The Appalachian Program: Progress, Problems, and Outlook

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APPALACHIA is important as a region because a very great gap exists between its stage of socioeconomic development and other developed regions; moreover, this gap is widening rather than closing. The problem, therefore, is first to arrest the spread in the gap, and, second, to find means, over some span of time, to narrow it.

The conscience of an affluent nation is disturbed and it wants to solve, right now, the problems it permitted to develop over the past three to five generations. Therefore, now is the time for an extraordinary effort to bring about adjustment in socioeconomic progress. Also, now is the time for a comprehensive research effort which relates culture, socioeconomic goals, and the use of nature's resources for a well-distributed and satisfactory level of income.

The objectives of this paper will be to review the highlights of various research findings, to surface some overlooked factors in dealing with the region, and to dwell on the outlook for the region.

The Appalachian Program

By implication, the title of this paper suggests that there is a program entity called an Appalachian program: such is not true. Whatever is called "The Appalachian Program" is a composite of many programs under the auspices of different sponsors. There is, however, before Congress, at the moment of preparing this paper, a Bill "to provide public works and economic development programs and the planning and coordination needed to assist in the development of the Appalachian Region." It is called the "Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1964." It is the result of a study developed by the President's Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC) appointed by the late President Kennedy. It justifies attention here because of its focus, philosophy, and concepts. The PARC plan is based on the assumption that the problem is largely economic, and thus the first order of concern. Large and deep investments in basic public facilities are proposed, with the expectation that

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1 The boundaries of the region are variously designated. The President's Appalachian Regional Commission appointed by President Kennedy included 355 of 919 counties in 11 states extending from Alabama to Pennsylvania. This region includes slightly less than 10 percent of the U.S. population. I believe it includes too many counties at the fringe.

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private enterprise will be the ultimate instrument in economic development. Further, the concept is that the problem is a regional one. It is to be implemented through the creation of an Appalachian Regional Commission. The commission must "serve the bigness of the total region, and the smallness of local jurisdiction." It "... must also perform the vital function of coordinating the many programs that are now conducted in the region by federal, state and local agencies."4

There are many programs of varied sponsorship in the region. One of unique interest is the West Virginia Center for Appalachian Studies and Development at West Virginia University, which was established in 1963, as a means of relating the total university, more completely, to the life of the state. The plan is to raise to the all-university level the agriculture invention of close interdependence of planning and program development for research, extension, and instruction. West Virginia is the only state that is all Appalachia.5

The Appalachian Region—Described

The region has been described as “a region of the most startling contrasts,”6 “a region apart,”7 “a region of poor land, low income, large population, subsistence agriculture, little industry, and underdeveloped institutions. It is a place where novelists and poets have found romance, philanthropists and missionaries have found dire need, devotees of progress have found a retarded culture, and where urban America has found a reservoir of population,”8 also, it is described as an economy where “... an important coal industry is in serious difficulties; little manufacturing (exists) except wood processing, clay refractories, and a few apparel firms in the less inaccessible spots. ... The base is primarily natural resources—coal, clay, timber, and some gas and oil. An undereducated labor force experienced only in these activities far exceeds present or prospective job opportunities. (The) economy yields incomes that are commensurate with its occupational structure and human skills, in segregated labor markets that are partially national and partially local. And

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2 H. R. 11946.
3 "Appalachia—A report by the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission, 1964,” Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Printing Office.
5 The West Virginia Center for Appalachian Studies and Development, West Virginia University Bul., Series 64, No. 5-12, November 1963.
7 Appalachia, see footnote 3.
large minorities are heavily dependent on public assistance." Also, it is said to be a place where lives "a proud and independent people with customs, values, and mores that differ markedly from those usually found in urban centers." An imbalance exists in the industrial structure. With only one employing enterprise in many communities, families are without alternative employment or bargaining power. Thus, lack of stability is a continual problem, with some exceptions.

To consider these characterizations as representative of the entire region would be a serious error. Actually, the region is made up of many subregions; and significant economic progress is being accomplished in some of them. There is a sameness, however, reflected in the guiding philosophies as expressed by the policies of the region's institutions and through its leadership. This sameness stems from the dominating influences of the cultural heritage of people living in isolated mountain life and work over a period of three to four generations.

Solving the Problem

One method of problem solving is to list all of the relevant causal factors, compare them with desirable norms, and then design approaches aimed at correction, factor by factor. A major point of this paper is that such an approach is wrong, because correcting the many deficient factors would not get at the roots of the problem. Furthermore, it would be too costly and too slow. Such an attack would hardly arrest the expanding gap, previously explained.

The right approach to development, this paper will propose, is one that circumvents the many factors of deficiency and strikes out boldly to develop a different model for the region by the year 2000, thereby redirecting the basic economic and social processes of the region.

A 1947 research study stressed the point that the time was right then to launch effective approaches for alleviating the many ills that beset the region. It was argued that the disorganization, found in the existing folk society, brought about by World Wars I and II coupled with applied technology resulted in a situation ready for positive action. Since 1947, mechanization and automation in the coal mines and the failure of the farmers to adopt the new agriculture technology has brought about almost completely disorganization in the established customs. Thus, we might conclude, once more, that the time is right for initiating effective programs.


*** Beers and Heflin, op. cit.
Recommended Solutions

This next section proposes to summarize some of the relevant solutions proposed through the conscientious efforts of many students of the Appalachian problem. I have selected single or closely related research studies to illustrate general conclusions on the broad areas of concern that would naturally be considered in program development and direction.

Agriculture should receive due consideration in the search for solutions. Price and income support programs of the USDA have been most effective in speeding up the adoption of new technology in the specialized agriculture regions of the U.S. In contrast, farmers in the marginal regions have not adopted the new technology or they have adopted it too slowly.\(^1\) As a result, U.S. agriculture production has shifted away from the marginal to specialized regions. The position of farmers in the Appalachian region, falling for the most part in the marginal group, has been worsened by the price and income support programs of the federal government.

A surplus labor force, underemployed and unemployed, of considerable size that is relatively unskilled, but adaptable to many kinds of non-farm employment, is found living in the rural areas.\(^2\)

We may conclude, therefore, that even though the region is essentially one of rural people, the opportunity for greater income from commercial agriculture is relatively limited with the exception of a few geographic areas. Most of the bright spots center in small geographic areas and about a specialized product such as tree fruits, small fruits, broilers, tobacco, dairy products or beef.

A line of thought followed by several researchers is that the major focus should be on human resource development. This calls for a reformulation of conceptions of what life within the mountains could be in the future. To do this calls for the development of new programs and new activities.\(^3\) Bets on the future would be placed on the oncoming generations.\(^4\) Concentration would be on the improvement of education,


\(^{3}\) Bowman and Haynes, op. cit., pp. 282-284.

the provision of vocational training, and guided migration to job opportunities. Rupert Vance,16 in particular, would concentrate on bringing about substantial reforms in the methods of community organization and action, and, simultaneously, he would systematically retire submarginal land by public purchase. Also, he recommends an intensive program of research. His point of focus for programs would be on eliminating the self-generating factors of the problem which have prevailed for many generations.

Studies made in the Upper East Tennessee Valley17 hold out hope through industrial development in the short and the long run. Findings show that factor and product markets are relatively more efficient in the counties that have enjoyed industrial development over the years. Such processes seemed to stimulate other business enterprises, in this case, agriculture; and where the industrial development factor has continued over several generations, it has had a sustained and complementary effect on the other economic factors, thus suggesting that a clue to economic progress is to be found in industrial development.

Another study of the impact of urban-industrial development on agriculture in the Tennessee River Valley came to the same conclusion, essentially, by finding that the median income level, farm and nonfarm, is related closely to urban-industrial development.18

A significant eastern Kentucky study oriented to forest economics19 concluded above all, excepting a new set of circumstances, that there are only two courses of development open to the geographic area—one, a subsistence economy resulting in a denser population, lower incomes, greater subsidy, the use of more cleared land for farming, and less forest; the other, an exchange economy emphasizing sparser population, higher incomes less subsidy, less farm use of land, and more forests. These researchers reject the agrarian subsistence economy, and base their hopes for ultimate well-being in a full exchange economy.

Researchers generally agree that significant progress in economic development takes place slowly and "catching up" is a slow process.20,21

16 Vance, op. cit.
Some believe that significant economic advancement in the Appalachians is just not in the cards. The factors important today to economic progress existed 50 years ago, the implication may be drawn that if the essential factors are not present today, significant development cannot take place short of several generations. Development, therefore, should be planned by generations of time; and, in so doing, the priority areas of emphasis should be listed. These conclusions bode badly for the localities with a high index of rurality as the factors correlated with industrial development are almost altogether nonexistent. It is from such areas that the highest rates of outmigration occur.

A study in eastern Kentucky concluded that continued and augmented migration of young people from the area, voluntarily, would be a wholesome occurrence. In this study, a long list of answers to the many existent problems is suggested, but the researchers conclude that none of them solved singly would have any significant effect, with the succinct conclusion that "the problem of improving the use of resources in the Breathitt area is as broad as the experience of living there."

Several excellent studies are available on the problems faced by a person or family moving from the region into an urban-industrial society. Our mountaineer comes out of a near folk society; he is sensitive, possesses a strong sense of integrity, personal and family honor, and is accustomed to individuality of choice and action. He stands in sharp contrast to the member of a society where group conformity, proper industrial work habits prevail, and where social skills are important. Such a person in the urban-industrial society expresses all the anxieties of a frustrated person.

Studies show, also, that persons coming out of the mountain culture, as a rule, do not adapt readily to the role of an entrepreneur as they lack managerial capabilities.

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20 Vance, op. cit., p. 298.
22 Bowman and Haynes, op. cit.
23 Beers and Heffin, op. cit.
26 Anthony L. Pavlick, "Effects of Federal Farm Programs on Incomes of Appalachian Farmers," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1963, is one of several who have discovered this lack of entrepreneurial skills.
27 Beers and Heffin, op. cit.
Analysis of Recommendations

A review of the economic and social studies made of various sub-regions reflects a wide range of problems studied. When measured against the available research results, the writer concludes that the action programs could be strengthened, substantially, by inclusion of the features which accommodate four conclusions, generally overlooked. Failure to do so is serious enough to justify the belief that much of what has been proposed as solutions will not come close to the expectations claimed.\(^2\)

1. There is an essential difference in the culture and human value systems of the people living in the Appalachian region as compared to other regions of the United States. Unless these differences are accounted for in program development, the slippage in actual gains toward desirable goals will be sufficiently great so that the rate of “catching up” will be much too slow.

2. The holders of capital representing the forests, the mines, the other natural resources, the financial interests, and the industrial complexes, somehow must be fitted into the plan of the future; and, also, they must be persuaded to assume greater responsibility for the economic and social evolution of the region if our American system is to work.

3. Integration and coordination of the institutional framework (agencies and organizations—public and private) would harness a resource absolutely necessary for accomplishment. The size of work force and the objectives and goals of this framework have been disregarded too often by program designers. Yet, each agency and organization continues to extend its influence, and to spin its web a bit more tightly.

4. Allowance for a lapse of time to permit maturation, sound institutionalization of the proposals at the local level, and the holding of protracted and deep discussions with the affected parties is essential to program longevity. Failure to do this encourages the yielding to the pressures of a few, the elevating to undue importance the matter of project approval through political expediency, and the lowering of dependence on sound economic and sociological logic. The press to get results in a short time (usually within the tenure of one administration) is usually so great that the program is usually another social and economic experiment. Study of the deliberate process by which a university introduces a new doctoral program into its longtime plan would provide some good guidelines to program developers.

New Goals Needed

For success in the Appalachians, any model with development as its goal, when implemented, must explode within the socioeconomic system,
and thus create a society with values and goals which coincide with the larger American society. It must do this if we argue that a program correcting the long list of inadequacies is not the answer. Therefore, a new set of goals must be produced. The research reviewed suggests that there are three new and important goals to be presented and justified to the citizens of the Appalachians. Also, with them modification of other goals would follow.

The orientation of the culture to an urban-industrial society

Opposite to the urban-industrial society is one oriented entirely to the rural-folk society, which presently dominates much of the region. The need for change from this society is expressed strongly by the sociologists. The urban-industrial society or some combination of the two will be basic to the future in achieving the socioeconomic goals. The innate attributes recognized in an urban-industrial society are: it becomes accustomed to the use of complex technological equipment which can neither be owned nor operated by a single worker; it becomes accustomed to an extensive division of labor as contrasted to one worker doing all of the jobs; it becomes accustomed to a hierarchy of job roles as would be found in a formal industrial organization; and it becomes accustomed to an interdependence between industrial organization and wider society on which the worker’s organization is dependent for its own evolution. Introduction of supporting philosophies and developing an understanding of such a cultural base in the school systems, informal education programs, religious teachings, and various governmental programs working directly with people would contribute to adoption of this important goal.

The full mobilization and controlled exploitation of the vast inventory of natural resources

Not many regions are blessed with a greater inventory of nature’s resources. In contrast, most students of the region agree that the natural resources are poorly integrated and coordinated resulting, therefore, in mismanagement, strong competition for the dominant economic use, and failure to capitalize upon the complementary relationships between the resources. The complementary relationships should be maximized; for example, the forest plus wildlife, plus fishing waters, plus the wilderness, add up naturally to tourism and outdoor recreation. Many of the age-old conflicts of this group with agriculture would be changed from competitive to complementary relationships.

A subregional concept of development should prevail. The many sub-

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regions should be identified and their geographic outlines laid out, taking into account the physical, human, political and environmental relationships. In effect the entire region would be zoned for its highest developmental opportunity. Then programs could be fitted into the overall direction, and the multipurpose concepts of resource use would make sense, and development would be orderly. In fact, any resource development plan is likely to be impractical if it does not include multi-resource use plans.

The institutional framework should be fully integrated, functionally

The number of paid professionals, representing the state and federal agencies, and private organizations in relation to the population is not only large but covers nearly every facet of human life. Some way must be found in which the operations of these agencies are supportive of the same general purposes and directions. When one lumps into one group the locally paid government officials, the locally paid public school personnel, the state and federal agency representatives, the religious workers, and the various representatives of member-supported organizations, and realizes that each agency representative in a community has a set of purposes which he is attempting to fulfill in the execution of his work; and when one discovers that the coordination is very limited, then one becomes acutely aware of the great need for harnessing the agency power to the welfare objectives for which it is established to accomplish.

These three goals, if means can be found to develop and implement them, combined with the many "good" programs, can result in the establishment of a new course for the Appalachian society.

Outlook

Whatever one concludes about the future prosperity of the Appalachians, two important points must be kept in mind—one, the lack of windfalls over the history of the Appalachians, coupled with gross capital depletion of natural and human resources over the past several generations, leaves the region in an extremely disadvantaged position in relation to other regions; and two, as hybrid corn was an explosive factor in agricultural development, so it is that such an explosive factor is needed for the Appalachians.31

Several researchers are pessimistic about the future, as they believe that there is no prospect in coal mining for absorption of the chronically

surplus labor force; that there is no solution to the chronic vulnerability
to economic fluctuations; and that wood processing does not promise
much relief to mountain employment. They therefore predict that the
Kentucky mountains will not develop a significantly expanding economy,
no matter what public policies are pursued. These conclusions are too
harsh.

Those in the Appalachians generally agree that the future will unfold
in the following directions: tourism and outdoor recreation will be the
great potential to develop; along the navigable waterways and at the in­
tersections of main interstate highways, industrialization will take place;
the great hardwood forests of the Appalachians will provide a significant
opportunity for extending income and employment; and the need for
more electric power in the future will result in doubling or even trebling
the present-day requirements for coal.

Coincident with the above concepts are the needs expressed over
and over, which must be met; the raising of the educational level; greater
endowment of skills for improved human capital; and the people in the
region learning the nonrural values.

In the final analysis, national and state leaders cannot give up even
though other regions, similarly, can be described separately. The Ap­
palachian region is a great laboratory for learning how a society meets
the onrush of automation, as it was first in the coal mines where its full
impact on a grand scale was felt. The Appalachian region must be fitted
into and become a part of the mainstreams of society so that it can be
a full participating member in both the costs and the benefits of a rapidly
changing and expanding economy.

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