



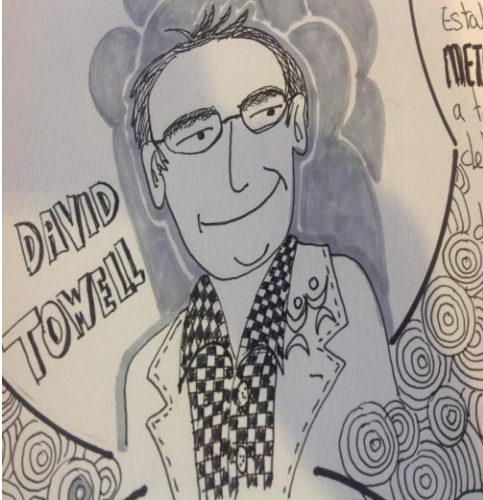
CENTRE FOR INCLUSIVE FUTURES
POLICY, ORGANISATION & COMMUNITY ACTION LEARNING

RAISING OUR GAME

**Signposts Towards Creating
A Better Tomorrow Together**



David Towell



Preface

Every year in early May, the Centre for Inclusive Futures hosts a networking reception in the style of 'world café' for 40-50 people in a wide variety of roles who the Centre has worked with in the past year and sometimes much longer in its mission to *develop sustainable communities which include everyone as equal citizens*. In 2015, this meeting took place shortly after the U.K. General Election which saw the election of a majority right-wing administration committed to a programme of continuing austerity and further social division, clearly disconnected from the everyday experience of ordinary citizens.

The organising question for our conversations was concerned with how we could best 'raise our game' to advance this mission in the new political context. This theme provides the title for this pamphlet and my commentary on these conversations provides the first essay in this collection.

To this I have added nine other short pieces, some articles, some reviews of key texts, which explore different strands in the strategies we need to work together to create a better future. (Most of these are available separately on the web at: <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/authors/david-towell/>) The pamphlet as a whole is both an input to this year's networking reception - on the 10th May - and hopefully also a resource to people elsewhere working with others in their communities and agencies to build a future in which we live in harmony with ourselves, each other and the natural world of which we are part.

The Index which follows advertises the focus of each *signpost*. I am grateful to our American colleague, Beth Mount, for permission to use a picture of her quilt *Garden of Soul* to add inspiration to the cover of this pamphlet and to our Spanish colleague, Ester Ortega, for the graphic - and perhaps youthful - representation of the author.

David Towell

May 2016

INDEX

	Page
Preface	3
1. Raising Our Game	5
2. This Changes Everything	12
3. Prosperity Without Growth	15
4. The Transition Companion	17
5. Building Community For The Great Transition	19
6. Leading From The Emerging Future	25
7. The Frugal Innovator	29
8. Leading The Inclusive City	31
9. Delivering The Promise Of <i>An Ordinary Life</i>	34
10. Pathfinders	38
A note on the <i>Centre for Inclusive Futures</i>	44

1. RAISING OUR GAME POST ELECTION

Notes on a World Café event at the King's Fund, 12 May 2015



Introduction

Each year in early May the Centre for Inclusive Futures hosts a networking reception informed by the 'World Café' method. People taking leadership roles at all levels from family life to national policy-making meet to celebrate work done in the preceding year, sustain and extend relationships and share their learning with other participants with the aim of enhancing our contributions in the coming year.

To structure conversation around the third of these aims we always have a 'big question'. In 2015 around 40 of us met four days after the U.K. General Election results were declared. Our big question was an obvious one:

Looking forward after the General Election, what are the promising opportunities and strategies for building more sustainable and inclusive communities in the coming years?

In truth, many of us were still angry, disappointed or anxious about the outcome of the election and the prospects of another five years of Conservative government, given the huge damage done by the previous Coalition to the social fabric of our country and the lives of people at risk of disadvantage. And indeed

the new government had already lost no time in confirming some of its worst intentions, for example, the abolition of the Human Rights Act.

So our initial thoughts following the Election probably focused more on concerns about further damage to vulnerable people and our communities likely to arise from dishonest, divisive and discriminatory policies. But I think we all understood that however justified our disappointment, we needed to move on to explore how best to make constructive responses driven by hope, not fear.

We were helped here by a recent publication from the New Economics Foundation (nef), introduced to us by its co-author Sarah Lyall, *Responding to austerity: How groups across the U.K. are adapting, challenging and imagining alternatives*. We were inspired by a blog already published by another participant, Sally Warren, *Let's be fierce not furious!* And Philippa Russell reminded us that 2015 is the 20th anniversary of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The DDA did more than any legislation in the last century to improve the rights of disabled people but it was highly controversial at the time. Although some of those rights have been weakened in the last five years, the DDA still represents a landmark on the long road to civil rights for disabled people. We need to safeguard the DDA provisions and also remind ourselves that we have achieved much against considerable opposition at times!

In World Café style, we set out on an evening of rotating small group discussions to share ideas and experiences. Of course, I was only party to a small proportion of what were probably hundreds of different conversations but this method makes space for a plenary session in which participants share insights and examples which have impressed them. I have drawn on these ideas in the summary which follows. I have tried to identify 8 key **principles** to inform our thinking and action – and illustrate these more concretely with *promising examples*.

Eight Principles

1. Stay grounded in our values while always seeking to imagine better ways of meeting these in contemporary Britain

We want to see our society as one which values diversity, welcomes everyone as equal citizens and seeks to use all our contributions in building a better future – one in which we live in harmony with ourselves, each other and our natural world. Put more technically, we always need to be creating actions which recognise the connections between, and aspire to meet the 'triple bottom line' of environmental protection, sustainable economies and greater social justice.

I myself like the formulation of these aims from the economist Tim Jackson in *Prosperity Without Growth*: Real prosperity 'resides in the quality of our lives

and the health and happiness of our families. It is present in the strength of our relationships and our trust in the community. It is evidenced by our satisfaction at work and our sense of shared meaning and purpose. It hangs on our potential to participate fully in the life of society.'

Jo Kidd shared with some of us ideas behind her latest community initiative - the Abbots Mill Project. This project is creating a centre for sustainability and social justice, using power from renewable resources, principally through re-instating a waterwheel into one of the mill races of the former Abbot's Mill in the centre of Canterbury. The project teaches people about living in harmony with our natural environment, with non-human animals and with each other. It is a peaceful, welcoming and accessible place for all. Simultaneously it is fostering concern for the environment, recreating local economic assets (e.g. green energy production) and modelling social inclusion.

2. Help each other to stay strong

We need to be prepared for (continuing!) a long struggle. Effective action requires vision and courage. We are at our best when we find ways of supporting each other when things are difficult and inspiring each other through sharing experiences.

Sally's blog, referred to above, commits her organisation, Paradigm, to continue its investment in supporting networks which 'connect people, ideas and action'. The World Café method itself is a powerful way of providing a 'safe space' for a diverse range of people to explore common challenges and seek to create a shared understanding of positive ways forward.

3. Challenge the indefensible!

Much of current economic and social policy is 'sold' on the basis of misleading commentary (the false narrative on the requirement for public sector 'austerity', the myth of 'shared sacrifice', the rhetoric against 'welfare' and those who need public support). This context is easily exploited by the unscrupulous (the government itself in fostering prejudice against poor and disabled people, rogue landlords, extortionate loan companies, etc.) We need the courage and organisation to challenge negative ideas and actions.

Nef's 'Responding to austerity' study details many examples of people fighting back, from the 'Hardest Hit' collective which exposes the disproportionate burdens imposed on disabled people to the campaign of 'Psychologists Against Austerity', which warns about the current increase in mental/emotional distress. We might add the recent emergence of the Learning Disability Alliance (and soon, Learning Disability England) as a new

campaigning organisation supporting the voice of people with learning disabilities at the national level.

4. 'Be the change you want to see'

This quotation attributed (not entirely accurately) to Gandhi still captures an important principle. We have most control over what we do ourselves. We need to demonstrate inclusion and compassion in our own daily lives and especially reach out to people at particular risk of disadvantage. This is the starting point for linking personal experience, local action and our aspirations for a better future.

Paul Davies told some of us about his experience as an independent member of the panels undertaking care and treatment reviews for people in 'Assessment and Treatment Units' for return to their communities. For many the 'system' seems to have lost sight of their essential humanity. It lacks the capacity to really listen to people, hear their story and act with compassion and urgency. We need the courage to see people as they really are and stand alongside them in regaining their personhood. In a different context, Jackie Downer and Sheila Hollins told us about 'Books Beyond Words' and ways of using them (for example in book clubs) that enable people, who are often not heard, to grow in their own lives and find new ways of expressing themselves, but equally importantly help their supporters to understand the realities of people's lives.

Philippa reminded us of the importance of enabling people to be creative and recognise themselves as active citizens. She described her son's and his friends' involvement in 'Partners in Art' and the value of creating spaces where everyone can come and share talents, ideas, and new relationships. She commented that in some places, personalisation and personal budgets had 'opened doors' for people with learning disabilities and their families, but felt that we all had to be part of a social movement to protect and 'grow' our communities. She felt that the commemoration of VE Day the previous week was a useful reminder that (to quote Churchill) 'great things can grow from disasters if it was the will of the people'.

5. Get involved wherever possible with fellow citizens taking action for a better future

Austerity is having multiple local impacts like dependence on food banks, eviction from one's home and increased exposure to 'hate crime'. We have a rich tradition of community activism in the U.K. Building on Principal 4, we can strengthen local initiatives and campaigns by 'joining up' ourselves and seeking to ensure that this resistance is itself inclusive.

For example, food banks need volunteers and volunteers can demonstrate solidarity with all those facing food poverty. 'Focus E15 Mothers', the campaign defending housing rights in Newham has gained national attention by attracting wider participation. People facing prejudice and hate crime can gain from personal support and advocacy. And credit unions and time banks are valuable means of offering mutual aid.

6. Demonstrate elements in an alternative vision through many practical examples

Otto Scharmer, in his development of 'Theory U', calls this 'prototyping' – not just imagining a better world but trying out various ways of creating this and thus strengthening our capacity to share persuasive new stories. In turn, we can spread innovation by what Margaret Wheatley (in *Walk Out, Walk On*) calls 'scaling across'.

This, of course, is how the 'An Ordinary Life' initiative built nation-wide support for closing institutions and enabling people with learning disabilities to return to their communities. Nic Crosby shared with some of us an important current demonstration of this vision in the work of In Control's 'Children's Programme', which is helping 'looked after' children placed 'out of area' to return to their families and engaging 'upstream' to prevent family break-down. This programme makes use of public policies which permit individuals and families to have personal (health and social care) budgets. Its success (e.g. in Middlesborough) relies on a common sense approach which focuses on the strengths of young people and their communities, emphasises the value of relationships and works with the young people, their families and others in their lives to discover 'what would it take' to enable them to succeed.

7. Listen to and seek to build relationships with people who are not yet 'on our side'

Fellow citizens and people in different roles may, of course, have different perspectives and attitudes. But we can't build a new society just with those who agree with us. We need to take a 'mindfulness' approach to understanding others ('listening with quiet mind and open heart') and in so doing, perhaps discover ways of creating common ground.

Noelle Blackman told us a positive story of how her therapeutic organisation, at risk of needing to rent new premises, had sought a dialogue with their commercial landlords and reached a new agreement based in mutual respect. Sue Carmichael talked to some people about the relationship building she has been doing to interest librarians in welcoming a new audience not usually seen in libraries (people with learning disabilities) to Books Beyond Words book clubs.

8. Build alliances with other groups and organisations to advance a wider agenda

This is an extension to Principal 7. As we have noted earlier, communities (and municipalities) face inter-connected challenges, for example in relation to delivering environmental protection, economic sustainability and social justice. Yet even in the field of disability, there has been a history of associations based on different impairments working separately for their particular interests. And not engaging with other associations concerned for example with responding to climate change or protecting employment rights. Yet by recognising inter-connections in these challenges and mapping local assets (thinking for example about the interests and contributions of local government, the NHS, universities, trade unions, churches and the wide variety of civil society associations) we may find ‘win – win’ strategies and strengthen our capacity for effective action.

There are many potential examples. Energy costs are a big factor in household poverty. Waste of energy is significant in the slow progress being made to address global warming. A big programme to promote local energy production and insulate houses would address both challenges and promote employment. To take another example, the NHS and its suppliers are typically the largest local employer. Many disabled people, including people with learning disabilities, have work skills and a reputation for reliability but are disproportionately excluded from the labour market. NHS efforts to boost employment of disabled people (e.g. following the ‘Project Search’ model) simultaneously contribute to stability in the workforce, improving the health and well-being of these people and strengthening a culture of inclusiveness in the NHS itself.

Taking Action

In the words of Alice Walker ‘We are the people we have been waiting for!’ We can try each day to take some action, often small, to make a positive difference – and link up these efforts to achieve more substantial change. Understanding the reality of people’s lives, imagining a better future, building stronger networks, doing something about it. The box below summarises our eight principles.



Raising Our Game: Eight Principles

- 1. Stay grounded in our values while always seeking to imagine better ways of meeting these in contemporary Britain**
- 2. Help each other to stay strong**
- 3. Challenge the indefensible!**
- 4. 'Be the change you want to see'**
- 5. Get involved wherever possible with fellow citizens taking action for a better future**
- 6. Demonstrate elements in an alternative vision through many practical examples**
- 7. Listen to and seek to build relationships with people who are not yet 'on our side'**
- 8. Build alliances with other groups and organisations to advance a wider agenda**

2. **THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING: Capitalism verses the climate**

- My review of a book by **Naomi Klein**

Recently I saw the film *Erin Brockovitch* replayed on late night TV. It's a great film in which Julia Roberts won an Oscar for her portrayal of Erin. You'll probably remember the powerful story, all the more so because it is true. The Hinckley plant of the Pacific Gas and Electrical Company in California used a dangerous chemical (hexavalent chromium) in combating corrosion in the cooling system of a compressor station which formed part of a natural gas pipeline. Despite an 'independent' regulator, the wastewater was illegally discharged into unlined ponds at the site, which in turn percolated into the groundwater affecting the working class community living close to the plant. Erin, a legal clerk with no formal education in law, discovers that there is a high incidence of devastating illness (cancer, miscarriages, birth defects) among these people and that the Company is trying to cover up the pollution by buying up their property. She is instrumental in building a legal case against the Company which was settled in 1996 in favour of the plaintiffs to the tune of \$333 million, the largest settlement ever paid in a direct action law suit in the United States (although paling into insignificance compared with the sums BP is paying to compensate for the huge damage caused by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico).

This is a story of corporate greed and corruption, profit before people and lax regulation, with terrible consequences - in this case challenged through a community coming together and being able to use the law, too late of course for many of the victims.



Naomi Klein is an outstanding investigative journalist who chooses the biggest issues and studies them in depth. There is no bigger issue than the ways in which collectively we are destroying the natural world on which humanity depends for its future, especially through our failure to tackle global warming. What happened in Hinckley is a microcosm of what is now a global challenge affecting us all. *This Changes Everything* is a 500 page blockbuster, telling this larger story in the style of the best 'who done its', with the added dimension of what can - and must - we do about it. It's a 'must read' for all of us concerned to create a better future in which we live in harmony with each other and the

natural world. As its sub-title, *Capitalism vs the climate*, implies, we cannot win this struggle unless we achieve radical change in the prevailing economic model embodied in globalisation, deregulation and corporate domination, in short, in contemporary Capitalism. There is no time to lose!

This book started from Naomi's investigation of the BP oil spill. Shocked by what she saw there, she widened her canvass and, five years later, this is the product. Along the way she discovered that the lack of agreement on international action to turn round the growth in emissions means that the 2 degrees Celsius target for limiting global warming is almost unattainable and there is a clear and present danger that we might reach 4 or even 6 degrees this Century with catastrophic consequences, unless we commit now to something much more radical, nothing less than a 'Marshall plan' for the Earth.

Why this failure? Essentially, as she puts this, the action we require conflicts with the deeply entrenched ideological pillars of the neo-liberal age - 'privatisation of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector and lowering of taxes, paid for with cuts to public spending'.

She shows in detail how 'free-trade' (e.g. as expressed through World Trade Organisation rules) is being allowed to trump 'green' policies which require, for example, giving preference to local production; she shows how various kinds of 'magical thinking', for example, relating to carbon trading schemes and Dr. Strangelove style geo-engineering are being used to put off the need for regulation; and she shows how outright deception (like fossil fuel companies funding an alternative climate 'science') is seeking to confuse the public. Big money is also perverting the democratic process.

We see all this in the U.K. Fracking provides a current example. Our government is proposing a 'dash for gas', using methods with well-documented risks (e.g. to the water supply) while reducing incentives for investment in renewables. We can wonder who will profit from this set of priorities? There has been strong public resistance (e.g. in the village of Balcombe) to this assault on the countryside, so the same government is seeking to take away local control over planning, while lobbying within the European Union to scrap relevant safety laws. And just to add insult to injury, the Tory peer, Lord Howell (father-in-law of the Chancellor leading the dash to gas) helpfully offered the suggestion that we should concentrate fracking in what he imagines to be the 'desolate' and 'uninhabited' North East of England, rather than, of course, the 'beautiful natural areas' in the Tory South. (This is just one stark example of the rich elite being comfortable about damaging distant people and places while believing they can protect themselves from the consequences of their policies. They are wrong: there is no hiding-place from climate change although undoubtedly poor people and places are being asked to pay the biggest price.)

So what is to be done? Naomi Klein identifies a cluster of strategies which already are taking us in the right direction, if not yet to scale and certainly not everywhere. We can resist. Local communities, not least indigenous communities (sometimes using legal rights to land established with the original colonialists) can say 'no', for example to the Keystone XL pipeline proposed as one export route from the Alberta tar sands. We can campaign for disinvestment in fossil fuels and reinvestment in alternative economic strategies (renewable energy, public transport, sustainable farming, eco-system renewal etc.) like those developed in more detail by the New Economics Foundation. We can press for 'polluter pays' policies to raise funds for alternatives and accept international frameworks which recognise that the first countries to industrialise are not only economically richer than others but have a duty to pay most towards the necessary transition towards sustainability - now requiring 'de-growth' in the developed countries to leave some space for growth in the others. We can seek to curb the power of huge corporations, not least by re-empowering local communities (as we see, for example, in Germany where success in moving towards renewable energy has been greatly helped by municipalities taking back control of the power grids).

The meaning of *This Changes Everything* is that in order to successfully meet the challenge of protecting ourselves and our planet, we have to bring together efforts to strengthen democracy, including local democracy; tackle growing inequality; end the fetish of economic growth; and reinvent our relationship with nature.

As Pope Francisco's recent encyclical on climate change *Laudato Si* expresses this, we need to find a moral solution to this challenge, one that discards the belief that we can control nature and seeks to understand instead our place *in* nature and recognises that our own well-being is linked to that of others. Interconnected challenges on this scale require an interconnected - and international - social movement in which all of us play our part. *We are all Erin Brockovitch*.

Naomi Klein *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*
Allen Lane, 2014

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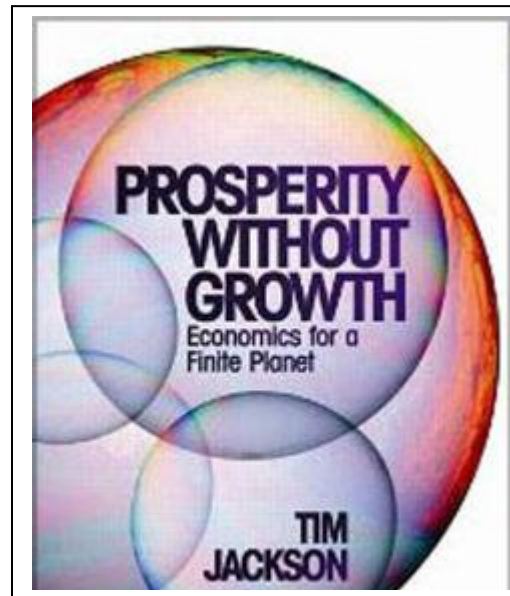
PROSPERITY WITHOUT GROWTH

Economics for a finite planet

- My review of a book by **Tim Jackson**

The central focus for the Centre for Inclusive Futures is on exploring how efforts to enhance social justice and promote inclusion can best be linked to the overarching 21st Century imperative of achieving a sustainable future, that is, which protects the biosphere and fosters well-being for all.

Tim Jackson's 2009 book *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* is a key text for this exploration. Jackson sets out to debunk the conventional thinking which has helped get us into the current mess and start to define a credible vision of what it would mean for human society to flourish in the context of ecological limits. He has particular messages for 'rich' economies like the U.K. which are already exhausting much more than our share of the world's natural resources.



In a persuasive and detailed analysis Jackson advances four main propositions:

- The dominant capitalist model of the last 30 years and the ecologically illiterate economic theories on which this is based have failed.
- Worse than this, the endless but unsustainable pursuit of economic growth is now 'wired in' to our materialist culture in which consumerism is a key driver and personal status is judged by wealth and acquisition.
- Current incrementalist myths, for example that growth and material consumption can be decoupled, don't stand up to empirical examination.
- We need therefore both a new ecological macro-economics and new ways of defining what we value: we have no sensible option but to pursue prosperity without growth.

Borrowing both from the small-scale example of social enterprises which employ (mostly) human resources to address community needs and the inspiration of 'intentional communities' like those discussed in Wheatley and Frieze's book *Walk Out, Walk On*, as well as Amartya Sen's identification of well-being in terms of our capabilities for flourishing, Jackson defines prosperity simply as a state which offers us all the ability to participate meaningfully in the life of society.

In more detail, *real prosperity* goes beyond basic material satisfactions (still to be achieved in many 'poorer' countries) to emphasise instead the quality of our lives and the health and happiness of our families; the strength of our relationships and our trust in the community; our sense of shared purpose and satisfaction at work. He also shows how well-being in this sense is more easily achieved in more equal societies.

This analysis leads on to a promising sketch of the public policies required to make the transition to a better future, in three main areas:

- Establishing clear limits to our use of non-renewable resources e.g. through caps on emissions and ecological tax reform.
- Changing our economy through an ecological focus on low carbon and labour intensive activities and investment in 'green' technologies, infrastructure and jobs.
- Changing our society through tackling systemic inequalities, sharing out employment and reducing working hours, and building more resilient communities which promote equal citizenship and local self-sufficiency.

Within this broad vision and strategy, we can develop our argument that valuing everyone in our diverse communities for the assets they bring and welcoming their inclusion is not only morally right, it is also essential to achieving this better future for us all.

Tim Jackson *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a finite planet* 2009

4. THE TRANSITION COMPANION Making your community more resilient in uncertain times

- My review of a book by **Rob Hopkins**

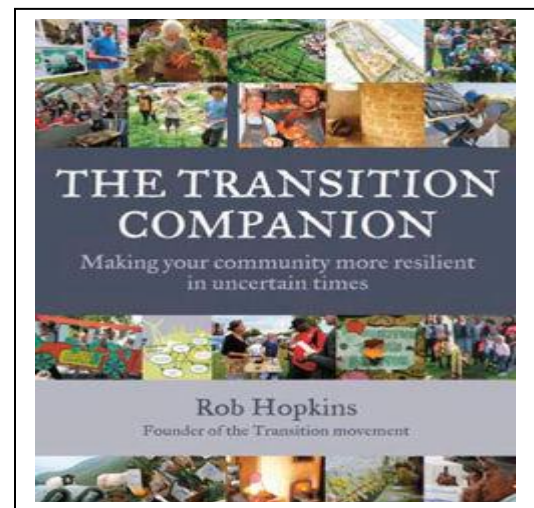
The preceding review is of Tim Jackson's *Prosperity Without Growth*. If this book is an economic theory for sustainable development, Hopkins provides a promising account of the practice in his book *The Transition Companion*.

The Transition movement, starting in the U.K. but spread now to more than 30 other countries, constitutes probably the most influential set of grass-roots initiatives towards sustainability.

I would say that this book is a gold mine of ideas, examples and useful processes, except that gold mines are finite and exhaustible: perhaps a better metaphor is an English meadow allowed to grow freely and demonstrate its ecological diversity and harmony. In 300 pages, Hopkins and his many collaborators discuss the why, what and especially the how of Transition, and report the enthusiasms which have been mobilised among citizens in many different localities. They summarise and illustrate no less than 43 ingredients and 21 tools which these local innovators have found useful under the five main headings of Starting out, Deepening the initiative, Connecting to more people, Scaling up locally and Seeking to inform national and global change. This is great stuff although, at least on my reading, the strategies so far devised to move to the larger scale remain relatively thin.

Transition towns started as a response to the challenges of 'peak oil' and climate change: local 'energy descent plans' i.e. to achieve very small carbon foot prints, remain the central driver. The movement envisions resilient communities delivering (as far as possible) localisation in green energy production, the food economy and construction. It also recognises that this resilience requires that we change ourselves as well as our environment.

Particularly welcome, *The Transition Companion* promotes processes of change based on openness and inclusion, recognising that successful initiatives depend on engaging the greatest range of local voices and experiences, across the diversity of class, culture, ethnicity, etc. To this end there are useful discussions of good listening and respectful communication,



effective meetings (World Café and Open Space get specific attention) and the significance of celebrations. There is also attention to learning from the experience of elders and involving young people.

The book argues that the future decentralised economy necessarily requires new social arrangements designed with social justice at their core.

Rob Hopkins *The Transition Companion: Making your community more resilient in uncertain times* 2011

5.

BUILDING COMMUNITY FOR THE GREAT TRANSITION

An agenda for sustainable and inclusive development

*For much of my life, I have joined with the disabled people's movement and its allies in recognising the need to build strong and **inclusive** communities if disabled people are to participate fully as equal citizens (1).*

*In the 21st Century we all face the even bigger – and now critical - challenge of working together to find ways of living in harmony with our planet so as to achieve a **sustainable** future. Disabled people and their allies need to be part of this broader movement but equally our communities need their participation, if broader strategies are to be successful.*

This short article considers how we can bring these two agenda together for mutual benefit so as to build communities which are both sustainable and inclusive and thus achieve what has rightly been described as 'The Great Transition' (2) to a better future.

The 21st Century Imperative: Living in harmony with our planet

Let's start from the big picture. We can't go on as we are. There is overwhelming scientific consensus that the threat posed by man-made climate change is both serious and urgent. Our continuing failure to rise to this challenge promises an intolerable future for later generations as we destroy our own habitat and the wonders of nature that depend on it. Long before then, we will have passed the peak in oil production even as energy needs rise with global population growth. Quite visibly, for example in the massive extinction of species and rapid disappearance of the polar ice caps and rain forests, our culture of over-consumption is causing massive damage in important eco-systems upon which human well-being depends. These environmental crises are closely connected to the failure of the global economic system, while incredibly, political leaderships still look for salvation in a return to GDP growth. We have learnt at huge cost that the world's financial system is an unaccountable casino but attempts at reform seem slow and unconvincing. We are living with massive and growing inequalities both between and within countries which make the 'richer' countries like the UK and even more so, the USA, dysfunctional for their own people (3). In these richer countries, people's life satisfaction is stagnant or declining. Indeed, as the New Economics Foundation puts this, we are living in a situation characterised by four 'U's: it is unsustainable, unstable, unfair and unhappy.

As citizens, we have a clear and present duty to join together with hope to address these multiple crises and regain control over the future (4), accepting our responsibility for securing the welfare of children being born today (many of whom might reasonably expect to live through this Century) and subsequent generations.

A compelling vision

‘Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing’
Arundhati Roy

As Arundhati Roy says, it doesn't have to be this way. As citizens we can reset our compass according to what we really value. We can develop a more intelligent perspective on the long-term inter-relationships of environment, economy and society.

And together we can start to create a compelling new vision of how it will be possible for human beings to flourish, live together cooperatively and pursue higher levels of well-being while acknowledging our debt to Mother Earth and appreciating the ecological limits to human activity: in short to have *Prosperity without Growth* (5).

There is a growing literature to help us with this task. I find Tim Jackson's book of this title especially helpful. Current economic models are ecologically illiterate in seeing stability as dependent on ever increasing growth in consumption and making materialism central to our social status. He argues for an alternative set of values grounded in family, friendship and community, in which we redefine 'prosperity' as residing in the quality of our lives, the health and happiness of our families, the strength of our relationships, our sense of shared purpose, our trust in local communities and our potential to participate fully in the life of society.

Others have taken up the challenge of describing the forms of economic and social organisation required to advance these values while we make rapid progress in cutting our carbon footprint, especially by ending our dependence on fossil fuels: that is, as we achieve *The Great Transition*.

For example, in *The Resilience Imperative* (6) Michael Lewis and Pat Conaty envision the transformation to more local and resilient economies i.e. where banks serve the public interest, energy and food production are mostly done much closer to home, we rethink construction and transport, we invest in public spaces and reclaim the commons, strengthen authentic civic leadership and reconnect with nature.

Fairness is an important value in itself, but we will also need greater equality to support the public ethos and cooperative working required to tackle these challenges together.

In turn, this renewed emphasis on community can help us awaken the power of families and neighbourhoods to help each other, for example in educating our children and caring for people needing support (7), especially if in the new

economy we find better ways of balancing the time spent at 'work' and the time we have available for making other contributions.

And at the local level, these new ways of thinking are finding a myriad of practical expressions, most notably in the 'Transition Towns' movement (8), starting in the U.K. and now constituting a global network of citizen-led initiatives bringing people together to tell a new story about the places where they live and what they could become in a sustainable future.

Being part of this

Our theme here is the need to bring the agenda for inclusion and sustainability together in order to secure this better future for all.

Local sustainability initiatives like 'Transition Towns' need to welcome the contributions of disabled people and their allies, as one major aspect of community diversity, because:

- ✓ Success in creating and acting on this new vision depends on reflecting the widest range of voices and experiences; there is work here for everyone.
- ✓ Disabled people bring distinctive experience and skills, for example in overcoming the barriers to equal participation, establishing trust, meeting effectively and communicating simply.
- ✓ Radical action is more likely where it is possible to forge alliances among different interests and establish 'convergence' ('win-win' initiatives) on shared priorities (9).

Reflecting the widest range of voices and experiences

Equally, disabled people and their allies need to be part of this because:

- ✓ As fellow citizens this is their future too. Indeed disabled people, especially in 'poorer' parts of the world are likely to be among the main victims of continuing climate failure.
- ✓ Providing things are organised accessibly, some disabled people not only bring experiences and skills but also have time.
- ✓ Most importantly, since every local community faces trade-offs among multiple challenges, disabled people need to join others in ensuring that social justice and inclusion are central to the transition agenda.

Ensuring that social justice and inclusion are central to the transition agenda

Achieving positive action through everyday democracy

Clearly our vision of a better future will require informed action at all levels from the local to the global. But we can have little confidence that either states or markets will meet this challenge unless driven by people coming together across a diverse range of interests locally to build trust and common purpose around the programme for radical change we now require. Marc Stears calls this process the renewal of 'everyday democracy' (10).

Again, *The Transition Companion* (8) provides us with encouraging examples of what this might involve if we start from real places, provide good 'public spaces' in which people equipped with useful information can dare to dream (11) about a different future and organise around their enthusiasms to initiate practical action upon which further work can build.

Fortunately there are a range of well-developed 'social technologies' for inviting local citizens and other stakeholders into the room and promoting constructive dialogue: for 'hosting conversations which matter' (12). For example, my colleague John O'Brien and I have used both 'World Café' (13) and 'Open Space Technology' (14) to frame a series of conversations about building sustainable and inclusive communities in two English Counties (15). We have also identified six practices for diverse participation and creative engagement in different aspects of local planning (16).

Practically we need civic leadership, local government and other agencies to recognise the inter-connections in the agenda for local development, welcome diversity and promote cooperative working on local priorities to optimise 'win-win' scenarios and promote well-being for all. Equally we need disabled people's organisations (and other associations representative of local diversity) together with commissioners and providers of services to these groups, to make strengthening community central to their work and to promote the contribution of disabled and other disadvantaged people to the collective agenda. We all need to be active citizens continually searching for, and creating opportunities to play our part in building communities that are both sustainable and inclusive.

The time is now. To quote Alice Walker,
'We are the people we have been waiting for'

Jo Kidd, John O'Brien and David Towell host a webpage which develops these ideas and seeks examples of local action from which we can learn at:
<http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/projects/sustainability-social-justice.html>

Notes

1. The fullest contemporary statement of what it would mean to include disabled people as equal citizens is set out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* 2006.
2. *The Great Transition* New Economics Foundation 2009 provides a succinct guide to the scale of the multiple current challenges – and a call to radical action.
3. The social ills produced by inequality in the rich countries are comprehensively discussed in Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* Allen Lane, 2009.
4. This statement of our challenge comes from Susan George *Whose Crisis, Whose Future? Towards a Greener, Fairer, Richer World* Polity, 2010.
5. Tim Jackson *Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a finite planet* Earthscan, 2009. The shift from GDP to a focus on well-being also requires a new form of national metrics: see for example Stiglitz, J, Sen A, and Fitoussi, J, *Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* CMEPSP, 2008.
6. Michael Lewis and Pat Conaty *The Resilience Imperative: Cooperative transitions to a steady-state economy* New Society Publishers, 2012.
7. John McKnight and Peter Block *The Abundant Community: Awakening the power of families and neighbourhoods* Berrett-Koehler, 2010.
8. Rob Hopkins *The Transition Companion: Making your community more resilient in uncertain times* Transition Books, 2011.
9. The idea of convergence is drawn from Anthony Giddens *The Politics of Climate Change* Polity, 2009.
10. Marc Stears *Everyday democracy: Taking centre-left politics beyond state and market* IPPR, 2011.
11. See for another impressive example *Dreaming Planet Earth Methods: Methods for mapping future food and energy systems at the local level* Bioneers for the Dreaming New Mexico Project, 2012.
12. An excellent introduction to the principles underpinning good conversation is Margaret Wheatley *Turning To One Another: simple conversations to restore hope to the future* Berrett-Koehler, 2002.

13. Juanita Brown and David Isaacs *The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter* Berrett-Koehler, 2005.

14. Harrison Owen *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide* Berrett-Koehler, 1997.

15. John O'Brien and David Towell *Conversations about building sustainable and inclusive communities – an invitation* 2010. Available in the on-line library www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/

16. John O'Brien and David Towell *Six Practices for Creative Engagement* 2011. Also at www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/ For a fuller introduction to participative methods useful in strategising sustainable development, see *The Weave: Participatory process design guide for strategic sustainable development* 2011. Available at www.theweave.info/

6. LEADING FROM THE EMERGING FUTURE From ego-system to eco-system economies

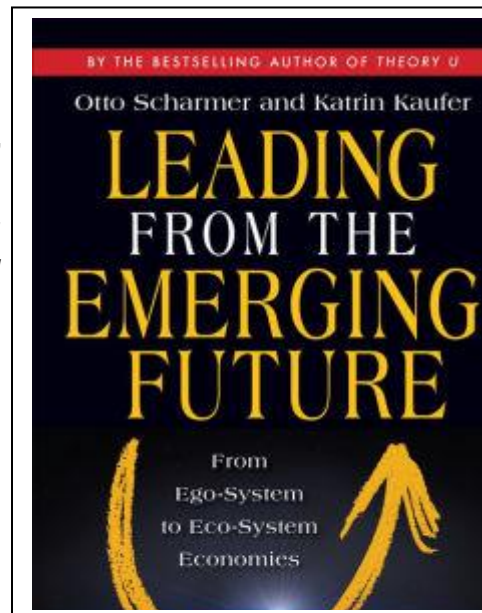
- My review of a book by **Otto Scharmer** and **Katrin Kaufer**

While writing this review, I am seeing adverts for a film biography of Stephen Hawking, *A Theory of Everything* – where ‘everything’ refers to the physical world. This book is almost as ambitious in the social sphere: it seeks to offer a detailed account of contemporary global challenges and articulate an approach – ‘Theory U’ - through which we might address these challenges so as to achieve the transformation to a sustainable and socially just future. A bold and pressing agenda indeed!

It’s not an easy read. First, the authors draw on scholarship from a diverse range of fields. They write from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and build on the ‘systems thinking’ of their colleague, Peter Senge. (Indeed Senge’s 2008 book *The Necessary Revolution: How individuals and organisations are working together to create a sustainable world* anticipates key parts of their argument.) They also make considerable use of ideas in oriental philosophies (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism): Theory U owes a lot to Confucius’s *Great Learning* essay. And their change strategy is informed by an understanding of social movements, especially in the tradition of Gandhi i.e. which start from the self. Partly as a consequence of these

oriental influences, they sometimes use language which is both theoretical and metaphysical, as in the repeated idea that there is a better future that *wants* to emerge.

Second the text is densely analytical. The longest chapter, on transforming thought, runs to 73 pages and develops a matrix of economic evolution distinguishing five major phases (expressed as 0.0 through to the emerging 4.0) across eight dimensions of activity, and at the 4.0 level in each dimension offers four propositions for achieving radical change. A subsequent matrix introduces four levels of aggregation (from the individual to the global) at which to develop new kinds of social awareness. All the boxes in these complex matrices are given at least some attention.




For both these reasons, this short review is necessarily selective and mostly I have tried to avoid the new jargon, doubtless losing some of the metaphysical connotations.

Scharmer and Kaufer begin with a radical diagnosis which identifies three major 'disconnections' as fundamental to our current ills: an ecological disconnect in which our economies seek to use more resources than we have; a social disconnect in which a small elite (the 1%) dominate the rest of us and leave much of the world in poverty; and a spiritual disconnect in which many of us experience loss of meaning in our lives and work. These disconnections underpin many other symptoms of global decline represented, for example, in the pursuit of GDP growth without attention to either ecological limits or personal well-being, technological development without reference to people's needs and governance arrangements which protect the powerful at the expense of the rest.

The long analytical chapter looks at eight aspects of these challenges (relating to nature, labour, capital, technology etc.) in the context of the evolution of economic thought. It seeks to describe and illustrate a next stage in this thinking (4.0) in which we move from 'ego system' (essentially fragmented and selfish) awareness to 'eco system' awareness i.e. in which we reconnect the economy with nature, re-link our work to our sense of purpose and seek to serve the real needs of our communities, so as to create well-being for all. (Of course, there are other pressing issues – armed conflict, religious intolerance, racism etc. – not addressed here.)

How can this fundamental transformation be achieved? The book has a second sub-title *Applying Theory U to transforming business, society and self*. 'Theory U', also developed by Scharmer, is an original approach to understanding how as individuals and networks we can achieve personal and societal change. In essence the 'U' refers to the shape of a process for unlearning past assumptions and inventing the new. It requires us to go on a journey together where we look inside ourselves to find our best values, our noblest intentions and look outside ourselves to see that something better is possible. We need to create the opportunities together to observe what is currently happening and listen deeply to other people's experiences, take time to share and make sense of these observations, support each other in considering what might be better and try out some new ideas and visions on which to build. Thus the 'U' process starts at the top of one side of the U and encourages us to put aside past prejudices and approach things with an open mind, open our hearts to other people's experiences and look to the 'emerging future' to find new possibilities. (Scharmer calls this last process 'presencing'.) Coming up the other side of the U, the process encourages us to take some action which tries out our fresh thinking and continue the process of learning together as we make bigger changes.

Making this more concrete, our colleague John O'Brien has tried to express these ideas simply in the context of a current European project *New Paths To*

Inclusion ( [OBrien Short Intro to Theory U 0.3.pdf](#)) John also recently facilitated a group 'presencing event' in Sesimbra, Portugal - the story of which is captured in a series of annotated photographs at:

<http://www.personcentredplanning.eu/news/latest-news/192-presencing-event-frame-by-frame>

The second half of the book explores and illustrates how these Theory U practices can assist transformation at the level of individuals and relationships, institutions and more globally. At the individual level, mindfulness practices are increasingly recognized as a route to compassion in care and indeed self-compassion (sensibly looking after ourselves). In networks with some shared intent (like the *New Paths to Inclusion Network*), large group events offer a vehicle for leaders to come together to renew their understanding, innovate and share in creating a different future. At the institutional level in different sectors (government, business, education, civil society associations), similar processes provide a means for bringing relevant stakeholders together to build new ways of working which demonstrate eco-system awareness - as we see in examples as different as the participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (Brazil), the Triodos Bank, and the World Wildlife Fund. There are seeds here for growing a better future.

In summary, I think we can draw at least seven main lessons from this important book:

- We all need to find opportunities to open our eyes to the extent of the disjunction between our values and everyday experience.
- We also need opportunities to create together new ways of thinking and acting in the world which replace dysfunctional and disjointed economic and social processes with a new eco-system awareness, understanding the whole as inter-related elements in everyone's well-being.
- We can express the goals in this new vision in terms of three harmonies: living in harmony with our best selves, other people and our environment.
- Real change towards this vision must start from each of us and the inner selves from which we engage with others.
- Theory U and its associated practices, which foster this self-reflection and an orientation to future opportunities, offer valuable new tools for co-producing a better future.
- Change on a large scale through these methods requires us to create spaces for engaging all relevant stakeholders in an eco-system and working across organisational and other boundaries to bring new possibilities into being.
- All this points to the need to invest in a new kind of widely dispersed leadership, in which people learn to listen deeply and act from their highest purposes, so as to encourage and facilitate this co-production.

Scharmer and Kaufer write with optimism about what is already being achieved down this path. However we would be wise to expect that 'the 1%' will not give up their damaging ways easily. Perhaps the next iteration of this work will give more emphasis to the conflicts inherent in radical change and the nature of the struggles to come if the authors' utopian 4.0 universe is to be further realized.

Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer *Leading from the Emerging Future: From ego-system to eco-system economies* 2013

7. THE FRUGAL INNOVATOR Creating change on a shoestring budget

- My review of a book by **Charles Leadbeater**

This latest work from Charles Leadbeater is a genuinely hopeful book for a troubled world. I would go so far as to commend this as a 're-engineering bible' for the global transition movement which seeks to find ways in which we can better live in harmony with each other and within the ecological limits of our planet. Filled with examples of frugal innovation, mostly from the large urban centres of the developing world, the author shows how we can learn from these examples to invent radical solutions to contemporary problems everywhere.

Leadbeater starts from three key 21st Century challenges. In the developing world, rapidly growing populations want and deserve decent quality lives – clean water, good food, low cost housing, renewable energy, relevant education and affordable health care – but not at the costs in cash and scarce resources of the profligate consumers in the 'rich' countries of the 'North'.

In the developed world, global capitalism is failing to deliver rising living standards for the great majority as the profits of growth increasingly accrue to mega corporations and a greedy elite. We, the 'squeezed middle', also need more frugal ways of living a good life.

And in both worlds, the expanding population must soon come to terms with the ecological limits to growth on the current model of globalisation.



Fortunately, the signposts to a better future are already visible in copious examples of a different kind of innovation, not so much in the shiny laboratories of Apple but rather in the back street workshops of Bangalore and Sao Paulo. So, we can see *lean* production in the call centre and mobile 'phone based primary health care system serving 5 million people in Mexico City. We can see *simple* design in the 'balwali' community schools in poor neighbourhoods in India where at about \$10 per child per year, young women offer early education in local spaces with parental funding. We can see *clean* innovation and frugal systems in Havana where, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the city learned to feed itself through establishing many small market gardens using organic

fertilisers. And we can see the *social* dimension of many of these innovations – people doing things for each other – in the mother-to-mother peer networks helping to combat HIV transmission in the Republic of South Africa.

At the core of frugal innovation are these four linked design principles: lean, simple, clean and social. Lean to eliminate waste in all its forms. Simple products which are easy to develop, use and maintain. Clean to minimise their environmental impact, treating waste from one process as an input to the next. Social in engaging consumers as co-producers, spreading delivery through networks and sharing costs among many users.

The new innovators are rooted in their communities and so can test what will work in real situations, but also cosmopolitan in connecting on a global scale. They also need to be, or work with, entrepreneurs who can shape organisational innovations, for example so that new products and their use spread laterally, and business innovations to make these products affordable, for example through 'pay-as-you-go'.

In the developing world, this is the only way forward. In the developed world, there will be resistance to changing our wasteful ways, especially since the very rich will continue to encourage them. But again, there are working examples which show what is possible. The city of Freiburg has brought together low cost housing, energy efficiency, renewable sources of energy and excellent public transport so as to offer a good quality of life for most people, irrespective of income.

Here then is a potent recipe for a better future, providing only we can transform a lot of what passes as business to a more social purpose. Now is the time!

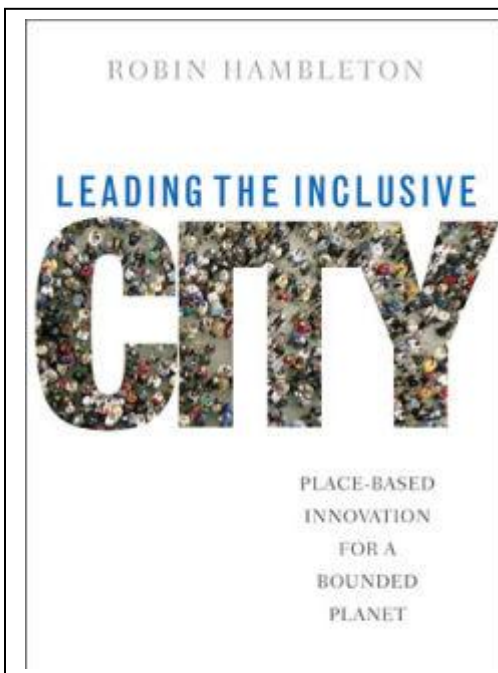
Charles Leadbeater *The Frugal Innovator: Creating change on a shoe-string budget* 2014

8. LEADING THE INCLUSIVE CITY Place-based innovation for a bounded planet

- My review of a book by **Robin Hambleton**

My main contribution to the work of the Centre for Welfare Reform is the *Sustainability and Social Justice Project* which I lead with Jo Kidd and John O'Brien. Our aim in this project is to encourage, share and learn from examples around the world of how people are finding ways of living in harmony with our planet (i.e. sustainably) and with each other (i.e. so as to achieve social justice). My most recent pamphlet, inspired in part by current work in Colombia, addresses these questions at the level of the municipality. Both the English version, *Building A Better Future Through Civic Partnership* and its Spanish equivalent, with the more snappy title *Ciudades Para Todos* (Cities For All), are available in the Centre's online Library.

The pamphlet has 16 pages. This latest blockbuster of a book from Robin Hambleton - running to 400 pages of inspiring examples and scholarly reflection - provides a comprehensive and excellent textbook for this endeavour at the level of the city.



I say 'textbook' but Hambleton is at pains to emphasise, first, that although this is an academic text (there are 30 pages of references to leading work in this field or rather, many relevant fields), it is also an example of *engaged scholarship*: Robin has been working and learning with city leaders around the world since we first met as colleagues at the University of Bristol's School for Advanced Urban Studies nearly 40 years ago. Second, this is not a book supplying 'answers', still less 'best practices': rather the ideas and examples are offered as a resource to civic leaders in their search for innovative ways of meeting contemporary challenges in their own cities.

By civic leaders here he certainly means elected politicians, but also those playing managerial and professional roles, community activists and people in local business and trade union organisations, with an interest in urban development at different levels from the grass roots upwards.

His aim then is to stimulate practical efforts to improve the quality of life in cities in the face of global trends towards rapid urbanisation, greater inequality, increasing diversity and environmental degradation.

But this is not a pessimistic analysis. On the contrary the book offers a grounded vision of a better future and an optimistic account of the role of civic leadership in achieving positive change. One highlight of the book is the inclusion of 17 of what Hambleton calls 'Innovation Stories', case studies of illuminating developments in a wide variety of cities around the world, including Ahmedabad in India, Chicago in the USA, Freiburg in Germany, Hamamatsu in Japan and Melbourne in Australia.

Hambleton's main themes are all captured in the extended title for this book. He sees place-based and therefore democratic leadership as an essential counter-weight to the place-less power of corporate and unaccountable elites in a globalised world, pursuing short-term profit with little regard to its human and environmental consequences. (He stresses Michael Sandel's argument that markets need to serve society and not the other way round.)

He suggests that progressive civic leadership should be concerned with building sustainable and inclusive cities, not one or the other. By *sustainable* here he means living within environmental limits and valuing our relationship with the rest of nature. ('Nature needs a distinct seat at the urban governance tables if cities are to be ecologically resilient.') By *inclusive*, he means enabling everyone to participate fully in the life of the city in a spirit of equal political, economic and social citizenship. (A whole chapter is devoted to ways of making increasing diversity - arising for example from urban migration - an advantage. Here the most impressive story is from Toronto, a rapidly growing city where more than half the population have been born elsewhere.)

Hambleton is currently the Professor of City Leadership at the University of the West of England. The nature of this progressive leadership is key to his argument and this receives extended discussion. He identifies what he calls the *New Civic Leadership* as involving 'strong place-based leadership acting to co-create new solutions to public problems by drawing on the complementary strengths of civil society, the market and the state'. Typically this means creating new spaces for people with different interests and perspectives to come together to develop a compelling vision of a sustainable and inclusive future and engage in a process of social discovery which tests better ways of doing things towards this goal.

More concretely this involves efforts to both strengthen democratic urban governance and promote public service innovation. The Innovation Stories offer more detail. In relation to the former, for example, the carefully considered reform of institutional structures in Auckland, New Zealand, created a unitary structure for governance capable of both developing and delivering a long term plan for the

city. Nearer home, in Bristol, public support for an elected mayor has given the first incumbent in this role the opportunity to offer visible leadership for the city, not just the council. And in Sweden, a wide coalition of civic leaders in Malmo are transforming a declining industrial town into a modern 'eco-city', partly through strong decentralisation of services to the neighbourhood level and a focus on environmental sustainability.

In relation to the latter, service innovation, Guangzhou in China is one of a growing number of the world's megacities which has invested in a Bus Rapid Transit system coupled with extensive bike use to provide cheap and sustainable public transport. Langrug, an informal settlement near Stellenbosch in South Africa, has employed a community development approach to both empowering local people and improving living conditions. And Copenhagen in Denmark is just one well-known European city which has changed the culture of city life, making it more 'people friendly', by recovering public space from motor vehicles to make it available to pedestrians, cyclists and street activities, while also 'greening' the environment.

Clearly a short review of a book on this scale cannot do justice to the richness of experience and analysis it contains. There are many more lessons and inspirations here for civic leaders everywhere prepared to combine considered judgment with bold action to make a positive difference in our towns and cities and thus advance a better life for all.

Robin Hambleton *Leading the Inclusive City: Place-based innovation for a bounded planet* 2015

9.

DELIVERING THE PROMISE OF AN ORDINARY LIFE

In 2013, the development agency *Paradigm* began a national initiative to reconnect hearts, minds and hands so as to ensure disabled people get the support they need to live their lives as they wish. In launching this initiative, Sally Warren asks 'If we accept that the foundation of our work in providing good support is (as John O'Brien puts this) to *see me as I am, as I am becoming and what I potentially can be*, we have to ask how something so simple has become so complicated and then what we can do to make it simple again?'

Paradigm has borrowed a title from an earlier era to define this initiative *An Ordinary Life For All* which seeks to reflect this simplicity. I recall here a little of the history of the *An Ordinary Life* movement and seek to renew its message for new times.

The 1980s: Closing institutions

Thatcher came to power in 1979 and quickly embarked on economic policies which put millions out of work and destroyed many traditional communities. But paradoxically this was the occasion for progressive reform in learning disability services, not a reason to avoid it. The series of scandals in institutional care over the previous two decades had drawn public attention to the human rights abuses in state i.e. mostly NHS, care and generated momentum for policy change – initially focused unfortunately on capital investment in 'community units' and other buildings which were certainly units but had little to do with community.

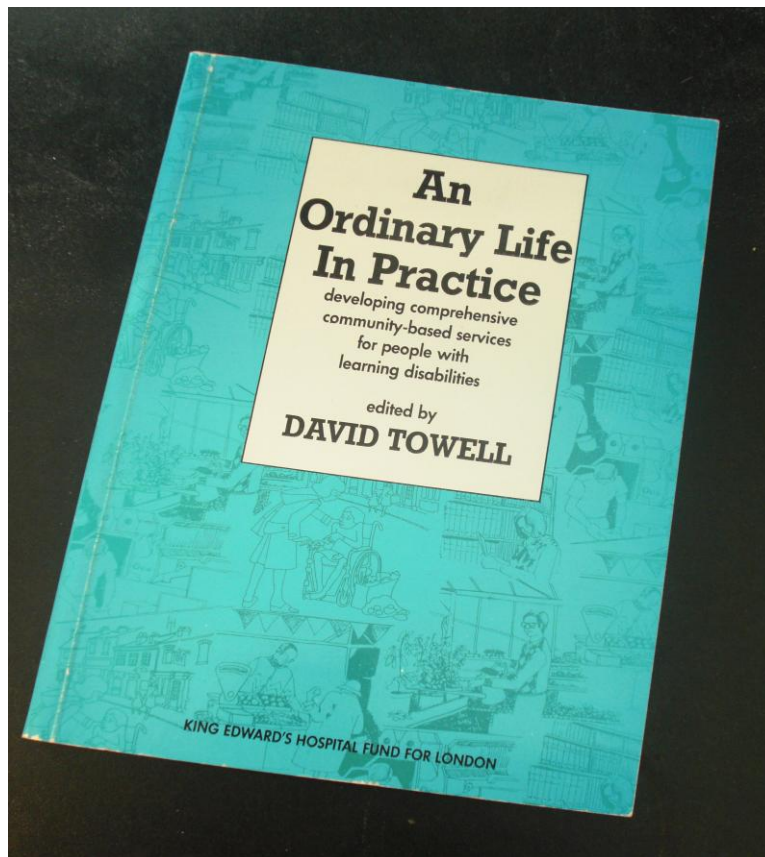
Faced with this opportunity for change and using the status of the King's Fund, I and my colleagues were able to bring together allies to advance an alternative philosophy. We defined the goal of good support as that of enabling people with learning disabilities to live *An Ordinary Life* in all its richness and diversity. As the first paper in the King's Fund series which informed the next twenty years of reform put this:

We want to see people with learning disabilities 'in the mainstream of life, living in ordinary houses and ordinary streets, with the same range of choices as any citizen, and mixing as equals with the other membersof their own community'

(*An Ordinary Life*, 1980)

The *An Ordinary Life* initiative was nationally important not just in setting out a clear philosophy and producing an extensive guide to practical action, but also in providing inspiration for a wide network of local leaders and a common currency for their efforts to do better with and for people with learning disabilities and their families - always recognising that families were and remain the main source of support to their disabled children well into adulthood if not for life. Indeed within a

few years there had been sufficient local progress for the 1988 publication *An Ordinary Life In Practice*. Paradigm launched this new initiative to coincide with this book's 25th anniversary!



21st Century renewal

Of course, there have been newer formulations of this goal since the 1980s. The *An Ordinary Life* philosophy informed the 2001 *Valuing People* White Paper and its core principles of 'Rights, Independence, Choice and Inclusion'. Simon Duffy has reworked these ideas in his influential book *Keys to Citizenship* (2003). And practice has moved on as we have recognised the limitations of the small group homes which dominated community living arrangements in the 1980s to favour supported living and helping people gain more control through self-directed support and individual budgets.

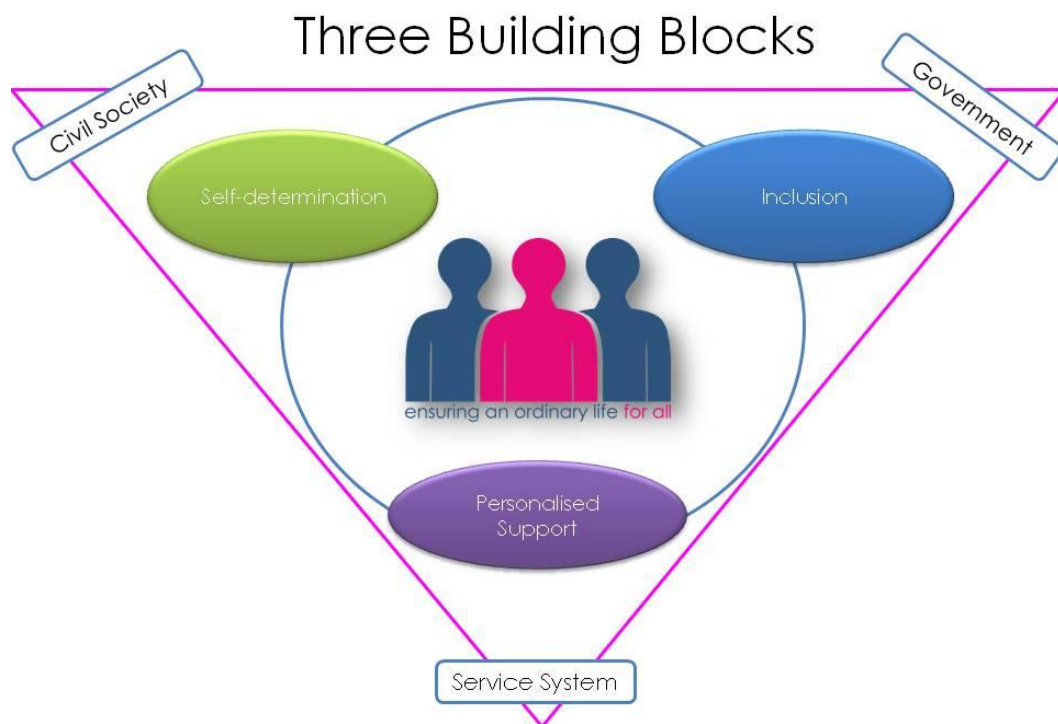
Most importantly, these values have recently been restated comprehensively in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (ratified by the U.K. in 2009), especially Article 19 *Living Independently and Being Included in the Community*.

'UN speak' is complex but this Article makes the unequivocal commitment that,

‘State Parties...recognize the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and shall take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community’

This Convention is much more than a statement of rights: it is also a broad route map for their implementation. Looking across different aspects of life in the community it suggests three main building blocks for advancing equal citizenship which I summarise as:

- ✓ *Self-determination*: ‘I can say what matters to me and how I want to live’.
- ✓ *Personalised support*: ‘I get the assistance I need to live as I want’.
- ✓ *Inclusion*: ‘I’m included in my community and benefit from its services’.



Contemporary challenges

Advancing the Convention’s radical agenda faces three great challenges. The first of these is not new at all. Despite better support to families, this frequently remains inadequate for them to live ordinary lives like other families. Second, for many people with learning disabilities, presence in the community has not equated to full participation, for example in education, employment and leisure

opportunities – and many still report lifetimes of loneliness and discrimination. Third, these weaknesses are now being magnified as the government's response to the global financial crisis leads to cuts in public expenditure on both services and welfare benefits. Moreover, this chilly climate may also be weakening the capacity of local communities as sources of mutual support, including for their disadvantaged members.

If the earlier *An Ordinary Life* initiative ended the reliance on traditional institutions, the challenge for a new generation is to ensure that good support delivers on the UNCRPD goals of autonomy and genuine community inclusion for people with learning disabilities in the face of these challenges.

No-one says that this is going to be easy but in the classic words of Robert Frost, we have promises to keep.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

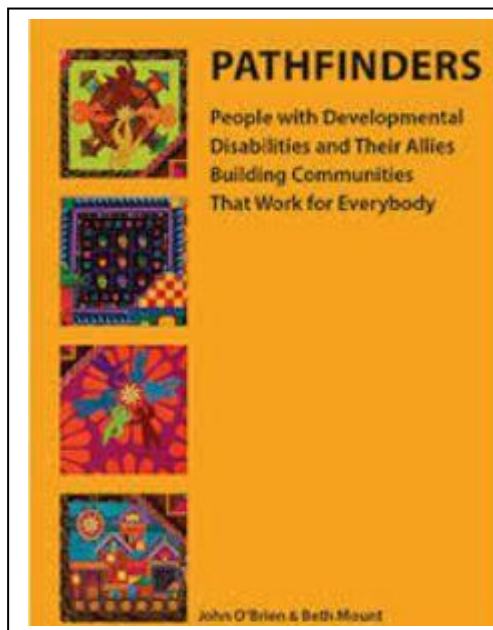
10.

PATHFINDERS

People with developmental disabilities and their allies building communities that work better for everyone

- My review of a book by **John O'Brien and Beth Mount**

*The Centre for Inclusive Futures defines its mission as 'developing sustainable communities that include everyone as equal citizens'. My friend Jackie and I have been long term allies in this work. Partly perhaps because of her own experience of segregation earlier in life, Jackie shows remarkable empathy for the experience of others. We speak from time-to-time about how people we know, especially people with learning disabilities (the nearest UK translation of 'developmental disabilities') are getting on. We share the view that many here in the U.K. are swimming against a rising tide of disadvantage associated with growing inequality, cuts to public services, and the 'us and them' devaluation of minorities. What should we do? Jackie's answer is that we must stand alongside people at risk of disadvantage and keep at the work of building community together, only do it better! **Pathfinders**, sub-titled 'People with Developmental Disabilities and Their Allies Building Communities That Work Better for Everybody' is an outstandingly useful resource for these continuing efforts.*



John is based in Atlanta, Georgia. I first invited him to come and help us here more than 35 years ago as we were developing the *An Ordinary Life* network: a national movement to bring people with learning disabilities (including my sister) out from institutions so that increasingly they would show up (to use John & Beth's words) in valued contributory roles in community places, where other citizens are typically to be found. Beth (now in New York) came a few years later to help us understand better how person-centred planning could be a genuinely radical approach to changing systems so that more people can live the lives they want.

Their collaboration with each other and support to networks in other countries (most recently in Europe, the multi-national *New Paths to Inclusion* programme) has continued both thoughtfully and energetically through these decades, John coming here once or twice every year since we first met and Beth mainly working

close to the ground to facilitate further social innovation, for example the Harlem *Urban Innovators* described in the book.

Like all of us, John and Beth bring their own values to this work but they function essentially as *facilitators*. They help to bring different people - disabled people, family members, other allies, paid supporters, system managers, etc. - together in ways which promote serious conversation. They enable participants to listen carefully to each other and think deeply about the situations they uncover. They try to promote better understanding of these situations and encourage people to invent new ways of doing things and take responsibility for actions, small and large, which make a positive difference. One aspect of this facilitation is reflecting back on what is emerging and capturing some of the learning in graphics or writing, for participants to use further. (For example, John has produced a series of books on how leaders in Dane County, Wisconsin, have worked to enable people with complex disabilities to be welcomed as full citizens, my favourite being *Celebrating the Ordinary* Inclusion Press, 1998).

In turn these reflections provide a means of sharing some of the ideas and inspirations more widely. In this new book, John and Beth have lovingly brought together much of the learning from these many years of practice into a single text, expressed in the form of useful thinking tools, many illuminating individual stories and a series of helpful summaries on ways of addressing key challenges. However, the book does not seek to offer 'solutions', beyond reporting what some impressive people and their allies have achieved in different situations. Rather, this is a book designed to inspire us all to continue our own journeys with others towards what (borrowing from Martin Luther King) they call 'creation of the beloved community'.

Let's start from the stories. *When Harry Met Sally* is a classic Hollywood version of the joys and struggles of building relationships. Famously it includes a restaurant scene with the punch-line 'I'll have what she's having!'. Unfortunately society has organised in ways which put multiple barriers in the way of many people, especially with more complex disabilities, getting anywhere close to what many others of us are having. But the stories of 'When Gail Met Ken', 'When Marcie Met André', 'When Audrey Met Ian' etc. provide powerful accounts of what pathfinders (the people with disabilities) like Ken, André and Ian can achieve in their lives (and in ours) when: 1) they set out to find something better; 2) they are able to become part of lasting relationships with allies; 3) together pathfinders and allies secure the space to co-create new possibilities; and 4) they are always asking 'what more is possible?'.

John and Beth identify six elements in a simple and powerful logic which underpins these journeys of personal discovery (and around which the book is organised):

- We can express our common purpose as citizens as being to play our part in building communities that work better for everyone. The *United Nations*

- Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities* offers an authoritative and comprehensive set of standards for what this means in the lives of disabled people if they are to achieve equal citizenship.
- These communities will be places where citizens offer one another opportunities to create and share 'real wealth', not just money but the good relationships, valued networks, development opportunities, etc. which contribute towards a full life.
 - For people with learning disabilities, social inclusion is typically the result of courageous *pathfinding* through a life-long journey.
 - This journey is more likely to be successful when pathfinders recruit personally committed allies (typically, but not only, starting with family) and skilful partners, including personal assistants and public sector managers, able to mobilise different kinds of support.
 - Good allies and partners in the journey to full inclusion learn how to assist people to have valued experiences (respect, self-direction, belonging and contributing) which other citizens enjoy.
 - This calls for fresh thinking and a process of social invention grounded in each person and their relationships.

Simple logic but in practice a deeply creative process in which pathfinders and their allies are fully engaged in a joint endeavour to realise their highest purposes. Beth is a talented artist in the American tradition of quilt-making. The image from the back cover of the book, *Garden of Soul* - reproduced on the front cover of this collection - aspires to represent the spirit of this creativity in a different medium.

However *Pathfinders* is not an easy read for the very best of reasons: many parts of the text, whether individual stories, particular graphics or detailed arguments, require intense reflection and the interrogation of how they relate to our own experiences, if we are to draw insights for better practice.

Let me illustrate this with three important examples.

The sense that we are expressing our own will in what we do and how we live is at the core of being human. Article 12 of the UN Convention provides a legal framework for self-determination in its prescription that disabled people enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others and should have access to the support they require to exercise this right. This proposition is a radical challenge to much current practice in relation to people with learning disabilities, especially those who do not communicate in typical ways. John and Beth offer a thoughtful commentary on what it means to be an ally in facilitating their self-determination.

For many people with learning disabilities, the key partners in this journey to self-determination and inclusion are direct support staff (sometimes described as

'personal assistants'). Despite the growth in individualised funding, most such staff are still employed by large, service providing organisations. John and Beth offer a detailed analysis of the direct support practices which best enable pathfinders to create their personal journeys to a fuller life and how these practices can be cultivated organisationally.

These journeys require pathfinders and their allies to engage in social invention: together they are seeking to build communities which work better for everyone as we see, for example, in the European *New Paths* programme and in the ongoing work of the Harlem *Urban Innovators*. Both these initiatives have been informed by an approach to social change embodied in Otto Scharmer's *Theory U*. In perhaps the most original contribution of the book, John and Beth offer a detailed exploration of how *Theory U* can guide a process of individual and group reflection which enables us to look with fresh eyes at the challenges we face and take creative action towards a better future.

Pathfinders is a book full of practical wisdom. It is a call to all of us to do whatever we can to greatly multiply the number of pathfinders making their own self-directed journeys to inclusion. Returning to Jackie's observations, I would add that we must also look to make common cause with others, for example who appreciate our need to live in better harmony with nature, in order to push back the rising tide of disadvantage so that these journeys can be pursued along a more gentle gradient.

John O'Brien and Beth Mount *Pathfinders* 2015



Developing sustainable communities which include everyone as equal citizens

The Centre for Inclusive Futures seeks to support networks of active leaders tackling disadvantage and discrimination through promoting equal citizenship, strengthening democracy and building more inclusive communities. It aims to integrate this agenda with the radical changes we must all make to live in better harmony with our planet and each other – *buen vivir* - so as to advance everyone's well-being.

The Centre works with individual leaders, organizations, public agencies and social movements (mainly in the UK and Colombia) to:

- offer an inclusive space for reflection on contemporary challenges, and
- support action designed to make a positive difference.

This work draws particularly on the values-based approach to enabling disabled people to achieve better lives demonstrated in the King's Fund *An Ordinary Life* initiative and now best expressed in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Methodologically it builds on the tradition of applying the social sciences to important practical challenges, especially how to achieve deep change in complex systems, pioneered by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. It is also informed by the thinking about both sustainable development and everyday justice advanced in the UK by the new economics foundation.

Recent writing about this work is available at:

<http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/authors/david-towell/>

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