



Networks

The social, technological, environmental and consumption practices that are most environmentally sustainable cannot sustain capitalism. So, what kind of social principles, values and relations would best support a more environmentally sustainable society and planet?

Compacts and networks

Compacts and networks offer viable forms for people to take and share direct power. Compacts, meaning formal agreements between individuals and groups to support all kinds of activities, including collective production and spheres of exchange, would be organised locally and in local-to-local networks. Planning and distribution would be facilitated using electronic communication, which would link households with neighbourhood precincts and broader, sub-bioregional communities and bioregional networks. Networks refer to the internal communications and relations between members within compacts as well as external connections comprising further compacts and other kinds of relations supporting compacts. For instance, a household would be organised by way of a compact which, in turn, would be a member of other compacts specifically formed to sustain the household and to facilitate its members to sustain other people within their neighbourhood comprising people and the local natural and built environment.

Once appropriate principles and values have the force of common rights and normal responsibilities, compacts and networks have the potential to constitute societies alternative to capitalist ones. Currently capitalist practices do not directly fulfil, rather in many ways contradict, universal human rights to basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, safety and care. Every activity involves monetary considerations at some level, shackling direct and sensible responses to human and environmental needs. Non-monetary compacts and networks would work directly with available human skills and effort, and energy and materials assessed in terms of their use-values. Every human being would have a right to basic needs and would be a member of compacts designed to fulfil those needs at the same time as belonging to networks that would make them responsible for fulfilling other people's basic needs and care for the local environment.

Even within capitalism people have experiences of techniques for sharing power to create products and services within families, collectives, cooperatives, and state and

community-based voluntary organisations. Certain public media bodies, emergency organisations based on volunteers and private charitable organisations demonstrate that people are very capable of developing and delivering high-quality and diverse products and services to cater for special interests as well as general consumption. Currently such practices are limited and frustrated by market-based and market-oriented activities, money raising being a common concern and distraction from, as well as obstacle to, good works. Volunteers often feel 'used' and tensions arise with salaried members of such organisations. In the transition to the vision of a compact society these organisations would benefit from interlocking support networks with similar organisations, developing compacts that involve the production of goods and services directly for one another in fair exchanges, sharing skills and knowledge, and passing on of surpluses, unused resources, 'waste' for re-use and so on.

Compacts and networks would be diverse, fulfilling a variety of purposes for numerous members. As basic ways of organising, formal compacts would offer robust and stable forms for local to global organisation of all kinds of activities, from those directed at fulfilling basic needs and wants to cultural and recreational ones. The principles of simplicity, local, and small would guide efficient and effective techniques for fulfilling basic needs to ensure more socially and environmentally friendly developments all over our planet. Permaculture and alternative, appropriate, technologies for generating energy and extracting and processing resources offer ready-made and trialled ways to proceed.

Sustainability requires that exchanges involving energy-intensive transport are reduced to a minimum. Therefore self-sufficiency and collective sufficiency must be the main aims of local organisations of environmentally sustainable units, comprising households within catchment areas based on bioregional rationalities. People would need to re-settle according to the natural opportunities and limits of local and regional environments. Even so, place-based living would allow for mobility outside local groups, especially for members with skills and knowledge to share with others. Formal spheres of non-monetary exchange have always relied on customary rights and responsibilities with local and personal variations associated with social and environmental circumstances and developments. Non-monetary exchange will involve compacts and networks that allow groups access to basic needs and wants from outside the local area when necessary.

Non-monetary spheres of exchange

Production for use and non-monetary exchange has structured political and cultural relations in non-capitalist societies – such as Indigenous, feudal, slave and tribute-based economies – as well as activities within and between households and larger social groups and networks, such as families and certain cooperatives, within capitalist systems. Production for use and non-monetary exchange has facilitated traditional 'gift economies' as well as expansive and impressive civilisations such as the Inca and Aztec societies.

Studies of non-capitalist societies have regularly revealed spheres of exchange involving specific goods and exchange protocols. For example, in areas without a natural source, salt or a useful metal might be provided in a continuous and reliable way in exchange for another natural product or craftwork, all by way of an established customary arrangement. Complicated mixtures of environmental and

social rationalities have underlain the principles, protocols and rules of such exchange. Rules about what and how much is gifted or bartered is logically linked with reproducing certain social relations and with environmental balances deemed necessary by those creating the rules. However, an important characteristic of traditional exchange is that, excepting for the case of women and slaves, it did not involve means of production such as land and other broad-scale conditions or major tools of production. Social groups owned natural resources through customary patterns of relations, such as inheritance, or invasions. Traditional trade too concentrated on luxury goods, craftwork and precious resources or materials.

The rise of market-based societies not only dissolved customs associated with non-monetary exchange but sometimes also replicated them. However, more often than not, trade destroyed traditional relations and institutions and created new forms of social relations and political structures. These capitalist forms of production and monetary exchange instituted processes characterised by a specific, monetary, rationality irrespective of the social and natural potential and limits of the local people and their country. The incapacity of capitalist production and monetary trade to address people's real wants and to incorporate and develop their real abilities as well its failure to optimise the use of nature in sustainable ways has meant that capitalist practices cannot meet current challenges for the planet and its peoples. We will not go back to old ways but we do know that we can develop new ways that have antecedents and that, from an historical point of view, capitalism has been 'the odd man out'.

For centuries, historians, geographers, and social and political scientists have critiqued the environmental and social results of the activities of capitalist 'developers', not simply as individuals but mainly in terms of their collective impact as a group of market-oriented actors. These critiques apprehend the world in scientific terms of simple use-values and contextualise history as one of a series of possible scenarios for humans to exist in and alter the landscapes they inhabit. Even though such critics have been neither radical nor Marxian, they have often pointed to more socially and environmentally beneficial possibilities that conflict with the drivers of capitalism, production for market exchange, profit and accumulation. Now is the time for us to drop our capitalist roles and not only perceive the world according to its use-values but also to manage it directly in terms of use-values, implementing techniques for production and exchange that embody simple, universal social and environmental values, nurturing human wellbeing and the continuity of a living planet.

Today non-monetary spheres of exchange offer a model to rationalise production and exchange in ways that respect and enhance social relations and ecological values. The deficiencies of local collective self-sufficiency and production for direct use-values can be overcome through low levels of exchange enabled by e-communication, negotiated on terms specific to the potential and limits of the peoples and landscapes in question. Thus spheres of exchange would be minimal and formal and either of mutual advantage to two exchanging individuals or communities or involve multilateral benefits to multiple individuals or communities.

Networks of exchange involving goods and services can be established and dissolved according to compacts involving wants and abilities. These networks would involve formal compacts dealing with use-values and negotiated in terms deemed fair by a diversity of models developed through local experiment and evolving into planetary

customs. Agreements would be formalised and dissolved by official independent mediating parties. Most importantly these exchange networks would complement communities living simply on production for direct use-values, exercising independence as well as benefiting from efficiencies evolving from collective self-sufficiency, by offering complementary and supplementary goods and services in exchange for the same.

Local collective sufficiency

To achieve local collective sufficiency, inhabitants will have use-rights and responsibilities for the catchment landscapes that substantially support them. Local, community-based forms of living, producing and exchanging that emphasise communal sufficiency are the most environmentally friendly because they minimise energy and resources otherwise wasted on transport and economise through providing directly for most daily needs.

In as much as local regions develop in communally sufficient ways they are socially and environmentally semi-autonomous, robust and resilient. Communal sufficiency overcomes limitations of self-sufficiency by economising on effort and by making use of economies of scale through the use of resources, including energy. Subsistence activities include collecting, growing, harvesting, storing and preserving foods in as environmentally friendly ways as possible, exercising principles such as those developed by permaculture and the slow-food movement.

A whole person exercises skills and develops knowledge in a range of activities. The compact society would nurture people and be nurtured by people who had a range of skills and applied them regularly in various ways, namely: subsistence, sharing, caring, learning and teaching. Work time would be divided between these activities so that, ideally, every person would participate, say one day a week, in production and exchange of the provision of subsistence goods and services, including: food; clothing; houses; furniture; equipment and buildings for households and neighbourhoods; and all the goods and services involved with electronic communications. Another day would be spent in caring activities: caring for children, sick and aged people, in a range of duties, including exercising the skills of 'barefoot doctors', complemented by highly skilled practitioners. Yet another day would be spent on decision-making and communicating with compact partners and in the activities of networks.

All these activities would involve training on the job and learning in specific places would be restricted to intensive skills and knowledge acquisition such as those involved with learning to read, write and exercise basic arithmetic skills. Thus continuous training would characterise compact communities. Another day would be spent on cultural and recreational activities, in which people would participate both as creators and enjoyers. It is unlikely that, once established, living in a compact society would require more than devoting the equivalent of three days or 20 hours per week work from all. People would be free to offer more time in such activities and to spend time travelling by foot, or helping transport goods, for a range of purposes.

Spheres of production and exchange would focus on the local, regional and global. These spheres would follow ecological as well as social rationales with local

economies based on the scale of catchments, along bioregional lines. Households would develop, say bi-annually, lists of basic needs and work out to what extent they could fulfil their needs through self-sufficiency, such as through their household gardens, kitchen baking, preserving and storing, and milk, meat and other products from domesticated animals, including fowls and goats. Households would grow and create according to appropriate principles and technology, such as prioritising indigenous vegetation and animals, and sustainable practices infused with permaculture approaches.

Neighbourhood farming and industrial facilities would complement the needs of households and provide workspaces for householders to exercise a wider sphere of activities related to collective sufficiency. Each neighbourhood would identify potential specific to their landscape for easily producing surpluses that met deficiencies in other neighbourhoods, or offering use-rights for specific purposes to their pockets of forest or marine areas for other local neighbourhoods to meet their subsistence needs. Neighbourhood audits would estimate production to account for accidental shortfalls and unpredictable losses but also coordinate with wider catchment-based networks so that such surpluses could act as a wider safety store to avoid waste.

Compacts and network lore

Explicit and formal compacts on production and the exchange of products as well as other social activities imply a network of agents who create, comply with and receive benefits from such compacts. These compacts would be similar to contracts but would not involve money, as contracts often do in capitalism. Compacts would only deal in use-values and the needs, capabilities and wants of the parties participating in the compact. Their formalisation would involve the engagement of an independent mediator responsible for ensuring proper conduct in making the compact and the negotiation of all details through the life of the compact, including compliance with and changes to the compact.

Short-term compacts between two parties might appear like barter or promises in use-values. Perhaps neighbourhoods or even more distantly placed communities would make a compact for an exchange that involved passing over surpluses to fulfil unexpectedly unmet needs in return for supplying crafted goods or art services now or at a specific time in the near or medium-term future. Long-term compacts between peoples, to provide one another with wants that neither can produce themselves, might well involve multilateral, not simply bilateral, exchange. Bioregions would negotiate with other bioregions to exchange, say seafood for indigenous forest nuts or animal meats, in particular seasons of the year or even all the year round. The compacts would involve deliberations over transport of goods.

Collective self-sufficiency implies personal and collective attachments to and deep respect for environmental birthplaces and migration-places and familial, household and neighbourhood bonds recognised and celebrated in a variety of cultural ways. Despite place-centred polities and sufficiency, compacts would allow people mobility for visiting and changing living spaces, as such, acting as citizens of the world. Attachment to spaces and landscapes would involve livelihood responsibilities and rights, protected by global compacts outlining basic principles, rights and responsibilities for humankind the world over, but also flexibly managed to take

account of changed natural and social circumstances. Thus living simply would not focus on simply living but on establishing and maintaining a holistic sense of security and wellbeing for all.

A person would make their life journey as an individual who accumulated skills, capabilities, experience and knowledge. Singular self-sufficiency and independence are impossible. Developing social and physical powers would be aspects of personal journeys as people grew in households, the responsibility of their natural parents and kin-parents charged to care for them. Households would comprise backgrounds and histories of all those people grouped under one roof, sharing their living space as a place to shelter, eat and socialise. Personal space, a room of one's own, and personal belongings would be universally established and protected rights.

Groups of households would make up larger neighbourhood precinct units, the size of which would be determined by environmental as well as social rationales, the particular sufficiency enabled by areas of landscape within which they lived and were sustained. The collectively sufficient-as-possible neighbourhood community would exist in balance and in regular contact with similar neighbouring groups, in order to exchange and share cultural and material surpluses and challenges with them as well as with more distant communities, all participating in numerous webs of compacts, networks.

While compacts would involve specific aims and outcomes, and might often have a temporary character, networks would exist as continuous relational channels of communication and interaction, fulfilling purposes of sharing information, mutual support, and guiding and protecting universal rights of individuals, communities and environmental landscapes. These networks would involve political compacts of the broadest nature, co-production of a limited number of goods and services most easily and efficiently created for multiple communities, such as research and learning on macro scales related to both environmental and social phenomena and developments, transfers of technical skills and knowledge and the managing the very electronic communications systems that would support networks and compacts.

Transition

The transition to a world without money – which is only to say that the conditions are laid for humans to establish communities based on social justice and environmental sustainability – would be created by, on the one hand, diminishing production and exchange based on a monetary, capitalist rationale and, on the other hand, progressively taking over production and exchange using non-monetary compacts. Already many communities the world over, such as Indigenous and peasant communities existing at the margins of capitalism, would have rights and responsibilities for traditionally occupied country acknowledged. At the same time they would be required to recognise sharing of country and resources through non-monetary compacts where appropriate.

Non-monetary production and exchange has already existed within, despite, and at the margins of monetary exchanges that dominate capitalism as well as proliferating in non-capitalist societies where non-monetary exchanges have enabled the sharing of responsibilities for production and distribution and redistribution of goods. The transition would focus on cutting and more evenly distributing work for wages,

depriving the market of labour to rely more and more on non-monetary production and exchange. Non-monetary exchange can complement social and political practices in communities where sharing power in making decisions over production and distribution is transparent and, as such, has the potential to be more reliable than in capitalism.

This spare vision of a global compact society comprising local compact communities indicates the basic processes, i.e. compacts and networks, sufficient to establish political structures to organise the planet, from local to global spheres, on the basis of the principles of social justice and environmental sustainability. At the same time it indicates the strategies necessary to achieve this vision: the conscientious avoidance of monetary rationale in restructuring organisations and activities on the **Left** and a focus on restructuring production and exchange to fulfil needs and wants related to social justice and in accordance with environmental sustainability. (See **Governance**.) This common vision clarifies both the necessary and sufficient principles and strategies for co-ordinating, expanding and amplifying efforts towards instituting local compact communities and a global compact society. Our defence is entirely ethical: the institution of substantive democracy for human wellbeing and the protection of a living planet.



Anitra Nelson, 10 April 2008: www.moneyfreezone.info