, communications, and development. The rate of change in our society is quite frankly dizzying. Far too often, it is difficult to see past the lives of ourselves and those around us and understand the impact that we have on the future.

But the reality is, the burdens of future generations lie on our shoulders. We need to consider what we have and what will be left for those who will come afterwards. The world we act in today will be inherited by others, and it would do us well to remember that its resources are limited. The Haudenosaunee principle of "seventh-generation planning" accounts for this—members of the confederacy use only what they need in order to make sure that the generations to come will have adequate access to the resources they need to live. WNYEA's version of seventh-generation planning involves engaging and empowering those who will soon be dictating our world's policies regarding future generations. The Youth and Climate Justice initiative is working on grassroots projects to ignite the fire of climate advocacy in Western New York.

In the last year, the Youth and Climate Justice fellows have done incredible work for climate advocacy in Western New York. They spoke on and facilitated panels at the Buffalo Humanities Festival in September 2017. Answering pre-written questions, they taught a room full of adults about the youth movement against climate change. Later in June 2018, they presided over a second panel and also independently led a workshop at the WNY Youth Climate Action Summit. They created interactive scenarios and each led small groups in order to teach

and encourage young peers to stand up for their rights in communities which may play adversarial roles in the larger fight for climate justice. Their work emphasizes the importance of justice in environmental advocacy and acknowledges that far too often the people that are most affected by climate change have the fewest outlets to speak out against it. Their workshops and panels teach youth and adults alike skills that will help them act in these tense spaces and hopefully empower them to voice the concerns that are left out of the narrative. While the initiative is still too new to track its impact, we can be sure that the groundwork the fellows are laying right now will help build the movement for climate justice in Western New York.

The fellows were able to develop these skills not in spite of, but *because* of their young age. As Fellow Lucy Handman expresses, “we might be younger but we have a voice, and we totally deserve for it to be heard. You don’t have to wait until you’re a full-grown adult” to express your opinions and exercise your rights to civic engagement. Nina Adam, a youth fellow, says the fellowship has given her opportunities for public speaking and leadership training; she hopes that with these experiences she will be able to help the environment “be better than what it’s going to be in the future.” Along with her peers, Nina is empowered and motivated to look at the world’s future the way many of us are unable to. She knows that the work that she does today will impact the way we look at the futures of the coming generation. The work that the Youth and Climate Justice Initiative does to train and educate young people is having real impacts on the way students who will inherit this world think about such issues. In creating the change that they want to see, the youth fellows are empowering themselves and others to take charge of the world they will one day inherit.

Believe it or not, this project is still in its infancy- despite its many accomplishments thus far, the Youth and Climate Justice Initiative has only been running for two

years. This means that its adult partners and youth fellows have many plans to expand its outreach and engagement. So, what's next for this group? What can we expect from the fellows in the coming year? Kelli Grabowski, an adult partner, hopes to incorporate a larger civic engagement component in the program, especially with an emphasis on marginalized, rural, and other underrepresented communities. As the initiative expands across Buffalo communities, she hopes that the students will have opportunity to "use each other as a network to make big changes" in environmental policy at local and even state levels. Through continued advocacy work, the youth fellows will continue to empower peers to affect change.

Far too often, young people do not have outlets to express their opinions on issues such as climate change. Environmental and climate studies are not explicitly woven into the school curriculums. Special conferences on youth and the environment are often expensive, exclusive, and inaccessible. The Youth and Climate Justice Initiative is born out of this community and aims to remain as such in order to provide reachable outlet and resource for students who are passionate about these issues. Returning to the principle of seventh-generation planning, we see how important it is to empower our current youth in order to affect real change tomorrow. As the Youth and Climate Justice Initiative begins its third year, its members hope to expand their influence, learn more about the issues that plague their communities, and bring environmental justice in Western New York.

Introduction to the Collaboratory for the Regenerative Economy (CoRE)

What happens when you put some of the smartest minds in the region in the same room? When you reach across disciplines in order to find innovative, intelligent minds committed to the advancement of regenerative principles?

What happens is this: the **C**ollaboratory for a **R**egenerative **E**conomy (**CoRE**). The CoRE team is made up of a powerful mix of academics, community leaders, and business entrepreneurs all working towards one common goal. They look to find holistic solutions to issues that plague our society, economy, and environment. In order to truly address the issues of climate change, we need a group that will lead us through a societal paradigm shift. The Collaboratory for a Regenerative Economy is that group.

Some of the most important discoveries happen in the gaps between disciplines. We need science and technology to push the boundaries of our existing work. We need the social sciences to assess how these technologies may affect and impact others. We need community leaders to act as a voice for the people most impacted. And we need industry to share the effect on the economy and overall vitality. The CoRE team works to forge connections across the different sectors of Buffalo in order to create innovative ideas on development.

II. Importance for academia

III. Importance for NGOs

IV. Importance for Businesses/Economy

Stella Niagara

I. Introduction

- A. Importance of the Niagara River
 - 1. Spirituality, history, culture
 - 2. Natural beauty, life for other beings, humans
 - 3. Industry?
- B. Changing perception of the Niagara
 - 1. not just a tourist destination/Niagara Falls
 - 2. So much more, such a rich region
- C. Segway: Looking at this idea with Stella Niagara and the Niagara Gorge

II. Stella Niagara

- . History
 - 1. Sisters of St. Francis (Sister Edith Wyss interview)
 - 2. War of 1812 and the Haudenosaunee (Jajeau interview)
- A. Ecological Importance
 - 1. Native Plants
 - 2. Overall well-being/vitality of the region
- B. Community Support
 - 1. Fostering participatory democracy in WNYLC process of acquiring land
 - 2. Community driven development in Stella Niagara

III. Niagara Gorge

- . History
 - 1. Sacred space for Haudenosaunee
 - 2. Located very close to Underground Railroad stops
- a. Many enslaved would use the Niagara Gorge and the Peace Bridge to cross into Canada
- A. Ecological Work
 - 1. Revitalizing through Restore the Gorge project
- . removing invasive species and planting native species // stop the bad, start the good

Scajaquada Corridor Coalition

I. Introduction

- A. Background on the Scajaquada
 - 1. History
 - 2. Impact on communities
- B. Who are the people trying to reverse this?
 - 1. NGOs, government, etc.
 - 2. The people themselves! Emphasis on community
 - 3. Scajaquada Corridor Coalition
- C. Ultimately a story about democracy- will the people united be able to affect change?

II. Ecological Impact

- . Scajaquada Creek
- A. Impact of traffic
- B. Cutting through Delaware Park

III. Community Impact

- . Cutting streets, neighborhoods, communities in half
- A. How that affects prosperity of region/people
- B. Community/cultural capital

IV. Issue: Financial Gain

- . Sean Ryan interview: Little financial wealth to be gained from this
- A. Paradigm shift: how do we show that other types of wealth are equally as important?

V. Work of the SCC