

# How Can We Integrate Human Rights, Social Justice, and Ecological Sustainability?

Observations from a Cooperative Inquiry

Diana Bustamante  
Anthony Flaccavento  
Sarah Ludwig  
Juan Rasario  
Isabel Toscano  
Millie Traveno  
Imani Walker  
Lisa Diane White

*Facilitators: Sandra Hayes and Lyle Yorks*

## Views Expressed in this Report

Consistent with the epistemic foundations of Cooperative Inquiry, the findings, ideas, and recommendations contained in this report are the product of the CI group's inquiry process. Accordingly, they are based on the experience and views of the members of the inquiry group and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Research Center for Leadership in Action.

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## About the Leadership for a Changing World Program

Leadership for a Changing World is a program of the Ford Foundation that recognizes and supports community leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. In addition, it seeks to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include the kinds of leaders participating in this program. Each year, Leadership for a Changing World recognizes 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees receive \$115,000 and participate in semiannual program meetings, collaborative research and a strategic communications effort. LCW is a signature program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Institute for Sustainable Communities and RCLA, NYU Wagner.

## About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University

The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) promotes practice-grounded, social-science based, interdisciplinary research that will help strengthen both the theory and the practice of leadership in public service. The Center for Leadership in Action is based at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. It was launched in August 2003 with support from the Ford Foundation.

## Members of the Research and Documentation Project Team include:

Bethany Godsoe, RCLA Executive Director

Sonia Ospina, RCLA Faculty Director and LCW Research Director

Amparo Hofmann, RCLA Deputy Director, and LCW Program Director

Erica Foldy, Affiliated Faculty Member

AiLun Ku, Program Coordinator

Jennifer Dodge, Research Associate

Waad El-Hadidy, Research Associate

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# Part 1: Conversation at the Intersection

## *What is the intersection between human rights, social justice, and ecological sustainability, and how do we integrate them in practice?*

In one way or another, social activists and community organizers have been struggling with variations of this question. United in terms of general political principles but separated by domains of practice and the need for continuously marshalling support for specific activities, building a more integrative effort by seeking synergy across domains of diverse action initiatives seems attainable but often remains elusive. Community action is frequently fragmented in its confrontations with the dominant social order.

Over the course of little more than a year, eight people from varied backgrounds and different communities around the US and Puerto Rico came together six times and participated in a process known as **cooperative inquiry** (CI) to explore more deeply the question: “How can we integrate human rights, social justice, and ecological sustainability?” Represented in the group were leaders of organizations working for change in support of local organic agriculture, ecology, immigrant rights, HIV populations, recovery from substance abuse, and domestic brutality. In addition to the diversity of practice, the group was diverse in both race and gender.

### **What is Cooperative Inquiry?**

Cooperative inquiry (CI) is a participatory research technique in which a small group of participants use their own experience to generate insights around an issue that is of burning concern to all of them. In this type of inquiry, participants formulate a question, agree upon a course of action, individually engage in action through their work, and then collectively make meaning from the data generated by their actions. This cycle of reflection-action-reflection is repeated several times until the group feels it has successfully addressed its concerns. On occasion, facilitators support the group to ensure that its members use the process to its full advantage. CI contributes to creating new knowledge grounded in practice, deepens the participants’ leadership potential, and strengthens relationships among group members.

### **An Overriding Insight—The Conundrums Inherent in the Inquiry Question**

The group came together with the assumption that leaders in social change agencies are similar in the assumptions they hold about the priorities in their work—that human rights, social justice, and ecological sustainability can be seamlessly (easily) integrated. While at a high level of abstraction this assumption was true, all members of the group could support the ideals of all of the programs represented by the group. As the inquiry progressed this assumption proved to be naive at the level of specific practices. Reality proved much more complex. As summarized below, integration of initiatives in human rights, social justice, and ecological sustainability has to take place across time and space. The group needed to reflect upon its assumptions about the immediate and long term impact of actions, with new insights emerging from across the silos of practice. Ultimately, as is often true of robust inquiries, the CI produced more questions than answers. However, the questions themselves reflected emerging insights.

A key insight is the need for inquiry-focused conversations into the conundrums that need confronting when we address questions of human rights and ecological sustainability. It is also necessary for these inquiries to stimulate action. Below are summaries of some of the conundrums the inquiry question raised. Several of these conundrums also demonstrate the challenges for ‘staying’ in the conversation.

### **Emergent Conundrums from the Cooperative Inquiry**

A core underlying conundrum is referenced above: *the integration of human rights and ecological sustainability involves resolving, or at least addressing, disconnections across time and space.* Sustainability recommendations must take into account trends over lengthy time periods (i.e., 300 years to fix CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere), while there is immediacy about human rights violations. Ecological sustainability is an issue that needs addressing at the global level, while human rights manifest at the local level. These disconnections across time and location structure the frames of reference of community organizers working in these distinct areas of activism.

However, ultimately the areas are connected. *Lack of human rights on a global scale contributes to the dichotomy of ecological sustainability and human rights at the local level.* For example, in addition to atrocities regularly reported in the headlines, people flee their home countries to other locations as large consuming nations increasingly undermine the quality of their lives and ability to survive by mining out their resources. They want meaningful lives but now can't have them because of the indifference and economics of a large, global consumptive community.

These shifts in population further stoke human rights abuses in the receiving countries, even while the new arrivals join the consumptive global economy, further contributing to the threats to sustainability. By the same token, globalizing agriculture, manufacturing, and waste disposal allows mainstream populations in developed countries to avoid recognizing hidden costs. On the other hand, while many sustainability activists advocate for using local resources, the reality is that many communities are resource poor. How can we localize communities that have never been localized in terms of resources, such as those that developed in desert environments—in the Southwest US, for example?

In addition to the conundrums the issue itself presents, *the language of solutions that arose during the inquiry revealed further underlying assumptions.* For example, the language and proposals around population control raised the issue of race and racist language. These proposals were targeted toward African-American women and other people of color. Recommendations for limiting the size of families began to sound like the language of oppressors—racist in their assumptions. This raised the question of the role that race—and our experience bounded by assumptions about race—was at play in our inquiry and how we were seeing the issues. When people of privilege focus on concerns that are real to their world, they are unaware of how their message plays to people whose lives are marginalized. The need for planning and control are meaningless to those who have no control over their lives. As Lisa would say:

*“The earth is suffering!”*

*“Well, I am in crisis. Call me when the earth is in crisis.”*

In short, this is a very difficult conversation to have. The challenges of the experience found expression in the poetry and writings of Lisa which were embraced by the group as “Lisa’s Pieces” (see following page).

### **The Need for More Conversations and a Vision**

One of the practical outcomes of the inquiry was that some group members attempted to stimulate some of these conversations among their constituencies. (See page 5 for Lisa’s reflection on holding these conversations.) Rather than offering simplistic answers, these attempts inevitably raised more questions, and that is often the first step toward reframing practices. There is the need for more sustained conversations that have as much inquiry as advocacy. Participants need to be prepared to accept ambiguity.

Often the mark of good inquiry is the raising of more questions, especially when inquiring into issues involving complex interactions. In these circumstances the questions raised are often more enlightening than answers. As demonstrated by Lisa’s reflections we learned a lot, encountered surprises, and have framed a direction for possible future inquiries and *action*. These inquiries may emerge in many forms, growing out of conversations around the ideas raised above, the accompanying PowerPoint presentation, and the attached manifesto (see part 2) which provides a road map for activism.

This document is intended as one way of framing the necessary inquiry-based conversations. The Vision and Plan section also contains specific recommendations for building a more just and sustainable world. The ideas are based upon emerging local success stories from around the world and the lessons this experience has provided. Ultimately, the Vision and Plan is a document of hope, for it is more about what we can do than what we should not; more about the possibilities of restoration, reconciliation, and building just and healthy communities than about simply fighting bad policies and behaviors or repairing damage. We urge you to read it, test it against your experience, and join us in its call to build a sustainable world from the ground up.

## LISA'S PIECES

What do we know? We were charged with the task of writing about sustainability. There was some concern that we were all on different pages. Some were talking about human rights, some were talking about ecological sustainability, many were talking about individual rights, that led to family, that led to community rights that led to national/political rights.

I was moved by my trip to Piñones. I was reminded that Black means get back. Stay away, less than, less resources. I was reminded that no matter where I went in the world, the darker your skin color, the more oppressed you would be. Why do they hate black so much? What was it? I felt the weight of this oppression physically. I felt the sadness of the oppression, and my heart was broken. I struggled to understand why. How could people that met me and grew to know and love me inflict their racist policies on me and still claim to love me, or did they ever? The racism pain was written as fast as the hurt could pour it out and my pen could write. This has been called my spoken word, my poetry, Lisa's pieces, I called it discharge writing. I called it pouring out my hurt. Call it what you may...

### Racism

I am Black, and you will never let me forget it.

I am Black and I will never let you forget it.\*

Blackness, you see it as something strange, exotic, scary, frightening, separate—other than you.

Cultural values, loved, shared, brilliant, different, proud, but separate—always separate.

Scared to embrace.

FEAR, of what?

My violence? My rage—simmering on a pot that has been cooking over 200 years.

Boiling over so many times.

Who keeps turning up the flames?

Maybe me? Maybe you?

It masks itself as sadness and despair, moves to a place of desperation and

Culminates in a rage that I feel my survival depends on.

Sadness—recognizing your fear.

I am HUMAN.

What removes my humanity?

What emotion justifies your action, your control, your rage and removes my humanity?

My tears fall, unnoticed or ignored by you.

If you acknowledge them, will you be reminded that blood flows through my veins? Red, pulsating and alive, until you flick the switch or administer the lethal injection that stops my heart, snuffing out a life.

Retribution for all my lack of control, self control, justified or not.

\*Quote by Jack Johnson, heavyweight champion back in the day.

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## A Closing Reflection on Our Process and Learning

Cooperative Inquiry

This Cooperative Inquiry.

Born of a place of curiosity.

Being pulled, compelled, open, ready to learn, ready to teach.

Ready to explore. Open to the process. Unknown, Comfort. Discomfort.

Insecure. Powerful. Powerless.

Sustainability. Yours? Mine? Ours? You? Me? Our organizations? Our communities? Our land? Mother Earth?

Too many people living in one place - more than the earth can provide for.

We are destroying our base.

Who will win the battle? No contest really.

Integrating. Intersecting.

Working where I didn't even know I could go, grow, or think.

Working with people who love, fear or dismiss me.

I am Black and you will never let me forget it.

Teaching, learning, excited. I bring something to the table.

Getting more, taking less, But I am a consumer.

I have some power, some privilege.

I use, I abuse.

I owe something to this earth.

Do people die for my right to eat the food they grow?

How greedy am I?

Do I really want to know?

Can I make your eyes glaze over with brutal facts and figures?

Can I show you a list of losses that become real when run your fingers over the names or the species lost, extinct, never to be remembered, unless in some history books?

Racism. Familiar words, familiar experiences. But where am I touched?

Not where my mother was, not where my father was.

Can I call you on it? Do I have the right?

Do I know what it is? Its look? Its feel? Its design—constructed centuries before I was born.

Held in place by construction that has retained its form for centuries. Perpetrated by generations with a knack for perfection.

Do I offend you?

Do I scare you or challenge you to see me, hear me, disagree with me?

I hope so.

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## Lisa's Reflection

Before [my work] was narrow, but now my work is in some ways harder because I have to learn more, I can't talk about things in a vacuum anymore. I have to...broaden my knowledge into other areas. When I think about people's reproductive rights, I now also think, "What about the earth's rights? Do you know where your trash goes?" I can be hard to engage clients and colleagues. They tend to be single-focused. They're interested, but can't deal with all this stuff, which is not right before them. At a coalition meeting, the topic of Mexicans came up. Someone talked about them as taking resources, resources that should be available to everyone. I challenged my colleagues: "Do you know what resources they left?" My knowledge has been broadened. (Lisa)

# Part 2: A Manifesto

# VISION FOR INTEGRATING HUMAN RIGHTS, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Anthony Flaccavento, Leadership for a Changing World, Group 4

May 2, 2006

## Goal

To articulate a *vision* sufficiently compelling, and a *strategic plan* sufficiently engaging to rapidly build a movement that integrates human rights, social justice, and ecological sustainability.

## I. Assumptions and/or Deductions

1. Any such “vision” must be both far-reaching *and* grounded in the here and now; global in both its ecological and social-political tenets, yet local in its potential for implementation.
2. We begin with *where people are*: Millions of people live in crisis or in precarious, distressed homes or communities. Many nonprofit and social change leaders work with them and share their struggles simply to keep going. Any vision of a sustainable society will seem irrelevant or “pie in the sky” unless it engages such distressed folks and enables them to begin to take steps toward building healthier homes and communities.
3. A “strategic plan” is likely necessary for several reasons: First, to help prioritize diverse goals within the broader vision; second, to integrate these diverse elements (e.g., human rights, ecological sustainability, etc.) in ways that are radical and synergistic, rather than based primarily on compromise; and third, to enable people—individuals, grass roots groups, larger organizations and associations—to actively engage with the vision, shaping it while changing themselves.
4. It is urgent that we begin this process now and progress rapidly for at least four reasons:
  - Millions of people around the world suffer gravely everyday. Much of this suffering is probably preventable with a different vision and practice of social development, with different public and private priorities.
  - In the US, there appears to be broad dissatisfaction not only with the current political regime but with many of the “rewards” of the modern, high stress, consumptive lifestyle. Additionally, many people are longing for authenticity, for spiritual meaning in their lives. Thus, the timing may be good for the emergence of a radically different vision of progress.
  - The immigration rights movement has not only brought attention to the struggles of immigrants in the US but has begun to expose the dependency of the US economy (and others) on cheap labor, on exploitation of workers and other undervalued resources. This may be a teachable moment (as we used to say), laying bare the fallacy of a global “knowledge economy” without consequences.
  - Finally, the preponderance of data indicates that the earth’s fundamental life support systems, that is, its ability to absorb our wastes (particularly carbon in the atmosphere) and regenerate essential resources (soil, water, air) are approaching their limit and may already be in decline. When we consider that the ultimate human population is likely to be 1¾ to two times as large as it is today, that the Asian subcontinent (China, India, Taiwan, etc), with a population eight times greater than the US, is now rapidly transforming into a modern, consumer, fossil fuel-dependent economy, and that certain human-made pollutants—most notably carbon—accumulate in the ecosystem and take hundreds of years to be cleansed,<sup>1</sup> we should understand the urgency of our present situation.

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<sup>1</sup> The burning of oil, gas, coal and wood release carbon dioxide. Other processes, such as animal feed lots, release methane. When these and other “greenhouse gases” enter the atmosphere, they trap heat, increasing both the temperature of the earth’s surface and the energy available for storms. The current level of carbon in the earth’s atmosphere—about 380 ppm—is more than a third greater than the level at the beginning of the industrial revolution. The rate at which carbon is accumulating is also increasing. And here’s the kicker: Once it enters our atmosphere, carbon dioxide will last for 200-300 years, meaning that the greenhouse gases we produce today will still be warming the atmosphere during the lives of our great-grandchildren’s great-great grandchildren. Along with every molecule of carbon dioxide produced over each of those ensuing generations.

5. There is much good work being done at the local and regional level, and to a lesser degree, at the state and national levels to promote human rights, social justice, and sustainability. Much, much more of this work needs to be undertaken. The larger political and cultural context, however, is at best unsupportive of this work, and more often opposes or negates it. What is lacking is a compelling, far reaching, yet practical vision that will radically shift the politics and culture of our nation (and by extension, much of the world) toward sustainability.

## II. The Current Vision (or “prevailing paradigm”)

To varying degrees, we in this LCW cohort are aware of our pressing, myriad problems: widespread poverty; extraordinary and increasing inequality of income; wealth and power; violence against and exploitation of women, children, and the vulnerable; loss of family farms, family businesses, and community based financial institutions; ecological degradation; racism and other forms of blaming and excluding; and more. While the reasons for these and other problems are undoubtedly many, we propose here that much of the root of the problem lies in the current vision of modernity and human progress. This globally dominant paradigm, at its core, is based on the following principles (actually understood by its proponents more as “laws,” verified by historical experience):

1. “Free market capitalism” is the only viable system to produce and distribute sufficient material goods to meet current and future demand needs.
2. The free market is also the best—if not only—system through which political rights and representative government can be secured.
3. Market freedom—the ability to buy what you want, when and where you want it—is human freedom, for all intents and purposes. Walter Wriston, President of Citibank, said “Markets are voting machines, global plebiscites.” Thomas Frank refers to this common belief (among elites) as “...an ecstatic confusion of markets with democracy, markets with people, markets with empowerment...”
4. The accumulation and concentration of wealth is the foundation of economic growth, and economic growth is what makes “market freedom” possible for, potentially, almost everyone. Put another way, “A rising tide lifts all boats.”
5. Surprisingly, that ever-rising tide somehow doesn’t lead to “flooding.” That is, there is no limit (land, resources, ecosystem carrying capacity) to economic growth. This is in part because the earth is so “big” (contrary to what environmental alarmists say), and in part due to the limitless capacity for human creativity, expressed through technological innovation<sup>2</sup> (hybrid cars, nuclear power, genetically modified crops, etc.).
6. The primary role of government—local, state and federal—is to protect the wealth creation process and to secure and facilitate market freedom for as many of its citizens as possible.
7. The federal government has the additional duty of protecting its citizens from outside attack, and the corollary responsibility of securing the resources needed (e.g., oil) to ensure continuation of “our way of life” (wealth accumulation and market freedom).
8. Occasional market dysfunctions, such as corporate monopolization or “insider trading” scandals, should be punished. Overall and over time however, the market is self-correcting through the mechanisms of competition (among businesses) and free choice (among consumers). Therefore, aside from its responsibility to protect wealth accumulation and facilitate market freedom, the government, including the courts, should stay out of the marketplace (i.e., don’t regulate consumer protections, worker health/safety, racial or gender-based discrimination, or environmental laws).

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<sup>2</sup> This view has only been extended and more fully embraced by the innumerable proponents of the “New Economy,” whose understanding of growth and limits was nicely summarized by George Gilder in 1997: “The last five years have seen...the overthrow of the tyranny of matter...In this economy, our ability to create wealth is not bound by physical limits, but by our ability to come up with new ideas—in other words, it’s unlimited.”

9. Individual mobility—physical, social, economic—is an expression of (market) freedom and should be encouraged. The only limit to this freedom is (or may be) immigration into the United States.

### III. A Vision for Sustainability—The Alternative View of Progress

#### Elements for Sustainability

1. **Ecological Limits.** First and foremost, human society must fit within the bounds of the ecosystem, that is, it must not use up ecological resources (“source”) faster than they can regenerate (or be replaced); and must not overwhelm the biosphere’s absorptive capacities (its “sinks”). Put another way, “The economy is a subset of the ecosystem” (Economist Herman Daly).

This is a fundamental, biophysical truth, in spite of the fantasies of both technophiles and New Economy devotees. It is the foundation upon which all other discussions, plans, and strategies related to economic development, population, energy policy, human rights, social justice, and social change must be based. This is one of the most difficult things for modern people to accept, in part because of the notion of human intelligence and creativity transcending “the tyranny of matter,” and in part because the petroleum-based economy has allowed us to use **millions of years of accumulated solar energy** in a little more than one century. As William Howard Kunstler has said, we have lived in the era of fossil fuel-based abundance long enough that it has become absolutely normative. We can’t fathom anything else.

It also must be acknowledged that talk of “limits,” “conservation,” and the need for “personal responsibility” has repeatedly been used by the affluent and those in power to scold the poor and to divert attention from grotesque inadequacies in wealth and standards of living. Wealthy, largely suburban first-world environmentalists preaching conservation to “developing countries” may just be history’s most extreme “do as I say, not as I do.”

In spite of this history and these hypocrisies, the biophysical limits of our world are inescapable and we must confront them.

2. **Local Capacity.** While living within the bounds of the biosphere is primarily about *limits*, it is also about *opportunities*. There are hundreds of different ecosystems, each offering varying degrees of opportunity for human sustenance, pleasure, and relationship. Central to many native peoples and “primitive” societies was their careful adaptation to place. A characteristic of modern societies and economies is their (our) nearly complete disregard for particularities—climatic, biological, historical—of their place. Sustainable societies will be intimately interconnected with their places.
3. **Participation and Social Justice.** There are two essential components to social justice: Enabling broad participation, and constraining power and the privileges it entails. There is reason to believe that much antisocial and destructive behavior comes in large part from *alienation*, from a lack of opportunities to participate, meaningfully, in one’s own life, household, community, and nation. Therefore a more sustainable society must be truly creative, one in which ordinary people can meaningfully participate in economic, political and civic life. Achieving this will only be possible in a world of vibrant local economies and communities, where people are *needed* by their neighbors, rather than being interchangeable parts in a global economy. It will also require strong protections for human rights, workplace rights and public/community rights vis a vis corporations.

Building more participatory societies will also require constraining wealth accumulation and power concentration, in economic, political, academic and media realms. At present, widespread citizen alienation enables corporate and government power accumulation, and vice versa.

The essence of social justice within a framework of sustainability is best expressed as *rights, responsibilities, and opportunities within the limits of the biosphere*.

4. **Regional Self-Reliance.** Sustainability will require a high degree of both creativity and local/bioregional self-reliance. “Making the most of what we have”—in perpetuity—will be an essential element of healthy communities and economies.

Community and regional self reliance, or “living close to home,” will require a number of things, including:

- **A diversity of people with a diversity of skills and a broad base of knowledge.** In the natural world, an astounding array of species adapt to and utilize various “trophic” levels, providing food, fuel, habitat, and shelter to one another. This not only allows them to live together, but maximizes the system’s overall productivity. This model—diverse, dynamic, productive, regenerative, and interdependent—must be the model for local communities and economies.
  - **A locally owned value-adding infrastructure, tailored to the ecological resources and human history of each region.** In rural areas, this infrastructure may take the form of processing facilities for food, fiber, structural materials, and energy, or systems of market access, to more directly connect “producers” (farmers, fisherman, etc) with consumers. In urban communities, it more likely will include an array of small-scale, intensive production activities (community gardens, urban farms), systems for reclaiming or recycling resources, and systems for reducing ecological impact, from earthen roofs, to “infill” redevelopment of abandoned urban centers, to “bio-fuels” based on recycled wastes.
  - **Educational systems that strike a far better balance between essential local knowledge and broader, historical human wisdom, that elevate the practical arts without trivializing fine arts and “great books.”** These educational systems will need to enhance the productivity of many different people doing many different jobs, all of us learning, in David Orr’s words, “to live well in our places.”
5. **Frugality and Conservation.** To achieve a sustainable society, the average resource consumption will have to be a small fraction of the levels to which ordinary Americans have become accustomed. No one knows the exact figure, but based upon energy constraints (including costs and consequences of alternatives to petroleum), it is probably about 20-25 percent of current consumption levels, and certainly well below half. Some of this can be achieved through efficiency gains, but the majority of the reduction in resource use will have to be achieved through a radical redesign of our communities, and changes in our material needs/expectations.
6. **The Role of Government.** The essential role of government must shift from:
- Facilitating the concentration of wealth
  - Promoting globalization; and
  - Promoting individual market freedom

To:

- Facilitating community-based wealth creation (at local/regional levels)
- Promoting adaptation—technologically, socially, institutionally—to local places;
- Creating incentives for resource conserving technologies, enterprises, and living arrangements
- Using tax policy and regulation to encourage businesses and industry to pay fair wages, protect the environment, and reduce fossil fuel use and;
- Immediately creating incentives/inducements for smaller families.

## FORGING A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Of course what will be required are *thousands* of plans, of experiments to begin to build a far more just and sustainable society. Most of these, of necessity, will be locally-based, scaled to particular ecosystems and human histories/cultures.

**Step 1:** The first goal of a strategic plan for sustainability should be the support and development of these local models, enabling them to reach their optimal scale and scope (that is, their ideal size and breadth of diversity).

This will require several things, including major public and private investment in regional self reliance and an “infrastructure for sustainability”, public research focused on increasing local productivity while minimizing resource use and ecological impact, and elimination of public policies that favor big box development, outsourcing, low wages, and other forms of globalization.

Serious investment in ecologically healthy, self-reliant communities will often need to be preceded or at least accompanied by far greater (than current) investment in human services, crisis relief, crime and addiction abatement, alternatives to incarceration, and other types of social justice and restoration work. We cannot expect to build healthy communities and dynamic local economies where sickness and injustice is widespread. In addressing these social problems, however, we must discern strategies that also help build the local economy, reduce dependence on fossil fuels and globalization, and meet local needs with local resources, intelligence, and infrastructure.

**Step 2:** Education, training, and so-called “retraining” of workers should focus first on building capacity of people to live locally, creatively, frugally and cooperatively. Jobs and economic well-being will derive far more from local businesses, family farms (forests, fisheries), recycling and resource recovery enterprises, alternative fuels, green building, and a broad array of “ecosystem businesses” that restore degraded landscapes (rural and urban) or processes. A research, education, and service sector will need to emerge to support these enterprises. Similarly, health care and basic human services should be designed, delivered, and controlled as locally as possible.

At present, while many communities around the globe are starved for jobs, *there is almost always plenty of work to be done*. Sustainability will require educating, training, and employing people to do this “community work,” preferably in and through the private sector, but where necessary, as public sector employees.

**Step 3:** Trade in a sustainable world will be mostly inter-regional, rather than international, limited by the cost and dwindling supply of oil and its substitutes. Limits on global trade are highly likely, probably within 10-20 years, because there is no available—or foreseeable—replacement for oil or natural gas that enables such easy mobility (cars, trucks, planes, ships). As the cost of transport sharply increases, trade may continue, but its benefits derive almost entirely to the very affluent. Alternatively, we can forge policies that encourage regional trade, especially that which brings in essential goods and helps build local capacity (what used to be called “import substitution”). Sustainably harvested Appalachian oak in the homes of South Carolina fishermen who sell seafood to restaurants and colleges in Raleigh may be feasible and good for all. Indonesian mahogany in the homes of Cornell professors who advise Nebraska corn farmers how to sell to Russia surely is not.

**Step 4:** Energy and resource use must decline dramatically on a per capita basis worldwide. Vastly greater sums of public investment, university research and development, and private business innovation are needed to fully develop renewable fuels and greatly increase the efficiency of tools, equipment, appliances, buildings, and transport. The creation or re-creation of vibrant local communities that are far, far less automobile dependent is urgent, essential, and likely to be very expensive. Petroleum use in food and fiber production will decline dramatically. Any hope of adequately feeding (sheltering, clothing) ourselves will require advances in organic and sustainable farming, urban and community farming, etc.

It should be clear that such a dramatic reduction in energy use will not be possible in a “global economy.”<sup>3</sup> Even in a far more localized world, people will need to live much more frugally and learn to find satisfaction and pleasure in new (or perhaps “old”) ways.

**Step 5:** Economic and tax policy must change fundamentally, driven by the goals of:

- Restoring “ecological capital” (soils, forests, rivers, oceans, etc.);
- Dramatically reducing fossil fuel use;
- Building vibrant, largely self-reliant communities; and
- Internalizing the full costs of production, that is livable wages, worker protections, consumer safety, and environmental protections.

At present, most economic policy favors recruiting large corporations over building local home grown businesses, channels nearly three fourths of subsidies to large and corporate farms, at the expense of family farms and encourages citing businesses overseas or in communities with weak labor and environmental regulations. Economic development and tax incentives value land—whether forest, prime farm land, or green space—almost entirely as real estate, inflating its price (at the expense of those trying to keep it as farms) and ignoring its critical role in food and fiber production and ecological balance. Tax policies generally create incentives to build, but far fewer to preserve or maintain. Weakened government regulations in the areas of labor protections, anti-discrimination, and pollution control all encourage business to externalize these costs, that is, to make their products as cheaply as possible, dumping the costs of layoffs, pollution, worker health, etc. into public sphere.

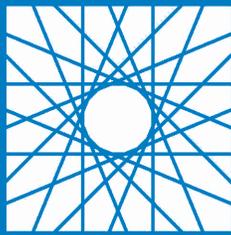
To move toward sustainability, all of these policies must be changed, and often reversed. This does not necessarily mean more government programs, but it will certainly require far greater public investment in these areas.

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<sup>3</sup> There are about one trillion barrels of recoverable oil left in the world. While that sounds like a lot, we are currently using about 27 billion barrels annually, meaning that we only have about 37 years left at current rates of consumption. And at least half of the balance of oil is much less accessible than most of what we’ve already used, meaning it will be much more costly (both financially and in terms of energy) to recover. The situation for natural gas is only slightly better, perhaps 50-75 years left at current rates (much less, as it increasingly substitutes for oil).

While a “hydrogen economy” is much discussed, at present there is no means to extract hydrogen (from water or hydrocarbons) without using more energy than what you get out. While that may change, it’s very unlikely that hydrogen can even replace petroleum, because it is so much less “dense” as an energy source, i.e. it takes about 20-25 times as much space to “fill the tank” for the same amount of energy as oil.





# Research Center for Leadership in Action

NYUWagner

Research Center for Leadership in Action  
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service  
New York University  
The Puck Building  
295 Lafayette Street, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10012-9604

212.992.9880

[wagner.leadership@nyu.edu](mailto:wagner.leadership@nyu.edu)

<http://www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership>