



LOCAL SELF-RELIANCE

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For the past several years, the good folks at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance in Washington, D.C. have worked to help urban residents gain greater control over their lives through the use of low-technology, decentralist tools and concepts. We strongly believe that more people (city dwellers and country folk alike) should be exposed to the Institute's efforts ... which is why we're now making this "what's happening where" report by ILSR staffers one of MOTHER's regular features.

We often hear of homesteaders who install solar systems or wood stoves to make themselves energy self-sufficient. But one of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance's studies has shown that city dwellers can-like their country cousins-go along way toward achieving such a goal for themselves!

A BIG-CITY CONCERN

The cost of energy has rapidly become a major item in all urban budgets. Using Washington, D.C. as a case study, the Institute found that the city spent \$601 million on energy in 1977. In fact, the District government used more money to purchase "power" than it budgeted for its entire court system! Worse than that, 86¢ out of every one of those energy dollars left the local economy, never to return . . . and only 3¢ of the remaining 144 went directly into the pockets of District residents in the form of wages and salaries. (This kind of "trade deficit" can rapidly drain the treasury of even the wealthiest community!)

A reduction in the amount of such "exported" money could have multiple benefits for a metropolis . . . because energy conservation efforts and solar installations produce far more jobs-dollar for dollar-than do investments in nuclear power plants and oil refineries. On top of that, the jobs created by "alternative" programs provide opportunities for both skilled and semiskilled workers. (In Washington-where half of the city's teenage blacks are unemployed-such labor opportunities could be really valuable!)

Perhaps the biggest benefit of urban energy self-sufficiency, however, is that investments in power conservation or solar technology tend to create and nurture small, locally based businesses. In Washington, for example, the "energy efficiency industries" such as insulation firms-could provide a 45% cut in present "power" use (excluding transportaion) while occupying several times the city's current energy-related work force. And those dollars that formerly left the city could be spent within the District ... to the benefit of its citizens.

Such a route is not just an idealistic dream, either . . . because-after reviewing information on energy consumption in the nation's capital-the Institute estimates that the city could (without affecting lifestyles or standards of living) reduce its present "power diet" by 50%. (The complete report is available from the Institute for \$13.)

CLEAN, SOLAR CITIES

Energy self-reliance, however, means a city must generate its own power supply as well as reduce its consumption of "imported" energy. Naturally, the potential for solar technology in any given city depends upon the ratio of available collector space to living space.

Although Washington has one of the highest densities of population in the nation, it's also blessed with an abundance of flat rooftops and a height limitation on buildings. Considering the present state of the art in solar technology, the Institute estimates that-while higher buildings would require more collector space than is available on their own roofs-three-story structures could produce all their thermal and electrical needs through the use of, solar installations.

Economics, of course, will play a major role in such development. So it's very important to understand the different measures by which systems can be judged "cost-effective".

For example, if a single homeowner saves only 60¢ in fuel for every \$1.00 spent on solar equipment over the lifetime of the system, the "sun power" wouldn't make much sense. But when the same situation is applied to an entire city, the figures can be viewed very differently, especially if you assume (as in the case of Washington) that only 14¢ of every conventional-energy dollar is retained in the local economy . . . whereas 50¢ of every "solar" dollar would return to the city in the form of payments to local industries, workers, and taxes. The multiplying effect of such "recycled" money can make solar power extremely economical from an urban (and social) perspective.

The challenge, then, exists in the manner in which cities can use their financing, taxing, and planning authorities to blend individual self-interest and community interests. One also has to keep in mind the intangible-but very important-benefits of local energy systems: self-confidence, self-reliance, a clean environment, and a quiet city.

Ironically, talk about energy self-sufficiency in the nation's capital has just begun. It is to be hoped that-through discussion, education, and experimentation-we can look back on the energy crisis of the 1970's as the catalyst for the development of better, more self-sufficient communities and cities across the entire nation.

You can have a free catalog of ILSR's recently expanded and updated selection of books and pamphlets by sending the Institute a self-addressed, stamped envelope. To get on the mailing list for their bimonthly magazine, *Self-Reliance*, send \$8.00 (or \$15.00 for institutions) to ILSR, 1717 18th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. Or, send \$25 (\$17 of which is tax-deductible) to become an associate member of the Institute . . . and-in addition to receiving their magazine-you'll obtain a 20% discount on other Local Self-Reliance publications.-MOTHER.