



IMAGINING ALPHISTIA

Imagine: it's the year 20-something, in the not too distant future, and a small new country has appeared on the horizon. It would not be the next world power, and not the next failed state. It would be an alternative to the nation states we've known all too well: oversized, intrusive, unsustainable environmentally, socially, morally. It's all in my own imagination and has been for a long time, but I've developed a plan for this new country, which I call Alphistia.

My own political skills are terrible, so it would be impossible for me to be the actual creator of a new country. My role is just to explain what Alphistia would be like, and perhaps inspire others with skills I lack to create a reasonable facsimile of it. If that doesn't come to pass...the documentation at least will exist...for your enjoyment.

Anthony Skaggs



Where?

But where is Alphistia, except in my own imagination? At the moment, of course, it is nowhere but there. But it is always imagined as being in an isolated place, “far from the madding crowd”. How to find that place is a challenge of course, and not an issue that can be solved easily or quickly. But as the world changes, declines, or devolves, opportunities can arise.

Imagine a beautiful lake in the “North Country”, surrounded by forests, hills and in the distance, mountains. Along its eastern side, there is a peninsula, with a river and its tributaries flowing into the lake. That area had been used primarily for lumbering, but that has declined, and the small camp town on the northern shore of the lake has seen better days.

Through negotiation, an organization called Project Alphistia is able to acquire the eastern peninsula for settlement. Plans are drawn up to allow for a population of under 300,000 inhabitants. At the rate of about 20,000 immigrants a year, infrastructure and housing could be built for these new Alphistians over a 15 year period.

They would not all live in one settlement, but in several dozen smaller towns, with one city as its hub and capital. They would build an electric railway, begin market farming to feed themselves, and establish small workshops and factories to provide the manufactured goods they'd need.

Across the lake, Camptown would still exist. It would be Alphistia's link to the outside world, with riverboats connecting to larger towns beyond. But Alphistia would by and large be on its own, in

a world more concerned with other troubles than to concentrate on this small country in the isolated Northlands.

Calamity

“Klava” is an Alphistian word meaning “decay and collapse”. The origin of the word itself is unknown, but I invented it in the mid-1970s to describe the anxiety of living in a dangerous world. Fear of nuclear war and massive economic and environmental problems were part of daily life then. While the Soviet empire collapsed in the years that followed, the world is still in trouble. Now there are not just the problems from climate change and continued nuclear proliferation, but even the most powerful countries in the world are ruled by leaders with authoritarian tendencies. Klava it seems, never went away.

The Collapse would not be noisy, nor violent, nor immediately catastrophic. It would be more a loss of confidence, which grows and spreads, and damaging all the levees and the dams of the world's economy and its political entities. After a time, it would seem like all the world was knee-deep in water, and for many others there was the dreadful feeling of drowning.

There would hopefully not be a nuclear event, or horrible act of terror, or a catastrophic sudden change in climate. Simply everything would worsen, and maintaining long supply-lines from China to the developed world using expensive and shrinking supplies of oil would be unsustainable.

The only superpower in the world would become increasingly self-isolated as it had bankrupted itself in wars of choice for decades, and had lived so far beyond its means millions of its inhabitants would be stranded in isolated former suburban settlements without jobs, ways to heat or cool their homes, and with no reliable transportation except their own two feet. In Europe, the unloved union would exist in name only, as the hundreds of local cultures cultivating their own gardens once more, would envy and meddle in their neighbor's. In the least developed parts of the world, life would go on much as it always did. There would minimal central control, enormous corruption and great extremes between rich and poor. Conditions in much of the previously developed world would become more like that with each passing year.

People all around the world were more than uneasy. Many were ready to rebel, but against whom, and what? Others wanted to escape, but as had always been the case, the options were limited. Immigration to the only superpower was over and done with - many there would gladly go somewhere more livable. For those in “Old Europe”, the goal, as always, was to preserve what they had, or what little was left. They were not in the mood for others to move in, and they wouldn't be willing to leave behind the remnants of the good old days.

Klava would be much like another Dark Ages. The era of globalization would end, resulting in many fewer economic links and a much greater level of political tensions. Many countries could go into steep decline: it's highly unlikely the USA would be exempt from this.

In such a vacuum, Alphistia could come into being. While many around the world would struggle to restore what the Klava disrupted or destroyed, Project Alphistia would put into action its plans to create a new society. On a small scale, and from their own efforts, Alphistians would show a way forward after the Klava.

It would be a country different from the current model: it would not have a petroleum-based economy, but would instead rely on electrical power from renewable resources. It would be self-sufficient in food production and the provision of most goods and services for everyday life. It would not measure quality of life based on abstract growth statistics: in many ways there would instead be a steady-state system.

Politically Alphistia would be a democratic and self-governing nation. Socially and culturally, Alphistia would welcome immigrants from around the world, but it would have its own language and culture. Those who have learned the Alphistian language, and are committed to Alphistian ideals would be self-motivated to come to live in this new country.

A post-Klava world is likely to be just as dangerous as the one that came before it. Even if a new Dark Ages develops, that would be all the more reason to establish Alphistia.

But Would it Work?

Capitalism works, but there's a heavy cost. Most Americans believe that they live in the best country in the world: a utopia in reality. It's a free country, prosperous, and many of its inhabitants live very well. However, most people outside the USA do not accept that it is the best country in the world, and hardly a utopia. Even America's closest neighbors in Canada thank themselves every day that they do not live in America, with its extremes of rich and poor, its ridiculous health care system, and its tendency to start wars.

The US is divided sharply into haves and have-nots. The bottom 10-15 percent of the population is left out, with inadequate safety nets, bad educational opportunities, and poor options for upward mobility. Socially, the American majority has a mean streak. The US has one of the largest prison populations in the world, and the poor are frequently mocked and blamed for their plight. Violence is an everyday part of American life, due to the massive number of guns in private hands. Violence seems to be the preferred solution from domestic quarrels to foreign policy, and Hollywood movies and television shows are a non-stop orgy of blood and death. America is an example of what people can do with noble ideals: make a muck of them.

A mess or not, at least the USA is a project realized voluntarily. The population is indoctrinated to believe that they live in the best country in the world, so it's no surprise that few Americans would ever emigrate. People from around the world still do want to come to live there, even if not all the world believes America is a utopia. But it is not a sustainable one.

Communism did not work, and except for Cuba and North Korea, no one forces that system on people anymore. China "conveniently" kept the nastiest features of Soviet-style communism politically, while abandoning almost all the economic aspects. Such a hybrid is not a model for anyone, anywhere. Russia is an authoritarian state controlled by former KGB agents, leaning more to the right with each passing year, trying to recapture a lost glory that never existed historically, and the state encourages its people to take refuge in the dead ends of Orthodox religion and Slavic nationalism. The kleptocracies of the Middle East, large parts of Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia are failures. There is no perfect system of course, just a lot of bad models.

Folkhemmet and Mondragon

The average person has most likely not heard of either word: Folkhemmet or Mondragon. The first is a Swedish word, which means "The People's Home". The second is a town in Spain, which inspired a co-operative economic movement. These two ideas are fundamental influences on what Alphistia would be like.

The People's Home came about in the late 1920s in Sweden when Per Albin Hansson, the head of the Social Democratic Party there declared that instead of the traditional ideology of Marxist class warfare, Swedish socialists should ally themselves with all segments of society to build a home for ALL its people. Comparing the family home to a national People's Home, he said in 1928:

"The good home does not recognize any privileged or neglected members, nor any favorites or stepchildren. In the good home there is equality, consideration, co-operation, and helpfulness. Applied to the people's home this would mean the breaking down of all the social and economic barriers that now separate citizens into the privileged and the neglected, into the rulers and the dependents, into the rich and the poor, the propertied and the impoverished, the plunderers and the plundered. Swedish society is not yet the people's home. There is a formal equality, equality of political rights, but from a social perspective, the class society remains, and from an economic perspective the dictatorship of the few prevails"

It was not until after World War II that Sweden was able to apply Hansson's ideas, when it created the well-known Swedish welfare state. Today the folkhemmet is considered history in Sweden, and is not the official ideology of the Swedish Social Democrats anymore. But most Swedes acknowledge that their model succeeded, if not perfectly, to create a high standard of living for all, with a strong commitment to egalitarianism.

And Mondragon? In the 1950s, under Franco's semi-fascist regime, a priest in the Basque region organized a small industrial co-operative, a credit union, and a technical school. This was an area even poorer than most parts of Spain of that time, but pooling resources as co-ops actually proved successful very quickly. The credit union worked as a co-operative investment bank that could set up factories, and dozens opened in the town of Mondragon and nearby. Unlike "normal" capitalist companies, the shareholders were the members of the Mondragon co-ops: the workers themselves. And even more important, they had a real one-man, one vote in the management of the company. In other words - they chose their own managers. Imagine such a thing in the ordinary capitalist enterprise, one of the most top-down undemocratic organizations ever invented.

The nay-sayers of course predicted Mondragon would collapse. It didn't. It consists of about 150 different co-operative enterprises today. It's been profitable through the years. It's never been merged with or bought out by some international conglomerate, because the shareholders would never vote for such nonsense. No hostile takeovers either, because to have stock in the company, you have to work for it already. Top managers earn at the maximum, 8 times the salary of the ordinary employee. Mondragon shows that capitalism can have a human face. It's not anti-market, but it puts people first.

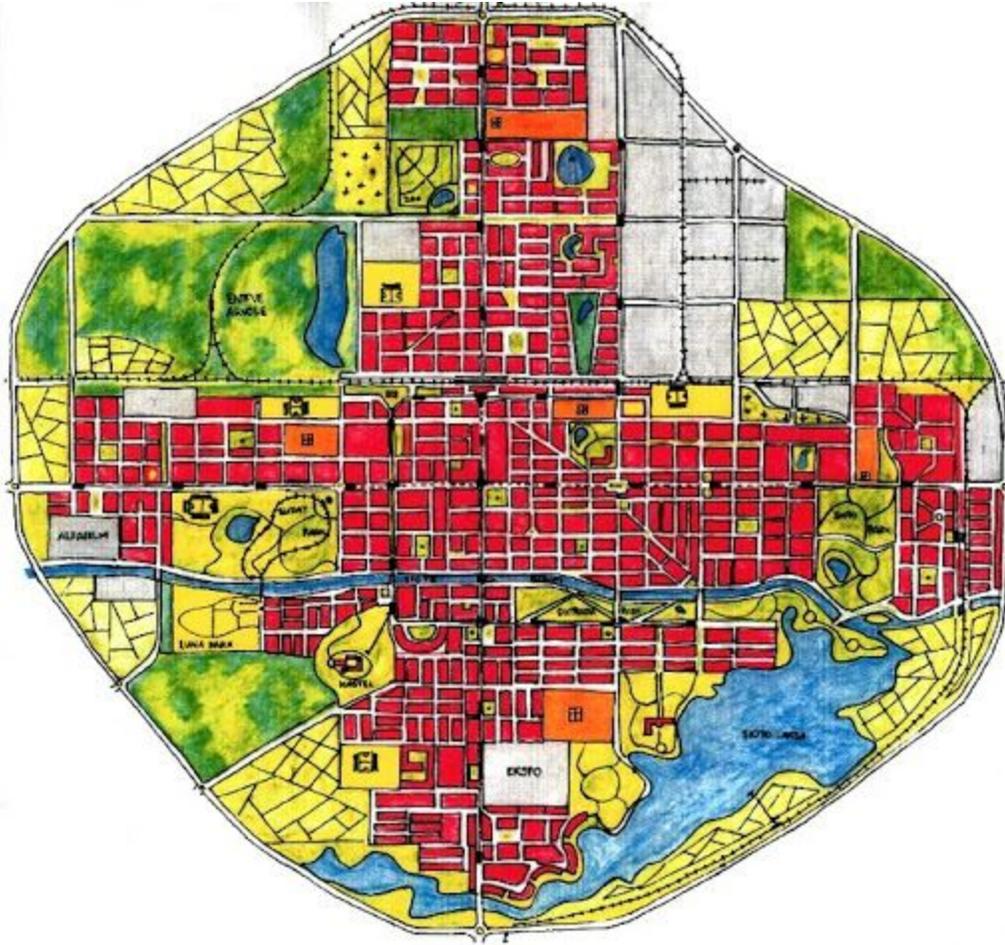
That's an ideal concept for organizing companies in Alphistia. Larger companies would be organized as co-ops in Alphistia, with Mondragon as the model. Private companies would exist of course, but be limited to the owners themselves (single owners or family businesses,

partnerships of two or several people). Other than the owners and their families, small businesses would not hire their own workers. Instead they would contract with the employment agency owned and operated by all the workers, as part of the national trade union. One of the advantages for this would be that there would only be one national union contract negotiated for the benefit of all members, and would eliminate the common exploitation of workers by capitalists the world over. And of course there would be minimum labor standards that all economic enterprises: co-ops, private firms, and state-owned companies would be required to adhere to legally. This would include minimum wages, working hour limits, overtime pay, sick days, maternity leave, vacation time, etc. All these would be regulated and mandated and the same for every worker in the country.

Would this make Alphistia the richest and most competitive economy the world has ever known? Decidedly not. But it would provide a quality of life to everyone living in the country far higher than the norm for most of the world's population.

The Good Life, Alphistian Style

Alphistia's projected population would be quite small, about 275,000 people. Enteve, the capital of Alphistia, would be a city of around 100,000. Tava, the second largest city, would have a population of 25,000, and Usta, the third largest, would have 15,000. Other provincial towns would be smaller: under 10,000 people, with an average of 7,000. Secondary provincial towns would be between 1000 and 3000 people, and villages would be localities under 1000 inhabitants.



A city of 100,000 people would not be a world metropolis, but Enteve would have its own underground metro system. That is because it would be planned for high density living, with low automobile ownership. Most people in the city would not live in high-rise apartment towers though, but in garden-style apartment houses of 2-4 stories, or in rowhouses. The metro system would consist of a network of streetcars called Metrotram, that would run underground in the city center, and in its own street lanes above ground. Nearly everywhere in Enteve would be within a five minute walk from a Metrotram station. Separate lanes on streets would make it easy to navigate the city by bicycle, too. Most people could easily get to work, do their daily shopping, or visit the city center and other parts of the city without relying on a car. If they wanted to have their own, of course it would be possible to buy a compact electrical car...but they would be extremely expensive.

Each neighborhood would have all the local shops and services necessary for daily living: supermarkets, farmer's markets, specialty stores, library, post office/banks etc. The city center would not be derelict, as has been a problem in many American cities in recent decades. Instead, it would be a vibrant hub for transportation to other parts of the country, national institutions such as the University, the National Hospital, government offices, and cultural destinations like theaters, cinemas, museums and libraries. And instead of shopping being zoned to big box stores on the outskirts of towns, the traditional role of "downtown" as a shopping destination would be normal in Alphistia. Taxis and short-term car rentals could be

hired for big purchases (or stores could deliver the products to one's home). It would be very easy to never need a car of one's own.

Factories would be in districts of the city that of course would be linked to the Metrotram system. Alphistian factories in any case, would not be the smoke-belching environmental nightmares of the past. Green tech would be the standard.

Other towns, such as Tava and Usta, would be medium-sized towns. Tava would be Alphistia's workshop, with many small factories, and a few big ones, and Usta would take advantage of being on the shore of Lake Usta, with its many fish.

And each province would have a small capital, with somewhere between 5-10,000 people. That would be within the range of a neighborhood in Enteve, and would replicate many of the shops and services that an ordinary neighborhood in Enteve would have.

All towns would be near farms, and the local farmers would bring their produce to the nearest town market for direct sale to consumers. Supermarkets like the traditional big box stores of the 20th century would not exist in Alphistia. They would be much smaller, and would concentrate on providing canned goods and other packaged goods for year-round consumption, and smaller items for everyday use. Fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables would be sold in the markets or small shops of their own, and farmers would provide fresh eggs, cheese, and meats to supermarkets or specialized shops, usually through co-ops.

Most farmers would own their own small farms, often their houses would be in a small village, with their land adjacent. Others would organize co-ops where they would share land and work, selling their produce to the national co-op supermarkets or at the town markets. But these would not be the majority of farms, since most people want to farm their own land.

Town dwellers could easily obtain their own gardens if they live in apartments. The periphery of every town would have garden allotments for that, and some people would even have their own weekend cottage in the countryside, with a garden plot. People could sell their produce in the markets, or can their fruits and vegetables for winter use.

Several of the co-op farms would own greenhouses to supply some fresh fruits and vegetables year-round, but most of the winter supplies would be canned by farmers or the co-op food processing factories.

Vorala, a town of 2,400 in Sioto province, is an example of a secondary provincial town. It would be situated in a farming region several kilometers south of the provincial capital, also named Sioto. Towns like Vorala would be typical of small urban settlements in Alphistia. They would be compact, pedestrian-oriented, with easy connections by rail to the provincial capital and within an hour by train to Enteve. A small community like Vorala would have none of the negative aspects of small-town or suburban life (isolation and lack of amenities), but would have positive qualities that a small and dense environment can provide (convenience, a sense of belonging, and being part of the greater whole).



In an isometric view of Vorala, one can see that the town would be urban, much more than the norm in pre-Klava towns of the same size. Most of the housing would be in small apartment buildings within a short walking distance from the town center and the train station. Low-rise apartment houses would be the norm in Alphistian urban planning, since these are economical to build and more pleasant to live in than high-rise towers. Even in small towns like Vorala though, some high-rise apartments in towers of 8-10 floors would be built for those who like them, particularly families without children or singles.

Most Alphistians would rent a 2-3 bedroom flat from a non-profit social housing company. This would provide good quality, reasonably priced housing for typical households. Those with higher incomes could buy a single unit if they wish, usually part of a row of houses, each with its own garden in the back. Stand alone single unit houses would be extremely expensive, but would be available for purchase to those with the highest incomes.

Vorala would be a market center nearby farmers, but would also have a variety of small factories and workshops. Right along the train tracks to the east and west of the station would be small factories and workshops. These would provide jobs to more than 50 percent of the local workforce. This would be normal in all provincial towns around the country. National planners would place a variety of local industries in each town so that if a factory goes out of business, there would be plenty of other enterprises left remaining. One-industry towns would not be the norm in the Alphistian context.

Farmers from the nearby towns would come to the local market halls adjacent to the train station to sell their products. Many town residents would have their own allotment gardens and would be able to sell their extra produce in the market halls as well. This would be a feature of every

Alphistian locality - in the largest cities such as Enteve, each neighborhood would have its own market halls. Every part of the country would have access to fresh, local fruits, vegetables, meats, poultry, dairy and fish, as well as pickled and canned products in the off-season.

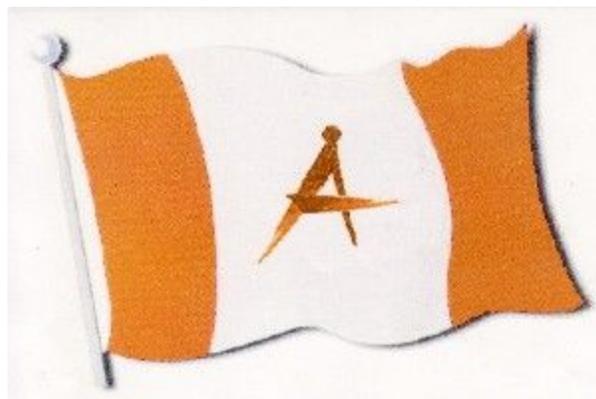
The average Alphistian would not need to work more than 35 hours per week. The trade unions would negotiate contracts above the norms legally mandated, so many workers would work a 28 hour week, with a three day weekend. Since Alphistians would not have the burden of “private taxes” as Americans (and many others around the world do), they would not need to make a lot of money to live well. Examples of such “private taxation” include: sky-high premiums for health insurance, inadequate old-age pensions that must be supplemented with savings risked in the stock market, and extremely expensive tuition at public universities that result in enormous debt from student loans for most young people.

In Alphistia, government taxes already would provide ALL Alphistians with access to medical care when needed, with very low copays, and free hospitalization. Their education would be free from kindergarten through university, their housing would be largely organized on an “at cost” non-profit system of rentals, and if they become unemployed or disabled, they would receive compensation until a new job is found for them, or they are retrained and placed again in the workforce. Workers would normally retire at age 60, although of course they could continue to work if they want to.

All workers would have at least one month’s paid vacation, and parents could take paid time off both before and after the birth of a child. Alphistians balance their work lives with their private lives, and the idea of working a 60 hour week for example, would be considered a ridiculous waste of time.

We Want to be Alphistians

The nineteenth century saw the rise in Europe of nationalism. Not all the nations got their own homeland; even today, Catalonia in Spain or Scotland in the UK are examples of places that probably should be independent countries. They have some autonomy but independence is still not feasible. In other places, such as the Faroe Islands, there is “limited independence”. The Faroese essentially rule themselves, with little interference from mother Denmark.



In most of the rest of Europe, the nationalism of the nineteenth centuries paid off with independent nation states at some point in the 1900s: Norway, Iceland, Slovenia, Slovakia to name several from the beginning and the end of the century. In between, the catastrophes of two world wars, the Nazis' perverted ideas about peoples and nations, the imposed political system by the Russians on Eastern Europe, the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia--all variations of nationalism showing the worst of humanity's capacity for evil.

The ideal of nationalism has been the aspiration for self-determination. From the League of Prizren, came a letter in 1878 to a British diplomat stating: "...we want to be Albanians". Likewise, in the 1840s, a manifesto was published by Icelandic students in Copenhagen with a similar idea: "We want to be Icelanders". The Norwegians making their case to Sweden at the end of the 1800s adopted the slogan: "We want a land of our own".

In Alphistian, this would be translated as "Ve vilye nas lesenum." Lesenum is our own word, the word used to describe our homeland. When speaking of Alphistia in general, or geographically, it's common enough to use the word landa, meaning country, nation, or land. Lesenum is used only to refer to Alphistia.

Alphistia's Constitution begins:

"We are a nation, and we call our country Alphistia. We come from many lands, to create a new society, and to provide ourselves lives of freedom, order, justice, and prosperity."

In Alphistian, the words are much more expressive:

"Ve es de lesenum, en ve deras nas landa de nomine se Alvestea. Ve kom se ovat landen te erdun an neuve samenlevte, en te deras naselne levten se frante, ordente, rekte, en tavente."

A word like "ordente" means much more than the one word equivalent in English: order. Alphistia would be neat, well-ordered, and planned, but all in an Alphistian way. When you are on the train from Berlin to Amsterdam, you know IMMEDIATELY would you go across the border from Germany to Holland: the look and the feel of the two countries is different, although each is neat, well-ordered, and planned. Alphistia would have a "Dutch sensibility", to express it in a way to relate to non-Alphistians what this new society would be like, but of course it would be uniquely Alphistian. "Ordente" means well-ordered, but in a pleasant and non-authoritarian way, cosy and "gezellig" as the Dutch say. That's not for everyone, which is why Alphistia would be inhabited by people who choose to live there. Someone who would find that anathema could go live in Vegas instead.

The word "tavente" is translated as prosperity, but it comes from the Alphistian word "good", so it means more "the good life", somewhat like la dolce vita as the Italians say about themselves.

It's the antithesis of the suburban existence of contemporary America: a way of life so devoid of meaning, so often lacking in anything good, that it has resulted in an enormous opioid epidemic amongst people of all classes and ages desperate to ease the pain of their profound alienation. That is the fundamental reason that Americans so often use their weapons against themselves and their fellow citizens in suicides and mass shootings. The rights to "frante, ordente, rekte en tavenete" would be far more valuable and meaningful than the "right to bear arms".

Imagine

John Lennon imagined there were no countries, because all the existing ones were so bad. My more limited imagination has focused on just one small one: Alphistia. It would be a good country, a people's home, and perhaps you can imagine it too.

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