

*What could be more important to our time than re-establishing the fundamentals for sustainable common wealth? This most timely book, written by one of the leading thinkers in the field, sets out a clear agenda that challenges all of us to act.*

Dr Neil Ravenscroft, Professor of Land Economy, University of Brighton,  
and Director of Tablehurst Farm CSA

*All around us we see evidence of the sort of life we create when we forget that all our wealth is common wealth. Let's celebrate a book which reminds us of that fact, and gives clear guidance on how to make it a reality in the modern world.*

Molly Scott Cato, Reader in Green Economics, Cardiff School of Management

*In the current climate of anxiety as to how we move on from the devastation of toxic capitalism (paradigm lost), Common Wealth offers a human centred alternative (paradigm found) to this most pressing of questions.*

Patricia Rawlinson, lecturer, London School of Economics, author *From Fear to Fraternity: A Russian Tale of Crime, Economy and Modernity*, Pluto Press, 2010

*This is a timely book, making the rare and important link between the crisis of our 'captive state' and the ways in which citizens and communities can mobilise to address it. More than a call to action, it offers practical and much needed pathways for actually taking action.*

Rosemary Foggitt and Pat Conaty, *Common Futures*

*While Common Wealth's analysis is attractive, Martin Large offers a lucid, insightful and thought-provoking set of workable suggestions for putting them into practice. Many are already doing so. He should be listened to ... and then acted upon.*

Professor Nigel Curry, Director of the Countryside and Community  
Research Institute, University of Gloucestershire

*Only by sharing the value of our common resources more fairly, is humanity likely to be able to avoid the worldwide self-destruction towards which our present path of development is leading us.*

*In his masterly new book Martin Large explores the changes this implies for the structures of business, government and civil society and the relationships between them. He identifies land value taxation and a citizen's income as among the measures that will help to bring the changes about.*

*Please read it if you care about the future of our species.*

James Robertson, a founder of the New Economics Foundation  
and author of *Transforming Economic Life*

*From bitter searching of the heart  
We rise to play a greater part  
This is the faith by which we stand  
Men shall know common wealth again*

Leonard Cohen, from *Villanelle for our Time*

*The earth shall become a common treasury to all, as it was first made and given to the sons of men.*

Gerard Winstanley, 1649

*The law doth punish man or woman  
That steals the goose from off the common  
But lets the greater felon loose  
That steals the common from the goose.*

Anon

*How can we put an end to unrestrained market fundamentalism and financial capitalism, that are void of morals or moderation, in order to protect the finances and livelihoods of our citizens? That is the issue we are now facing. In these times, we must return to the idea of fraternity – as in the French slogan ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité’ – as a force for moderating the danger inherent within freedom.*

Yukio Hatoyama, Prime Minister, *A New Path for Japan*

*The more that freedom informs civil society and the cultural sector, the more equality informs the state sector with its rights and responsibilities, and the more that mutuality or fraternity guide business and economic life – the more creative, just, democratic, healthier, wealthier, the more sustainable, will be our society.*

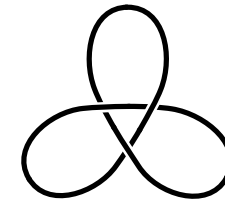
Martin Large, *Common Wealth*

*There is no wealth but life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.*

John Ruskin, *Unto this Last*

# Common Wealth

For a free, equal, mutual  
and sustainable society



MARTIN LARGE



HAWTHORN PRESS

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Martin Large, October 2009

## About the author

Martin Large works as a facilitator in the field of individual, organisational, community and societal development; his clients have included civil society organisations, government agencies and businesses ranging from small to multinational. This involves creating the conditions for people to meet, engage and make the most of their resources; exploring the contexts and key issues they face; evaluating what works and doesn't work; and helping them to focus on emerging desired futures and how to achieve them.

He has worked as an educator, as an academic lecturing in management and organisational behaviour at what is now the University of Gloucestershire, and as a management consultant with Social Ecology Associates and Sustainable Futures. He has run a publishing company for 29 years, chairs Stroud Common Wealth, and has enabled the development of a variety of cultural projects, including a theatre, college, co-operatives, the Social Enterprise Centre and community land trusts.

Martin's motto is, 'It is better to light fires than to fill buckets.'

## Foreword

It is extraordinarily difficult to understand quite how unwell our economy is, and why. Our instincts tell us to ignore it, to await the return of easy loans and rising house prices. Our brains, when we engage them, tell us something else.

The economy has been, for most of us in the West, ‘everything’. We have judged others, and ourselves, by economic performance. We have developed a curious fear about money. However much we have, will we ever have enough? Bankers earning millions make us fearful of not being able to afford – well, something. Our obsession with money has blinded us to all the other things that make us feel good, happy and secure. It has also blinded us to the surging undercurrents of inequality, unfairness, distorted systems and structural weaknesses that make future crunches not only likely but inevitable. Stand by for the energy crunch, oil crunch, food crunch and water crunch. Stand by, too, to watch democracy buckle under the strain of these challenges.

It is time to pay attention. Most readers will be astonished to learn how land is distributed in the UK. It is now almost a thousand years after the Norman invasion when William parceled out much of the country to his nobility, or ‘cronies’ as one might call them now. The aristocracy, the church, the crown and the government all continue to own land on a vast scale. Spend a moment thinking about it and you may wonder how, with all our intelligence and concern for progress and democracy, the one thing – apart from air and water – which we might think of as ours in fellowship with our fellow citizens is owned by a very few. Land ownership in Britain is still almost mediaeval.

Do we not have the wit to think of a better and fairer way? Indeed, can we not dream up better ways of doing business, running cities, regenerating communities and energising food production?

A book like this, exploring the system which is – witness the credit crunch – so inadequate, is badly needed. There is no shortage of analysis of the way society works, but Martin brings us up to date and tackles difficult questions from the perspective of a man who has made new ideas work. He has pioneered new ways of sharing land and resources and knows what is possible. In fact, he has inspired me to re-think much of what I do. A Bristol city-centre development that I have been involved with will now be driven by the search for new ways of engaging the community and creating space for everyone, rather than for a few profiteers. We will work in transparent partnership with all concerned. This is Martin’s way, and he has much to teach us.

Martin asks us to ponder the question of making the transition to a more free, equal, mutual and sustainable society. We are challenged to remember the history of land theft and land enclosure that has set the patterns of inequality that have remained largely unchanged in centuries. Then, by offering us examples of inspirational reform, of individuals challenging old ways of thinking, of new institutions and new ideas, Martin shows that there really are new ways of being. We certainly need them.

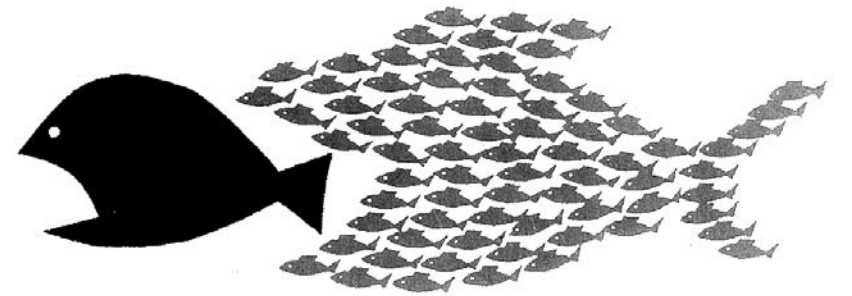
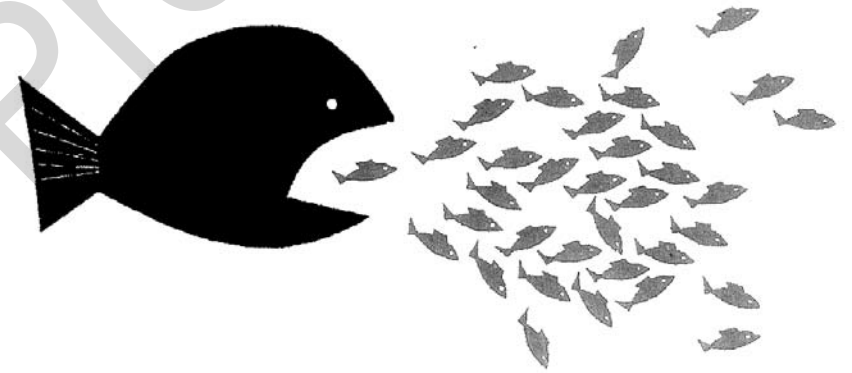
I am especially inspired by the story of Charlotte and Ben Hollins, who secured their father’s tenanted organic farm with the help of thousands of investors in Fordhall Community Land Initiative, a community land trust. Martin was deeply engaged in the process and has shown what is possible. He explores practical theories of land trusteeship for permanently affordable homes, of freeing education and of land taxation. It is never dry; it is always hopeful. But unlike so many theorists, Martin makes it happen.

Alastair Sawday

PART 1

*Remaking Society*

Hawthorn Press



*The Fishes by Ken Sprague*

## Chapter 1

### What Social Future Do We Want?



The market triumphalism of financial capitalism has gone. Yet City bankers' bonuses are creeping back, thanks to competing banks going bust and taxpayers propping up a shaky financial system, which nearly collapsed in October 2008. Whilst the belief that 'unfettered markets know best' has been shattered, with nearly one million young people aged 16–25 unemployed, people are asking, 'What is our new vision of society? If not the market, what are our guiding values?' A young friend asked, 'Is life just about economics? What values can I live by?' Michael Sandell, the 2009 BBC Reith lecturer, suggests that we face the challenge of the re-moralisation of society saying, 'Most political questions are at their core moral or spiritual ... they are about our vision for the common good.' So *Common Wealth* takes up Professor Sandell's invitation to explore how the values of freedom, equality, mutuality and sustainability can help transform society: an economy that works well for all, a vibrant cultural life that enables every human being realise their potential, a political life rooted in equality, human rights and social justice, and the sustainable care for the environment.

Westminster parliamentary democracy also faces a crisis of legitimacy. With the massive public bailouts, have the too-big-to-fail banks captured the state? Who rules? There is public outrage at the MPs' expenses scandal, at cash for legislation, at a part time parliament failing to protect our civil liberties and do its job of holding government to account. Faced by the credit, food, climate, energy, water and poverty crunches, it is clear our way of life may be unsustainable. Our social future is being mortgaged up to the hilt to prop up the financial system; government prints money to support the banks, yet four million people are waiting for social housing. There has been little debate about the choices we face, say between free university tuition versus bankers' bonuses. There is also denial and conflicting information about Britain's real financial situation.

The British government has spent £95.5 billion propping up the Royal Bank of Scotland, which it believes is too big to fail. Taxpayers, however, have no clear idea

just how risky RBS really is, as the accounts which hide toxic assets are so obscure. Lloyds/HBOS is also too big to fail. The government has insured these imploded banks with taxpayers' money against future losses. The banks are also supposed to both build up their capital and keep lending to homeowners and businesses – two conflicting tasks. Alistair Darling's grim April 2009 budget made it clear just how mortgaged Britain's future is, with the projected national deficit for 2009–10 increasing from an estimate of £38 billion in 2008 to £175 billion. Projected borrowing for the four years from 2009 is £606 billion, national debt will be 79 per cent of GDP, the highest ever in peacetime, the economy will have its worst year since 1945 and the debt will cost £35–47 billion per annum to service. This means people losing their jobs, government spending cuts, a falling pound, personal and company bankruptcies. And Britain, compared with other countries, is in deep economic trouble, with a unique combination of a bust housing boom, a consumer credit bubble, an economy based on financial services and an overspending government with the motto of 'debt, debt, debt'.<sup>1</sup> And in a pre-election year, both government and opposition are concealing the hard choices and hoping for a return to business as usual, rather than making a thorough evaluation of why things went wrong.

However, this crisis offers an opportunity to remake society – a wake-up call that invites the questions, 'What social future do we want?' and 'How can we create a sustainable society for people and planet?'

Some people want a 'business as usual' social future. They want to kick-start the economy with tax cuts, printing money and bailing out the banks to get the economy booming again. Others want a Green New Deal, creating a low-carbon economy and doing more with less.



*Mutilated World by Ken Sprague*

The deep-green transition movement looks to a whole redesign of the way we live and work so as to cope with the challenge of peak oil through an energy descent. The British government wants a surveillance society to deal with rising terrorism, the anti-social individualism triggered by thirty years of 'selfish capitalism,' strikes from factory closures and social unrest from unemployment. However, the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen considers that real democracy is central to sustainable development if it is to work for all. And many people want to get on with building the social future where they are, whether this means developing more sustainable businesses, caring for the environment, renewing democracy or community development.



For those who want to get engaged practically, a first step is to analyse the causes of what is happening; secondly, decide what social future they want; and thirdly, to develop positive solutions that work. Examples of positive, practical solutions are anyway already emerging, whether it is an innovative social enterprise, conversation cafés, environmental improvement or renewed interest in allotments and the transition towns' movement. This book, whilst drawing on such solutions, offers perspective on 'work on the social future in progress'. Reflecting on some of the learning from the social future as this emerges can help clarify the context of our changing world, raise relevant questions and find some workable solutions that point the way ahead.

### **Box 1.1 Stroud co-op allotments**

Allotments are now so popular that many towns have as many people on the waiting list as they have allotments. People value growing good food along with the benefits of gardening, health and conviviality. The seven members of the informally organised Stroud co-op allotments make the most of their land by sharing work on a total of 4.5 allotments, which are formally held by individual members. Children join in. 'On Friday we work from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. with a coffee break around a fire to boil water for hot drinks in the winter. We have built a curved bench by our hut. We plan our crop list and rotation every year, so that we are harvesting something every week of the year. In autumn we preserve a lot of our produce to cover the following year's "hungry gap".'

*Source: Nick Weir*



It is good to engage practically with developing positive solutions; however, it is also vital to understand how we got here. One major cause of the various energy, credit, climate, poverty, food and democratic crunches we face is that much of our commons, our common wealth of shared resources such as land, water, culture, radio bandwidth, publicly owned utilities, and many public services such as water, have been enclosed, privatised and then sold back to us. James Robertson gives one helpful definition of the commons as 'common or shared resources'. These 'are resources whose value is due to Nature and to the activities and demands of society as a whole, and not to the efforts or skill of individual people or organisations.'<sup>2</sup> The story of the enclosure of common land in Britain is familiar; however, the enclosure of other commons has intensified over the last thirty years. This is an age of enclosure, of privatization, where our commons – whether the gifts of nature such as land, water, air, seeds, the human genome, or the commons resulting from human creativity – such as capital, the financial system, public assets, culture, health, education – have been made into commodities for sale on the market. Everything is now for sale. Just as the banks plundered our financial commons in a market-fundamentalist free-for-all, so some Westminster MPs took as much in the way of expenses as they could within their rules from our taxes. At the same time, a compliant parliament forgot it was their job to secure the common good. Parliament failed to preserve our common wealth, the family silver of, for example, our public utilities, from privatising Conservative and New Labour governments. MPs failed to scrutinise the corporate capture of government for private gain and so much else.<sup>3</sup>

So this book is about reclaiming our common wealth in order to help bring about a more free, equitable, mutual and sustainable society. Developing small-scale, positive solutions is a good start, but this needs resourcing, for example with affordable access to land for community-supported food growing. So I argue that it is vital to recognise that things like land and capital are commons: rights, not commodities. At worst, utter desolation and at best market failure results from treating, say, land as a commodity, as we see from the lack of affordable homes and one in nine households being in negative equity.

However, traditionally, much common wealth was stewarded by community-based organisations such as churches, charities and commons associations outside both the public sector of the government and the private business market sector. As 'the voluntary and community organisation sector' is now reinventing itself as 'civil society', new forms of communalising or mutualising assets such as community land trusts are emerging. (Community land trusteeship will be explored in Chapter 10, 'Land for People'.)

*Common Wealth* goes on to argue that, after thirty years of successive governments unleashing a neo-liberal capitalist society, the 'crunch' now gives space to think through the shape of our emerging society. For example, the current captive, corporate state can be replaced by a government that works for the common good; the economy can be freed from neo-liberal capitalism by developing an associative, fair trade economy; and public services such as education and health can be liberated from both state dominance and from commercialisation. So government,

business and civil society can rebuild common wealth, based on such guiding principles as freedom, equality, mutuality and sustainability. I argue that the wellbeing, wealth and resilience of society will be greater, the more we recognise the distinct, unique contributions of government, business and civil society, which embrace cultural, voluntary and community organisations. So, the more the principle of freedom informs civil society and culture, the more equality informs the state sector of human rights and the more that mutuality guides business and economic life, the more creative, just, democratic, healthy, the more resilient, will be our society.

I hope that the renewed understanding of the commons and of the emerging tripolar society of civil society, business and government will lead to limiting markets to the economic system and removing the recently imposed markets from the public, statutory sector and from the cultural and community sector. This would mean stopping the marketisation of the NHS and of education, for example. Professor Michael Sandell, in his 2009 Reith Lectures, also invites people to rethink the moral limits to markets, as the free market triumphalism of the last thirty years has now been replaced by market scepticism. There is much hope, he says, for cultural, moral and civil renewal, in working for the public good.

I also aim to offer people interested in co-creating their desired social future some practical solutions and tools for change. These tools include useful social maps for analysis, strategic planning tools and practical partnership-building resources for making the transition to a more sustainable, creative and just society, a transition from capitalist to civil society. Such partnerships can focus on a variety of themes such as improving energy use, transport, housing, health or education. Anyone who wants to get engaged – business leaders, political leaders, government officials, civil society/community activists and facilitators – will find the tools and maps useful.

But what led to this analysis of common wealth and the need for a new understanding of the need for civil, not capitalist society? Firstly, I wrote to the *Guardian* about the credit crunch. When the Stroud Conservative parliamentary candidate then told me on the street that ‘Your *Guardian* letter was wrong – it’s not a meltdown of the financial system, it’s only a correction’, I retorted, ‘Wake up! We face a major crisis!’

Some media space has since been given to discussing the ‘new politics’, economic analysis and how companies have been avoiding tax. But too little space has been given to more fundamental social analysis and the emerging practical solutions – hence this book.

The second reason for writing *Common Wealth* is that the corporate media and government give little space for the inspiring, practical solutions that can help rebuild our democracy, economy and way of life. The emerging alternatives are below the radar of both government and the media. This is not surprising. The corporate financial, business, media and political elites that control the current failing system both created it and still profit from it. Like Stroud’s Conservative parliamentary candidate, they are in denial, hoping things can be patched up for business as usual. But they are not reflecting and doing things differently. They are still looking in the rear-view mirror for guidance. But as Einstein once said, ‘We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.’

For example, soon after the HBOS and Bradford and Bingley banks went bust in September 2008, partly from short selling, the FSA banned the short selling of shares. This is where speculators borrow shares they do not own in order to buy them later at a cheaper price. The ban was lifted by the FSA on Friday 16 January 2009. Chancellor Alistair Darling, who thought the ban should stay in force, was given an hour’s notice of the end of the ban. Barclays Bank then lost 25 per cent of its share value in frenzied trading. The defensive Lord Turner, the new FSA chair, said that abusive short selling was not playing a major role in the Barclays’ share meltdown. However, the hedge fund Lansdown Partners, who also bet on Northern Rock’s crash, made a profit of £12 million from short selling Barclays.<sup>4</sup> Lansdown also help fund the Tory Party. One wonders how much political and financial elites actually care for the common wealth and wellbeing of ordinary people.

Thirdly, it is not just the financial meltdown that has triggered *Common Wealth*. We face destructive forces, locally, nationally and globally. Christmas 2008 saw the brutal assault on Gaza by the Israeli Army, professing to target Hamas soldiers whilst killing and injuring children and civilians. The Israeli Army, government and mainstream media vilified some young Israeli soldiers who told their Gaza stories factually, for example how they were ordered to shoot anyone on sight. The destructive forces of war, nationalism and terrorism are easy to unleash but hard to stop. We saw this in the 1990s with the Yugoslav civil war and the ensuing break-up into nationalist states:- what my wife, Judith Large, called *The War Next*

#### **Box 1.2 Letter to the Guardian, 19 September 2008**

Dear Editor,

Capitalism is imploding with the credit crunch, just as communism fell with the Berlin Wall in 1989, with both systems morally bankrupt. Successive British governments have sold off public assets and utilities at knock-down prices, leaving us defenseless against massive energy price increases. Politicians have engineered a disastrous housing boom and bust, with parliament allowing Blair/Brown and Bush their murderous \$3 trillion Iraq war.

And now corporate socialism is being extended by Prime Minister Brown at vast taxpayer expense to the predatory city bankers whose only value is that ‘greed is good’, even whilst the same bankers are destroying HBOS through speculative short selling. This is a defining historic moment with the collapse of light-touch, laissez-faire turbo capitalism.

So how can we the people reassert democratic power over our elitist parliamentary shamocracy? Reclaim a people’s banking sector that serves society? And will your newspaper give space to inspiring and practical solutions that will help re-vision our democracy, economy and way of life?

Martin Large

*Door.*<sup>5</sup> The British government continues to wage wars, including the Iraq War, which has cost up to a million Iraqi lives, 3 million refugees and the deaths of 179 British soldiers. British soldiers are still fighting in Afghanistan with to date over 200 deaths and 1000 injured. Given the destructive forces we face, which can so easily be mobilised by rabble-rousing politicians and the corporate media who want to divert attention away from domestic problems, this book is about taking constructive action to build a human-friendly society with a more resilient democracy, economy and culture. Better to light candles than curse the darkness, as the old saying goes.

The need for this constructive approach was vividly brought home to me when I was working as a facilitator in post-civil-war Croatia in 1997 with the Osijek-based Zentar za Mir or Centre for Peace. I was working near the devastated town of Vukovar, where Serb militias had massacred several hundred Croatians at the hospital in the recent civil war. I vividly remember driving past the ruined high school and church of my translator, Tanya, and my feelings of shock at her stories. Vukovar was a ghost town with several miles of shot-up buildings along the road, evoking the worst pictures of bombed-out cities from the end of the Second World War.

I was working with thirty-five members of newly forming ‘peace teams’ that would provide human rights support, legal advice and community development in the civil-war-torn areas bordering on Bosnia and Serbia. We were staying at an old, castle-like hotel overlooking the Danube, which was partly blocked by a wrecked ship. There was the occasional sound of gunfire at night. Participants of all ages came from former Yugoslav backgrounds – a patchwork of vibrant, positive people who had tough, harrowing stories to tell. When they were prioritising strategic tasks, I suggested, ‘Don’t try to do too much, too soon; after all, Rome wasn’t built in a day.’ Tanya muttered to me bitterly, ‘Yes, but it was destroyed in a day, like Vukovar. It is much easier to destroy than to create.’

So when apologists for the current financial meltdown glibly talk about the inevitability of capitalist cycles of creative destruction, I remember Tanya’s words, ‘It is much easier to destroy than to create!’ Think of the costs of this neo-liberal capitalist destruction. Who loses and who benefits?

However, constructive action to help build a more sustainable society, like the work of the Zentar za Mir peace teams, has significant positive results. As a result of my first Croatian visit, I returned to work for the peace teams on a new arts centre, Roma community development, a Bosnian human rights centre and a youth centre for Vucovar. One young member of the original peace teams had even been elected to the new Croat parliament in Zagreb as a social democrat.

The fourth reason for writing *Common Wealth* is to show how a rebalancing of business, government and civil society is happening. There is a growing global and local civil-society-led movement working practically for a more sustainable planet, a movement of movements that works to counter the destructive forces of war, the climate and credit crunches and much more. This work goes largely unreported, though President Obama, as a former community organiser, knows about the huge potential of ‘we, the people’ to remake the world, in partnership with government and business.

So, the purpose of this book is to nurture the seeds of change. It will show how individuals, companies, communities and government can develop a more resilient society in our workplaces and communities. The social future is already visible.

## Seed questions

We face the credit, climate, peak oil and food crunches, just to mention a few pressing issues. How do we collaborate to resolve such complex challenges? *Common Wealth* analyses how we got to here and suggests what we can do about it.

My strategic planning work with people in companies, government and communities was one key trigger for writing this book. Whether it was the Post Office or the Croatian peace teams, people kept coming up with strikingly similar key questions about their desired social future. Colleagues around the planet noticed the same questions coming up.

This is how questions can come up, for example in strategic planning workshops. As the first step, participants describe all the changes in the wider world over the last few years that strike them as novel or significant. They then describe, firstly, what the world will be like in five years’ time if all the trends they identify continue *without anyone doing anything*, and, secondly, they describe the future in seven years if *people work hard to make a difference*. The contrast between the desirable and the probable futures of the world are so striking that people get fired up to then make a plan for the future of an issue, their community, company or organisation. This dialogue creates the space for people to analyse and wake up to what is happening in the wider world as well as in their organisational or community contexts and to explore what they really want.

When then asked to discuss the desired future scenarios and to formulate the significant points arising, the following seed questions frequently come up:

- How can we build a more efficient, collaborative, sustainable, resilient economy that meets people’s needs and respects the planet’s carrying capacity?
- How are we building a more peaceful, democratic, just and equitable society?
- How are we enabling all human beings to reach their full spiritual, creative, social and physical potential?
- How are we creating a more beautiful world and environment? How are we caring for the earth and all its living beings?

Help with tackling the above seed questions that people are asking can only start here, using a few transformational action points. Readers of course will know what is most pressing in their community, company or organisation, and will decide their own entry points.

## Who will find this book useful?

This book is for anyone wanting to make a difference in their community, company or organisation in enabling the transition to a more creative, just and sustainable society. It offers strategic planning tools and processes for transformation. Business leaders will find the book useful not just for their own company success,

but also for mapping how to collaborate more effectively for mutual benefit with government and civil society over pressing questions. Successful businesses have an enlightened self-interest in supporting a more sustainable society. Civil society activists and cultural and community leaders will see how their initiatives and advocacy can complement the work of government and companies. Politicians and civil servants will be able to re-imagine their role as the heart of society rather than as bureaucratic controllers. This book is for those who want to build practical social futures wherever they are, and who find this more motivating than getting depressed just talking about problems and what 'they' should do.

### **Entry points for transformational change**

Take housing as one practical entry point. The causes of the lack of affordable housing in Britain can be identified as housing market failure, a dysfunctional financial system, successive governments that deliberately created the conditions for a house-price bubble in order to engineer 'economic growth' and the treating of land as a market commodity rather than a socially shared 'commons' like the air. This analysis, outlined in more depth in Chapter 10, *Land for People*, leads to tried and tested workable solutions such as a land value tax and developing community land trusts for urban neighbourhoods, towns and villages for permanently affordable access to homes, workspace, land for food growing and community facilities. The transformative action of treating land as a right, as a common wealth for us all, redraws the boundaries so that land is no longer a commodity as understood by neo-liberal economics. Other entry points will include treating capital as common wealth, liberating work through the citizen's income and freeing education from capture by the state.

This book will also describe the 'big picture' of the social, economic and political landscape as a strategic change map to help business, civil society and political leaders chart their organisations' courses in a turbulent world. The reason for offering this social map is that we are in a social, environmental, political and economic crisis caused by a runaway capitalist system, fully unleashed since the end of communism in 1989. It could be that just as the morally bankrupt communist system collapsed in 1989, the current system of neo-liberal capitalism is now collapsing step by step with a self-destroying, debtonating financial system. The state cannot take on any more banking failures, let alone the toxic unsecured debts of trillions of dollars in the shadow banking system. Just as the 1929 Wall Street Crash and ensuing Depression showed how a ruling political and economic system dominated by the 'masters of the universe' in Wall Street and the City of London destroyed itself, we are now facing a systemic breakdown over a few years. But no one really knows the timetable.

I argue that society has come to be dominated by the corporate business and financial sector, with a captive state that secures citizen compliance and channels increasing amounts of our taxes to the corporations for delivering ever more costly and less effective services. For example, consider how successive British governments have handed over low-priced publicly owned energy utilities to corporations, allowing them to charge above-inflation price increases for energy

and then get away with windfall profits. Or consider how much public money has been used to support the banks with shares and loans, and how much risk the taxpayers have taken on by insuring the toxic debts of banks.

However, the argument goes further, advocating that it is now time to separate the corporate business sector from the state and balance both with a dynamic, emerging new societal partner variously called 'civil society', 'the community' or the 'cultural sector'. News broadcasts covering disasters now commonly announce that 'Government, civil society and business are working together to bring relief.' I will argue that the civil society or community sector is emerging as a leading body of a 'third societal sector' to challenge and counterbalance the dominance of the business and government sectors. Civil society led in the 1989 toppling of the Berlin Wall, the 1999 'Battle of Seattle', the 2003 global opposition to the Iraq War and the 1 April 2009 G20 'Financial Fool's Day'. Civil society organisations at Seattle challenged the cosy collusion between the business and government sectors as represented by the World Trade Organization, which was then bidding for world economic dictatorship. Civil society organisations or CSOs are advocating democracy, social justice and holistic sustainable development. Environmental CSOs and consumers are pressing the supermarkets to start a green conversion, to set environmental standards far higher than governments set for themselves. For example, to become carbon neutral, to stop sending waste to landfill and to stop selling paper, wood or fish that does not come from sustainable sources.

### **Business, government and civil society: partners for sustainable development**

Society can be likened to a three-legged stool whose legs are government, business and civil society. If each sector focuses on its strengths and engages appropriately in dialogue and partnerships with the other two sectors then there can be social renewal and effective practical action.

Conversely, when business, the state and civil society overstep their appropriate boundaries, society suffers. For example, the state is held captive by business when the large supermarkets bully governments to set industry-friendly standards, get planning permission to build in green belts and drive small shops out of business so that we get 'ghost town Britain'. When the state allows the commoditisation and selling of the commons, such as land, water, air and natural resources, then people no longer have affordable access. When business commercialises the cultural space of civil society, we see health and education treated as profit-making businesses. When the public sector runs businesses or civil society organisations there is the danger of red tape, waste and bureaucracy.

### **Clarifying boundaries**

Each sector will be able to contribute more effectively to the common good by clarifying boundaries between business, the public sector and civil society. There is currently much confusion; for example the government treats health as if it were only a business, with patients as consumers. The clarification of society's threefold boundaries leads to a separation of powers and of governance. This separation in

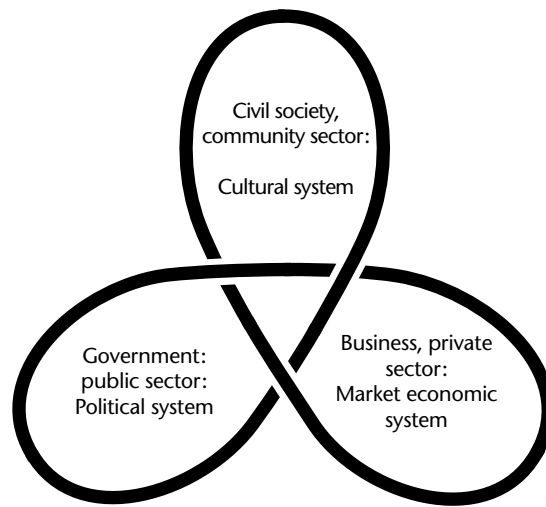


Figure 1.1 The three sectors: government, business and civil society

society as a whole could become as useful a piece of social architecture as James Madison's separation of statutory powers between the legislature, executive government and judiciary in the US Constitution of 1787.

Fortunately, people have a practical sense of the differences between the state, business and civil society in everyday life. People have a gut feeling that citizenship is not a commodity that should be 'bought', that the content of education should not be politically decided and that religion is a private, not a state affair, for example.

The separation of powers between state, business and civil society results in a new guiding principle:

The well-being, wealth and resilience of society will be greater, the more the separation of the three societal sectors is recognised. So, the more that freedom informs civil society and the cultural sector, the more equality informs the state sector with its rights and responsibilities, and the more that mutuality guides business and economic life – the more creative, just, democratic, healthier, the more resilient, our society.<sup>6</sup>

It is all very well to argue for such high principles as a society based on freedom, equality, mutuality and sustainability, but what are the *practical* benefits of this threefold analysis of society? I will argue that the recognition of the appropriate boundaries and positive contributions of state, civil society and business will result in such practical outcomes as:

- identifying ways the three sectors can work together for holistic sustainable development, so that we can live much better on much less and tackle hitherto intractable challenges;

- reclaiming the dignity of labour through the citizen's basic income, so that people can be freed for real work and social contribution;
- recapturing capital for social benefit and respecting individual enterprise;
- reclaiming land and capital as common wealth, so that they are no longer commodities traded on the market but are held in trust for common benefits – including permanently affordable homes, farms and capital for enterprise;
- freeing human potential, for example by the state again becoming a partner rather than a provider of public services such as the arts, health and education.

One danger is to cover too much. This is not a book that is 95 per cent critique with 5 per cent solutions at the end. I will focus on analysis, on identifying principles for social renewal and suggesting a few practical, transformational entry points for action.

You may not really understand a system until you try to change it. For example, I have learned a huge amount about Britain's farmland ownership system through carrying out a community farmland trust action research project that has resulted in setting up a number of successful farmland trusts.<sup>7</sup> One striking thing I learned was that around 70 per cent of British land is owned by only 157,000 landowners, and that 10 per cent of Britain is still owned by descendants of the Plantagenets who benefited from William the Conqueror's 1066 land-grab!

I hope this book will help you with maps and some guiding theory for the journey. Theory without practice or experience is useless, and practice without theory can be dangerous, because you don't understand the underlying principles, only the recipes. You have the know-how, but not necessarily the 'know-why'.

## What will be covered?

### Part 1 Remaking society

1. What social future do we want?
2. Remaking society
3. Tripolar society: government, business and civil society

### Part 2 From capitalist to civil society

4. The emergence of civil society
5. Capturing the state
6. Capturing culture
7. Capitalism unleashed: the seizure of common wealth

### Part 3 Redrawing boundaries

8. Transforming capitalism
9. The citizen's income
10. Land for people, homes and communities
11. Freeing education
12. Common wealth: leading from the social future as it emerges



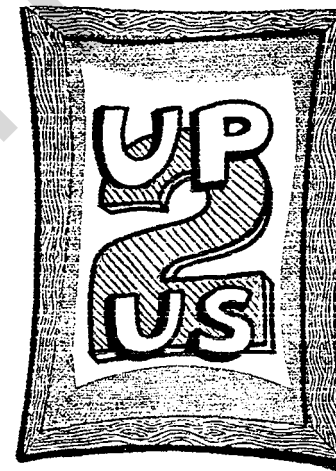
## How to best use this book

The book is structured so that it can be dipped into, as well as read straight through. Diagrams and pictures tell one story. Boxes offer solutions, stories and examples. Part 1 describes the new social landscape of the three societal powers, as an alternative to the bipolar state- and business-dominated society now collapsing. Some readers will want to focus on the practical applications of threefold analysis such as transforming capitalism, land and labour in Part 3. People concerned with strategic community, business or governmental planning will be interested in the partnership-building and planning tools and participative design tools for organisation redesign in Chapter 12 and Appendix 1. Part 2, on the move from capitalist to civil society, offers a political, economic and cultural analysis of how we got here. It offers an analysis of neo-liberalism, which threatens to destroy the planet, business and the community as well as undermine individual wellbeing through affluenza. It culminates in a summary table comparing tripolar society with neo-liberal society. There are follow-up resources in the Appendices, as well as a glossary and index.

The first question to address is, 'How is it that more and more people want to make a difference?'

## Chapter 2

### Remaking Society



*Stroud community  
planning motto*

Just as the power of old social structures fades, more and more people want to make a difference – to their communities, workplaces and the planet. The global breakdown of old social, economic and cultural forms is creating the conditions for individual initiative and agency. This marks a historic shift in human development from dependency on traditional social structures where *'they* should do something', to emerging social movements where people take action to make a difference. The 'more people want to make a difference' virus is spreading globally with travel, the Internet, business and the rise of global civil society. For example, I heard a West Papuan elder give an inspiring talk about the indigenous independence movement's struggle with Indonesia and the mining corporations, with two young filmmakers who had

risked their lives to make an undercover film there. President Obama is another example. He worked as a community organiser for three years on Chicago's South Side, and then went into law and politics.

The aim of this chapter is to describe this seismic shift from a more collective consciousness formed by gender, class, work or ethnicity to an individual consciousness emancipated from traditional roles. Without wanting to recap twentieth-century history, the taking of refuge in outdated collective identities, such as nationalism or religious fundamentalism, can be seen as an expression of a fear of freedom in a bewildering world of rapid change. The current historic shift from collective consciousness to more self-aware, responsible individuals points a way