

NEW IDEAS FOR LOCAL TO GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY - AN INTRODUCTION TO ‘THRIVING THROUGH TRANSFORMATION’

Boyd Blackwell¹

President, Australia New Zealand Society for Ecological Economics, Armidale, New England, Australia

This manuscript introduces a collection of papers arising from the ANZSEE 2015 Conference, ‘Thriving Through Transformation: Local to Global Sustainability’. The papers cover a spectrum of issues on sustainable transformation of the human existence to one that is more within the limits of our social, cultural, ecological, environmental, economic and political systems. All papers help solve issues of public policy importance at local, regional, national and global scales. Together they provide a timely contribution towards a lasting legacy for planetary wellbeing and sustainability practice.

Introduction

The papers presented here on the ANZSEE website come from a double blind peer reviewed process of those presented to the biennial 2015 conference of the Australia New Zealand Society for Ecological Economics (ANZSEE). The conference was held at the University of New England (UNE) in Armidale, New South Wales, Australia from 19 to 23 October. All papers jointly contribute to helping transform the human existence to one that is socially, culturally, environmentally, ecologically, economically and politically sustainable. Transforming our human existence to meet these multiple dimensions of ‘true’ sustainability is a very difficult task, balancing potentially competing interests and inevitably involving trade-offs between these dimensions, particularly when put into practice.

However, at the foundation of these transformations is the concept of efficiency, that is, where there are gains in a number of dimensions of sustainability without tradeoffs in others. Such efficiency forms the foundation for the principle of Sustainable Economic Development promoted in 1972 by the Club Rome². Today it is as important as it was then as to how, in practice, we reach these goals, or how we ‘transform’. Indeed, the need to transform has transgressed into all facets of life including spiritual, for example, with the global nomination of the Pope, Herman Daly and the Club of Rome for a Nobel Peace Prize in Sustainable Development³ to having the hottest year on record in the locality of Armidale⁴ where, as evidence of a

¹ The author is the current President of the Australia New Zealand Society for Ecological Economics and was Chair of the Organising Committee of the 2015 Biennial Conference.

² Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report on the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, Universe Books, New York (1972), www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Limits-to-Growth-digital-scan-version.pdf

³ Nobel Peace Prize for Sustainable Development, ‘Nobel Peace Prize themed for Sustainable Development’ (2015), <http://np4sd.org>

⁴ Hottest year on record since 1891: see Anon. ‘The Weather at Armidale NSW’ (2017) www.weatherarmidale.com

much deeper and mortal cost, the supply of air cooling capital was uncharacteristically surpassed by demand.⁵

Transformation entails changing from one state to another or several sequential states and an underlying philosophy of the conference and the papers collected on the web is for the need to take action by ‘walking the talk’ as well as ‘talking the talk’ – that is – to take action to change our human behaviour. Change is inherent in economic analysis as is efficiency, both concepts critical to the study of biology and ecology and indeed important in a range of other disciplines. Our conference was therefore designed to connect the intellectual to the practical and the applied and we refer you to our conference web page to help you as the reader make change as required: <http://anzsee.org>. For example, our workshops on integrating Aboriginal knowledge systems with those from the pure and social sciences brought academics from across the disciplines of Art, Humanities, Education, Economics, Park Management, Northern Institute, Health and many other disciplines. We had field trips to Australia’s Gondwana World Heritage rainforests, to the local Aboriginal Keeping Place, New England Regional Art and Printing Museums, Community Garden and a UNE Linguists’ backyard which was a home grown food bowl for his family and the broader Armidale community.⁶ We provided delegates with stainless steel water bottles embossed with the ANZSEE logo rather than providing plastic bottles to ensure we reduced landfill, waste and embodied energy. We provided bus and bicycle transport to further reduce the ecological footprint of our conference. Because of space, I cannot list all the initiatives we included to ensure as a conference group we ‘walked the talk’.

All conference talks have been recorded and are available at a link from our society website (<http://anzsee.org>) and there is a parallel series of articles published with the *International Journal of Rural Law and Policy* (IJR&P, <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/ijrlp>) which should be read in conjunction with the papers presented here. The recordings include our virtual collaborative event with Griffith University where we joined with leading global evolutionary economists to discuss and debate the alternative paths to sustainable transformative states (www.griffith.edu.au/business-government/griffith-business-school/departments/department-accounting-finance-economics/news-and-events/managing-the-transition-to-a-stable-economy). These activities are reasons to celebrate as is our success in filling four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarships for attendance at the conference, while not sounding like many, is a significant first-time milestone in the society’s and UNE’s history and a positive re-

⁵ Jacinta Tutty, Queensland heat wave sparks fan shortage, 13 January, Courier Mail (2017) www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/queensland-heatwave-sparks-fan-shortage/news-story/c1e8e8e3a51a8d33f0cce169f856df8d?from=htc_rss

⁶ Incidentally, we enjoyed home made and home grown baked apple pies in our cross cultural workshop because of the generosity of the Bruderhof people from Danthonia in the New England region who joined with us at in discussing and taking transformation action at Dr Nash’s home grown and cooked vegetarian lunch and garden tour along with fresh home grown and baked bread from the famous ‘Nick’ of the Gold Fish Bowl. Simply sharing good food with good people can nourish and connect the souls of people for an indefinite period of time.

flection of what is a promising future for cultural understanding and respect in our region.

One of the key themes of the conference was to consider issues of importance to sustaining rural, regional and remote areas. There were a range of events, including talks, workshops and field trips that supported ‘local to global’ research and initiatives in this area including improving soil and pasture health, delivering enduring community value from mining, and enhancing indigenous wellbeing. Improving the wellbeing of rural, regional and remote areas is central UNE’s strategic goals and the conference helped provide impact for researchers in these areas as well as promoting the profile of UNE to a global audience through the international linkages that ANZSEE, and its parent institution, the International Society for Ecological Economics (www.isecoeco.org) can offer.

I would like to formally thank the fantastic organizing committee for delivering the conference and to our sponsors (see Table 1) which helped support the conference – without the support of both of these groups the success of the conference would not have been possible – including the important research outputs like the papers contained here on the web. It was only through the focused hard work of a connected ‘local’ but also ‘afar’ team (e.g. in Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaide and New Zealand) that we could deliver such a successful conference.

Table 1: Sponsors of the Biennial 2015 ANZSEE Conference

Sponsor	Type
Commonwealth Science and Industry Research Organisation and UNE School of Environmental and Rural Science	Silver
NSW Government, Local Land Services, Northern Tablelands	Bronze
Ninti One Ltd: Innovation for Remote Australia and UNE VC’s Office	Indigenous Participation
UNE School of Behavioural, Cognitive and Social Sciences	HDR attendance
UNE Institute for Rural Futures, UniSA, UNE Life, Sustainable Living Armidale (Armidale Road to Paris), The Goldfish Bowl, Bruderhof, Armidale Community Garden	In-kind and cost-recovery
UNE Smart Farm: Sustainable Manageable Accessible Technologies, UNE Business School and Dr Nash and his family	Hosts and In-kind

Source: <https://anzsee.org/sponsors/>

Overview of the articles

Given this background, there are five double blind reviewed papers (see Table 2 for a summary) from the conference presented on the web and they are not presented in any particular order of priority or quality and should not be read as such. Instead they are presented in what may appear to be a ‘natural flow’ of topics.

In the first article, Greenway, importantly identifies that by narrowly framing water as inputs into economic production and urban water supply, a physical view of only ‘dams and pipes’ dominates our approach to management, detracting from a broader opportunity transform sustainable water management. ‘Water is multi-functional within interconnected socio-environ-ecological spheres.’ Building from this initial finding Greenway makes the second point relates to a further narrow focus on water security in the protection of water. ‘Protecting water, it is argued, requires reflection on current processes and a re-defining of water management criteria’ – the chal-

lenge for policy makers. Greenway reviews the water governance literature to evaluate an emerging ‘new water paradigm’ building on ‘water soft’ paths, in the context of developing better definitions of water security. This paper can be read in conjunction with the article published in IJRL&P on the social consequences of water rights re-allocation in Mexico to support industrial transformation.

Table 1: Articles contained in this special issue

No.	Transformation Title	Location	Authors
1	The Security of Water Resources	Global	Greenway
2	Minimizing Social Externalities of Major Resource Projects: A Way Forward Through Shared Value	Southeast Queensland, Australia	Phelan, Dawes, Costanza & Kubiszewski
3	Functional Remoteness in Sparsely Populated Areas of Australia	Remote Australia	Lovell
4	A Dynamic Evaluation of the Impacts of an Emissions Trading Scheme on the Australian Economy and Emissions Levels	Australia	Nong, Meng & Siriwardana
5	Ecological Economics and the Cosmic Bank	Armidale, New South Wales	Nash

In the second article, Phelan, Dawes, Costanza and Kubiszewski uses shared value theory to help the mining industry transform to a more sustainable future by minimizing the social externalities resulting from major resource projects. The paper ties with a parallel article published in the IJRL&P special issue as well as part of a special session on *Enduring Community Value from Mining* contained in the conference recordings. Phelan et al., identify the inherent limitations in corporate-sponsored community development which has emerged in response to increasing public expectations of social performance for the resource sector. Using coal seam gas (CSG) projects in Southeast Queensland, Australia Phelan et al. argue that to minimize negative externalities of major resource projects, operating companies need to move beyond managing social impacts and maintaining the social license to operate to a more strategic approach based on the principles of shared value.

The third article by my Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation colleague, Lovell, takes us to remote Australia and analyses some critical problems that remote Australian’s face. Lovell finds that transitional sustainability theories provide a framework for spatial and relational geographic remoteness across sectors in remote Australia. Lovell furthermore identifies that functional remoteness underpins socio-technological and socio-cultural innovations generally across the human landscape. Urban and remote perspectives of remoteness currently create a disjunction, yet remoteness informs research and policy, development and innovation. Lovell therefore encourages readers to consider a framework for ‘functional remoteness’ in order to better bring innovation to the bush and the bush close to the city. ‘This article presents a nascent synthesis of ‘functional remoteness’; remote economic participation achieved through functional place-based and complex local systems, and the dynamics between them and the multi-agent regimes with which they interact, locally and globally.’

The fourth article by Nong, Meng and Siriwardana we return to an important yet persistent debate, that began many decades ago, over dynamic climate systems and

what the simulated impacts from an emissions trading scheme for the Australian economy. Nong et al. use computable general equilibrium modelling, and in particular, an 'environmentally extended MONASH model and a database containing detailed energy sectors' to predict these impacts. They find that price of carbon permits increases from AUD\$4.6 in 2015 to \$13.3 in 2020 and \$43.5 in 2030. The agricultural sector is the main purchaser of permits along with the black and brown coal electricity sectors. As a result, Australia's GDP is projected to be 0.77% and 1.84% lower in 2020 and in 2030 respectively. Because the price of electricity will increase considerably with the ETS, Nong et al. argue that the scheme lends strong support towards the transition to renewable energy. A key political hurdle is that Australian household income and welfare, as measured through 'equivalent variations', are considerably reduced.

In the final article, Nash provides an excellent 'walking the talk' example to all about how one can make substantial transformation even within the constraints of one's own home and standard sized block, even where one rents one's home (i.e. where economic property rights do not exit). Using the concept of The Cosmic Bank (TCB) Nash shows how a broader view of beneficial flows between the family and society result in a better world of connectedness between people, healthy food provision, sanitation, and general wellbeing. I encourage all readers to devour this article for practical yet easy steps to transform their back yards to gifted source of food for their family and through TCB, a return flow of wellbeing with society.

Concluding Remarks

Together these articles might seem like a disparate collection of papers without common themes but the threads are apparent within each: whether people are in remote or urban Australia, the need to use resources (whether water, gas or coal) in a socially, culturally and environmentally conscious manner will help transform our society to a healthy existence. This includes the need to ensure that we have an appropriate view of less well off places in our nation (remote Australia) such that the divide between the city and the bush is bridged. While transformations may need to occur in our theoretical constructs, perspectives and predications for policy reform, we can also take individual family action and real change as shown by Nash's TCB practice within the 'confines' of his family's urban and rented home. The need to transform to sustainable solutions at the 'local to global' scale is critical to ensuring the wellbeing of our globe's people. Ecological economics is as much about the ecology of our social, cultural and political systems as it is about the ecology of our natural systems and economics.

A final important point to make as part of the presentation of these conference papers is that ANZSEE is a society based on ecological economics which is inherently inclusive of other disciplines. Again this is no easy task, and requires additional effort and persistence, to understand each other's ways, concerns, approaches and thinking. It also involves empathy and empathetic action. For this conference and collection of papers there was a resounding effort by the organizing committee and those involved to include other disciplines and this resulted in greater debate, im-

proved understanding, and greater opportunities for transforming the human existence to the fully dimensional sustainability goal outlined above. It is truly incredible what can be achieved by a group of hard working collegiate people from disparate backgrounds rather than in silos. I therefore hope you enjoy the papers contained within this collection, learn from the authors experiences and journeys, embrace with other disciplines and gain inspiration and encouragement for your efforts to transform our existence to a more sustainable future – ‘locally to globally’ and by ‘walking the talk’.

References

Anon. ‘The Weather at Armidale NSW’ (2017) www.weatherarmidale.com

Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report on the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, Universe Books, New York (1972), www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Limits-to-Growth-digital-scan-version.pdf

Jacinta Tutty, Queensland heat wave sparks fan shortage, 13 January, Courier Mail (2017) www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/queensland-heatwave-sparks-fan-shortage/news-story/c1ebe8e3a51a8d33focce169f856df8d?from=htc_rss

Nobel Peace Prize for Sustainable Development, ‘Nobel Peace Prize themed for Sustainable Development’ (2015), <http://np4sd.org>