

THE INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION Robin Harrison

This concept could only arise from a region and community similar to ours with its enormous range of research and development into sustainable practices

THE SURVIVAL OF OUR SPECIES

Our global life-support systems are collapsing. The damage we are doing to our planet is growing exponentially, potentially changing our environment to one where more complex organisms like human beings may no longer be able to survive. This could well mean the extinction of our species.

If we are to reverse this process we must develop strategies that have the capability of growing, globally, faster than the damage.

Our survival is unlikely without a healthy environment, a healthy society and a healthy economy.

A society in harmony with the planet and each other has the potential to be prosperous beyond the dreams of our present economy.

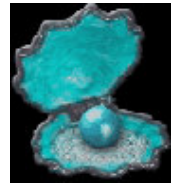
As a social species trade has always been one of our most civilising forces. As such, our global economy is vital. However, our current, exploitive and oil based, global economy is not sustainable.

Can we use the resources of the global economy to effect the changes we need and, by that use, change the nature of the global economy?

The growth of suburbia over the last 60 years is the most visible sign of the growth of the damage to our environment and the driven consumer society.

This way of living has been made possible by an abundance of oil and is dependant on a constantly increasing supply.

Much of today's consumption patterns appear to be created and driven by deep dissatisfaction in many areas of the suburban life style, a phenomenon exploited widely by the advertising industry. This is not to suggest that consumption per se is undesirable but what can be envisaged is the non-driven consumption, by prosperous, empowered people, of goods produced in environmentally beneficial ways with renewable resources.



In the development marketplace, the only choice of lifestyle is suburbia; dormitory suburbs, hungry for non-renewable resources, where the inhabitants are obliged to commute for practically everything. Most supplies are trucked in and most profits and wastes are trucked out using even more non-renewable resources. Suburbia and the massive road systems needed to service it replace agricultural production on some of our most fertile land.

The majority of the third world aspires to a suburban lifestyle. It is the most prosperous lifestyle currently available.

An alternative to suburbia, which is more attractive, prosperous, culturally flexible and affordable, would probably perform well in the global marketplace. If it were also an earth, society and economic repair kit, the more rapid the growth the better.

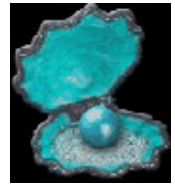
Can we envisage a global economy where the bottom line, for every member of our species, is prosperity?

The experiments and developments in sustainability over the last 30 years in this region, and very few others around the world, have been prodigious. Largely for economic reasons this has, for the most part, been done by educated, middle class people. One consequence of that is the later, rapid, rise of university departments devoted to the subject, centres for alternative technology, sustainability research institutes, permaculture institutes, Seed Savers etc. It has all been recorded.

We have a vast fund of information and practical knowledge; enough to know what would be needed to establish intentional communities with the optimal chance of resulting in a prosperous society, in harmony with each other, the planet and, of course, the surrounding society. Communities where creativity and innovation, potentially our species greatest resource, are encouraged and nurtured.

We know that one-off intentional community developments experience great difficulty accessing income in their early years and, indeed, are usually obliged to access income and resources from outside, reducing focus on the community.

If the initial set-up costs could be deferred and the inhabitants could access an income setting up the community for the first couple of years then, in an environment of prosperity, the community would be able to develop high levels of consensual living and work skills. With an internal economy comes the ability to value anything we like, such as **mutually empowering conflict management skills.**



The corporate model could enable such a cost deferral with great potential as an investment vehicle.

There are large amounts in the money market desperately looking for secure long-term investment with good sustainable growth.

The Corporate Model

One of the major inefficiencies of corporations is their pyramidal power structure. Indeed, the more efficient corporations are becoming so by flattening the pyramids, broadening the management base. The corporate model envisaged, by new settlers entering as shareholders, would have an inbuilt pressure to flatten the pyramid.

Such a flat management system could be the ideal model for a harmonious society.

If it is, there are significant advantages. The corporate structure is perfect for interfacing with the resources of the global economy and is more powerful than national governments, just look at the corporate controlled U.S. Administration.

The most powerful model operating at its greatest potential; that could be a major resource. Since the growth would be incremental and by personal choice, it would be achieved non-confrontationally, the only way to achieve harmony.

Of course a corporation must have a product; so what would that be, beyond supplying the growing market for clean foods, clean energy and renewable resources?

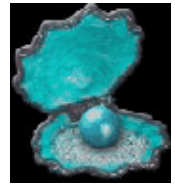
The investment is in communities of people living in harmony with each other and our planet; an environment which values and nurtures creativity and innovation.

The people, the creativity and innovation and the probable resultant enterprise, are the product.

This is an investment in sustainability, which must be the economy of the future; if we are to have a future.

It would also enable the redefining of the many industries that need it, with great benefit to ourselves.

Consider, as just one example, our manufacturing sector and the seemingly unbreakable nexus with non-renewable resources. Our vehicles and white goods, for instance, are built out of steel because they are part of the steel fabrication industry, not because it's the smartest material to use.



Plastics can be sourced from vegetation rather than petrochemicals. We can benefit by breaking the current nexus.

An alternative vehicle building industry could have complete choice of materials and motive power. Alternative energy is already approaching cost effectiveness with grid power. The greater efficiencies due to larger scale, diverse, manufacturing and attendant R and D are likely to make it far more cost effective.

The list goes on and we already have a prodigious development base, in all areas, to work from.

Within 30 years, the non-renewable resources our civilisation depends on will probably be seriously depleted. We could well be providing our species resources.

Mobile Factories

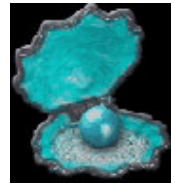
Buckminster Fuller first raised the possibility of creating factories that could be in one place for 5-10 years then move to a new location. This would enable each village to have a manufacturing capability for as long as it was needed. The factory would have available an educated workforce highly skilled in consensual work practices and conflict management and a highly motivated one since, as shareholders of the corporation, they would own the means of production.

Since, initially, the corporation would be manufacturing for its own shareholders, widespread use by them could well create demand in the wider community if the products are as good as we expect them to be. Advertising, a major cost to most corporations, would be a minimal requirement in this model since, rather than being a separate entity, it would be an integral part of the production/consumption chain.

Environmentally beneficial manufacturing from renewable resources; Permanufacturing perhaps?

Ideally, the village and villagers would be largely debt free in 10-15 years and moving towards a more integrated service/agrarian economy. Given the rapid growth rate we would like, a readily available career path for settlers would be in the development of further communities.

A community of communities of debt-free, empowered, prosperous people, where creativity and innovation are valued and nurtured. The level of enterprise could be remarkable and I think one could trust the decisions they would be likely to make.



Because of the various levels of empowerment and disempowerment inherent to them, present and previous social orders have been imposed orders. This concept has the potential to discover the natural social order amongst empowered people.

Potential political effects

Without doubt, our form of democracy is the best system of government devised to date. However, there are systemic problems. Democracy means government by the people and, currently, we have government by half the people.

The largely two party system dictates an adversarial decision making process. In an environment where 'attack the enemy' is the order of the day, creativity and innovation are a fragile commodity and engagement with emerging ideas is difficult, to say the least.

Presently there are really only two philosophies available. The right, where the individual is considered to be more important than society and the left, where society is considered to be more important than the individual.

This concept views us as a social species of individuals. Both are equally important.

This concept could help towards reform of that system.

Potential growth rates would ensure increasing political representation. That representation would be part of a well-resourced team, all with finely honed conflict management skills. The introduction of mutually empowering conflict management strategies to our legislatures could significantly improve the quality of decision-making.

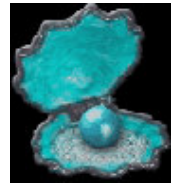
Fire, Flood and Drought

Given the frequency of these conditions in Australia they are part of the landscape. Disasters are the result of how we are living in that landscape. We can go a long way towards fire, flood and drought proofing our habitat with Permaculture.

Global overpopulation

The pattern we see is population explosion in third world countries for various reasons; contribution to family income, care in old age etc. Wealthy first world countries are experiencing minus population growth. There is the potential for universal prosperity to solve our population problems and find balance.

As mentioned earlier, the intentional community experimentation of



the last decades is being widely researched. One of those researchers is - Dr. Malcolm Hollick, Dept of Environmental Engineering, University of W.A. It's with gratitude that we are using his;

'CHECKLIST OF MAJOR RESEARCH ISSUES REGARDING ECOVILLAGES'

The checklist is the bold headings. The commentaries are ours using these design parameters for harmony and freedom.

- **Prosperity**
- **Autonomy**
- **Personal responsibility**

LEGAL STRUCTURES:

Security of tenure for all (land rights) is probably the most important element to consider. It would be unfortunate if one person could be evicted from the community, even by a large majority decision. If one person can be evicted then no one person is secure.

If eviction were not possible, then the community would be wholly committed to enabling and empowering strategies.

A community of empowered people would be well equipped to deal with individual problems.

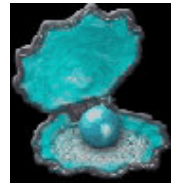
Any legal structure must recognise the sovereignty of the individual. A community is comprised of individuals whose value to the community, and the common aim, is enhanced by their diversity. We are a social species of individuals.

As individuals we benefit from being a social species, as a social species we benefit from the diversity of our individuality. Therefore society and the individual are both paramount.

Having the internal economy fund the raising of mutually empowering conflict management skills would remove the need for lawyers internally. However, a powerful corporate legal department would provide protection for all shareholders externally; individually and collectively. Available communications technology would enable that asset to be spread and developed throughout the network.

LAND OWNERSHIP:

As members of the species list of this planet, how can we "own" bits of it? We can own our infrastructure; we can enjoy the privacy of that land which we are prepared to personally care for, beyond that we are caretakers and stewards. Everyone being shareholders of the body that owns the land can achieve this. We need not be restricted to



currently available systems of multiple occupancy. The crucial element is security of tenure (land rights).

House and other personal infrastructure sale arrangements; If the network of villages is successful houses will be both valuable and affordable.

FINANCIAL STRUCTURE:

The corporate model could provide a fully funded internal "LETS" (Local exchange and Trading System), conveniently exchangeable for dollars, enabling the rapid implementation of the overall system (Permaculture, etc) and its infrastructure.

This could be achieved with no unemployment, no poverty, no welfare and, importantly, addresses a large problem identified in Bill Metcalf's work; - the lack of focus on the community caused by having to commute to make an income and travel to access resources. ("From Utopian Dreaming To Communal Reality: Co-operative Lifestyles In Australia" University of Sydney Press.)

An internal "LETS" is able to reward work, and indeed any activity beneficial to the community such as learning, health and services etc. Such a system would encourage enterprise, initiative and responsibility. It would be another effective tool of empowerment to all.

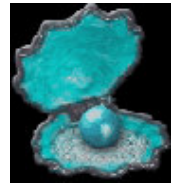
The consensual skills and work practices developed during the implementation phase would, most probably, develop into other areas of enterprise.

Rapid implementation of the overall system would facilitate earlier harvesting, processing and marketing of yields. Low cost, energy efficient building and land design skills could be in great demand in the surrounding areas as they could be highly desirable.

Since the economy, in large part, shapes society, so can our own. The community decides what activities are valuable to it and rewards them appropriately.

The community would have a range of tasks that would need doing. Those tasks could be offered at a base rate and some of them would be claimed. The rest could be offered at a higher rate and more would be claimed. Continuing this process until all are claimed would result in the most unattractive tasks bringing the highest reward rather than being performed by the least empowered.

In this system, "LETS" points only come into existence in return for



work done for the community, and are then able to be traded. Hence, the overall infrastructure is, for the most part, owned by the community. Other identified problems, such as people's diminishing enthusiasm for working bees etc, are addressed.

DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE:

Since the ultimate aim would be to achieve complete consensus, it's probably worth defining consensus and seeing what we can do to make it work.

Is consensus "Everybody Agrees"? Or is it "Everybody has the Information and Nobody Disagrees"?

If it is the former, then everybody is obliged to have an opinion and, all too often, that forced opinion is "NO!" a phenomenon known as 'action blocking'. Consensus decision-making in meetings tends towards the first model and has proved so unwieldy that it has often, with the greatest will in the world, been abandoned.

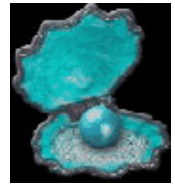
Another option would be to abandon the decision-making meetings. Meetings need not be decision-making forums. As we move into the 21st century we have much more efficient decision making tools.

A dedicated computer network can run the "LETS" transparently, be able to interface with an external banking or credit union for its dollar exchangeability and would probably allow for 'everybody has the information and nobody objects' consensual decision making a lot better than meetings.

For example, you may wish to instigate a project (fence, bridge, plantation, marketing system, research project, etc). Your first move could be to put that project out on the network for input from the community and/or communities. That includes any objections, which would be seen as positive input. This provides a wider range of design elements, which should result in better system design. Eventually, after dealing with the objections, with conflict management systems in place to assist that process, calling for a work force.

No votes are needed, no conflicts arise that can't be mediated and managed. Villagers can, at their own terminals, deal quickly and efficiently with all the village and network business that interests and concerns them, leaving them with the right to not concern themselves with things they couldn't care less about.

We already understand that the transparency of any "LETS" system is vital to its self-regulation. If transparency leads to self-regulating systems, then transparency of all village and network business should lead to self-regulating decision making systems.



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:

Can conflict be an asset rather than a liability?

Mutually empowering conflict management strategies, already developed, codified and teachable, have the potential to achieve that. With an internal economy to highly value those skills, their use could quickly become second nature as the advantages of managing conflict in this manner become apparent.

Whatever it takes to raise these skills would bear rapid returns. When everyone' is looking for a way for everyone to win decision-making is much easier.

Dissent is always useful, indeed vital, to our understanding. It becomes a problem with "Action Blocking". Perhaps the concept; - "Everybody has the information and nobody disagrees" addresses this problem.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

Size. There is an optimum village size (the less people you have, the less diversity at the village's disposal. However, too many people and you can't know everyone and cohesion is lost). Apparently the upper range is 2-3,000.

There is one set of circumstances where human beings and human nature are at their best and finest; **when we know most of the people we deal with most of the time.**

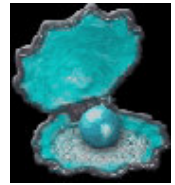
(Mat Ridley, 'The Origins Of Virtue' Human Nature and the Evolution of Cooperation. Viking Press)

That social environment tends to be behaviourally self-regulating.

What Binds the Community?

The greatest success, so far, has been in communities with a common belief system. However, for the number of people envisaged (potentially everyone), a common religion, spirituality, morality or worldview is difficult if not impossible. Since we need diversity it is probably also not advisable, beyond the wider aim of the well being of the villagers, the village, the environment and society at large.

The ability to engage in any spiritual, religious or moral practises one desires, provided of course that they don't interfere with the freedom of others, should be taken as read but, apart from recognising that right, belief systems are not useful as design vectors for a general



model since they could well be, and usually are, different for everyone.

The intention is for a general model with the flexibility to embrace all cultural differences.

Personal development, conflict management, enabling etc, strategies have been developed in non-sectarian ways already. Health issues (healthy villagers are an asset to the village), aged care (elders are an asset to the village), education etc (ditto), can all be dealt with by the internal economy.

In a village of this size one can envision every level of sharing and housing density. It follows that acceptance of a wide variety of housing, lands management, education, in fact almost everything, is crucial and probably inevitable. So long as the underlying perception of healthy people, society and the environment as assets, is well entrenched and is constantly re-enforced by the resulting abundance, then diversity and flexibility are supremely valuable.

Growth would be both incremental and by personal choice, therefore non-confrontational, the only path to harmony.

Any alternative would require bureaucracy and enforcement levels of organisation that are, with the greatest will in the world, inefficient and highly corruptible.

LINKS WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY:

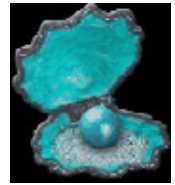
We are all part of the same species, the same society. Our health and well being depend on the health and well being of our social, physical and economic environments.

The model envisaged would desire a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with the wider community. We are not separate! However, issues such as roads, power, water supply, sewerage, education, health care, etc, are probably all best dealt with on the community level.

OUTREACH EDUCATION:

Outreach education as a fundraiser in the initial stages of building a single community has been incredibly productive. It has served to codify much of what's been developed so far.

The internal economy could fund a comprehensive and flexible education system. Since both teaching and learning are valuable to society, those with something to teach could, if there are those wanting to learn, receive a teacher's income; those wishing to learn



could, if there are those to teach, receive a student's income. The dividing lines between education, employment and recreation may well prove to be artificial in this more integrated environment. Indeed the whole of society and life could be a university.

BROAD BRUSH ECONOMICS:

Presently the only economic models available are Laissez Faire and Socialist, both of which see consideration of social and environmental concerns as costs.

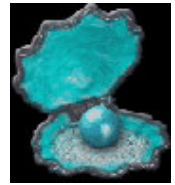
This model considers them as assets. With a bottom line of prosperity for all there is no need for an upper limit to prosperity. Incentives for personal endeavour are important.

The initial working capital needed would be significant, but would be mitigated by various factors; -

- Natural systems are orders of magnitude more efficient and economical than conventional systems.
- Major expenses to villagers, initially housing and food but with more variety later, are obtainable with "LETS", so not all of villagers' incomes are converted to dollars. Villagers and subsequent villages would have, incrementally, less need for dollars.
- The lower cost of living in such an environment, lower food and housing costs, reduced commuting, etc, would enable a greater investment in the community by way of fees/shareholding and housing costs being paid off sooner.
- The questions of how to design the land and an integrated polyculture, how to create the infrastructure, how to run the economy, how to manage conflict and deal consensually are already being addressed. Specialists have developed, and are continuing to develop, in all those fields.
- An economy of free exchange of energy, impossible within our present economy, may well be achievable from this platform.

We envisage a scenario where the land design and earthworks are done first, (with efficient, durable, low-cost and aesthetically pleasing building strategies such as poured earth construction, the raw materials can be provided to each building site at this stage).

With building sites identified and prepared, the beginnings of the village centre can be put in place, comprising, for instance, a restaurant/cafe/entertainment space, commercial kitchen with a future in food processing, store, centralised amenities, {toilets, showers, laundry, etc}, wood/metal workshops, a nursery and several chalets.



The first settlers can be housed and fed and, as homes are built, more settlers can move in.

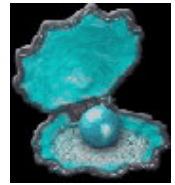
When the village reaches optimum size the chalets can be used for emergency housing, conferences, tourism, etc.

- Income could be forthcoming from the restaurant/entertainment space being open to the public.
- The wood/metal workshops, whilst primarily designed to provide infrastructure components and other essentials for the village, could also be open to the public.
- The energy efficient and economical building and land design techniques developed will be a valuable asset and certainly marketable to the surrounding community.
- Due to the rapid implementation of the overall system, harvest, processing, and marketing of yields would happen earlier.
- As mentioned earlier, the consensual skills and work practises developed during the implementation phase would, most probably, develop into other areas of enterprise.
- A successful village would have substantial outreach education potential, and the knowledge and skills to enable a career path for interested settlers in future village development, which will certainly be needed to achieve the rapid growth required.
- The resources available to subsequent communities would be progressively greater.
- If the project is prosperous and profitable in present economic terms, and the lifestyle proves attractive to people, then rapid expansion could be expected.
- An economic expansion, which results in environmental, social and economic repair.

POTENTIAL VILLAGERS:

Early research showed the likelihood of populating several communities, in Australia alone, quite quickly and, largely, by people who are already familiar with the concepts involved.

The growing number of communities of debt-free, empowered, prosperous people would be very attractive in the marketplace. Who else would want to live in a place where housing and incomes are available? Probably a fair amount of people to whom housing and incomes are not available. There is a lot of damage, caused by our species, on this planet. There are a lot of people without housing and incomes. That's an equation that could result in high- speed earth, social and economic repair.



ALTRUISM AND SELF INTEREST

One frequently mentioned problem from the intentional community experiments is the obstruction often caused by individualistic selfinterest. It may be that the problem lies in expecting people not to be self-interested individuals.

Our cultural philosophical base, indeed the philosophical base of the patriarchy, is dualism and that is evident in the dualist nature of most, if not all, of our institutions. (Edward deBono, I Am Right, You Are Wrong)

This has the effect, amongst others, of creating absolute values that are absolute opposites; right/wrong, friend/enemy, altruism/selfinterest. If we don't use a dualist perception maybe they don't have to be opposites.

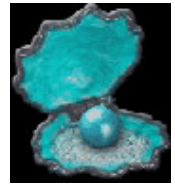
Mat Ridley's work shows that we, as individuals, benefit from being a social species and that, as a social species, we benefit from the greatly increased diversity of resources of being individuals.

We are a social species of individuals, a remarkable development. Maybe this is the oneness of the all that we are seeking. My health and well being is paramount. My health and well being is totally dependant on the health and well being of everything and everybody around me, which must also be paramount. I can be totally self-interested and totally altruistic at one and the same time given the right social environment.

It is entirely possible that our problems lie, not with human nature, but with our social and economic environments. For instance, politically we are presented with essentially two choices; the Right, with the belief that the individual is more important than society and the Left, with the belief that society is more important than the individual. It could be that socialism is simply a reaction to feudal capitalism and, as such, something of a mirror image.

Maybe this approach is more of a response.

There is an additional benefit to this proposal. The social, environmental and economic problems, which threaten our survival as a species, are addressed practically, from the bottom up, in an environment of abundance and prosperity, rather than one of denial and poverty. The trickle-up effect perhaps? There is no reason why it should not be an attractive and fulfilling lifestyle, and every reason why it should be. Prosperity has a greater chance of growing rapidly than self-denial. The carrot is mightier than the stick!



Acknowledgements

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The People Of The Rainbow Region, And Beyond