

# A vision for an ecocentric society and how to get there

The survival of society may depend upon it becoming governed by the nature of its host bioregions, as occurred in pre-modern times with Australian Aboriginals.

The three most important requirements for establishing a decentralized, locally governed ecocentric society are to:

- 1 adopt a framework of ecological property rights for land, buildings, enterprises and money;
- 2 adopt an ecological form of 'network governance' as was practised in pre-modern societies, and as re-invented in stakeholder-controlled entities;
- 3 encourage a decline in the global population through education and through providing universal basic incomes (UBIs) to remove the need for children to provide care and income for citizens.

These three requirements are mutually reinforcing. Ecological property rights create a way to provide citizens with income-producing assets to fund UBIs and in turn facilitate degrowth. Property rights become ecological, I contend, when rules of ownership adopt the 'use it or lose it' processes that emerge in squatter settlements, for instance (Turnbull, 1983). Ecological governance arises when network-governed social organizations introduce distributed decision-making to create distributed intelligences, enabling a comprehensive management of complexity. The John Lewis Partnership is an example of this, as are ants and bees who collectively decide where, when and how to construct and maintain their complex dwellings. Ecological governance would insure that income was: (a) appropriately distributed; and (b) not captured by the greedy.

Ecological property rights would counter inequality in three ways that economists generally neglect. These are: (i) overpayment of investors in a way not reported by accountants; (ii) windfall gains in urban land created by public investment and by others; and (iii) interest paid on money.

Tax incentives can be used to divert overpayments of investors to stakeholders and others to fund a 'community dividend' or UBI (Turnbull, 2015). Bottom-up decision-making with citizen referendums can provide a way to democratize the wealth of cities from self-financing infrastructure investment (Turnbull, 2017). It requires all windfall gains to be captured by a suburban real estate investment trust owned only by resident voters to eliminate the cost of land for commercial investors and homeowners. This was illustrated by the case of First Garden City Limited, which financed the town of Letchworth, 35 miles north of London in the UK (Purdum, 1913). As land is typically half the price of a dwelling, such self-financing would halve the cost of new homes to generate a virtuous self-reinforcing sustainable process.

Money that has a negative interest rate is ecological because it follows the 'use it or lose it' rule. It would avoid inequality generated from the unfair process of money being able to make more money through earning interest. Ecological money would be highly attractive. It would reduce the current excessive costs of the financial system by eliminating bank and credit card transaction fees. These are ten times greater than the costs of privately issued negative interest rate money used during the Great Depression (Turnbull, 2016). Ecological money would not carry out the conventional roles of money to be a store of value or a unit of value. It would simply become a medium

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“An ecocentric society would enrich democracy with a more humanistic mix of governance mechanisms.”

of exchange to avoid the inconvenience of barter. A stable index of value should be established independently of the financial system. Real assets, mortgages and equities would provide stores of value.

There are a number of other ways of allocating resources than using markets. These include families, clans, tribes, communities, associations, networks and hierarchies in the private and government sectors. An ecocentric society would enrich democracy with a more humanistic mix of governance mechanisms. A more detailed outline of this vision and how to get there is presented in Turnbull (2015). ■

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Details from Pani

by Daksha Patel

Higher-resolution versions: <https://is.gd/ecoartwork>

**About the artwork:** *Pani*, a word for water in many South Asian countries, is a new commission for the Horniman Museum, London, UK (2017). The large print merges satellite imagery of coastal planes with drawings of flora and fauna partly hidden in the landscape (they are literally disappearing as a result of water pollution) and traces of embroidery. The colours and threads evoke craft traditions of the region, and they are sewn into the map, suggesting the interconnections between nature and culture: the loss of natural habitat is also a loss to the fabric of human culture. A group of terracotta pots are displayed next to the print, their designs based upon traditional water carrying vessels. Here they are misshapen and deformed, with drawings of chemical pollutants etched into the clay.

