

## **Why the village is the solution to the polycrisis.**

9.10.2025

8978 w

Most of the major global problems are primarily due to the fact that far too much producing and consuming is going on. This cannot be reduced to sustainable levels unless we achieve extreme “degrowth”. It is argued that this cannot be done unless most people live frugally in small highly self-sufficient and cooperative villages. This article points to the benefits of this social form and explains how it defuses global problems while improving the quality of life.

Firstly the reasons for these context-setting claims will be outlined.

### **The global situation.**

The present industrial-affluent-consumer society is grossly unjust and unsustainable, It is far beyond levels of resource use, environmental impacts, “living standards”, and GDP that can be kept up for long let alone spread to all people. These will probably have to be reduced by more than 70%. This over-consumption is the fundamental cause of the major global problems such as resource depletion, environmental destruction, the deprivation of billions of people especially in poor countries, and resource wars. The profit and growth driven economic system is inevitably generating rapidly rising inequality and impoverishment, thereby causing the anger destroying social cohesion and prompting the rise of fascism.

It will be argued that this trajectory cannot be remedied by reforms and technical fixes such as more recycling; it must involve scrapping the commitment to affluence and growth and shifting to lifestyles and systems that enable a high quality of life for all based on far lower resource demand.

The Simpler Way project (TSW, 2025) argues that there is only one social form that can enable this quest. Its feasibility will be detailed following an indication of the reasons for the above claims regarding the overshoot.

Following here's an outline of why the present path is unsustainable.

1. The World Wildlife Fund's “Footprint” measure shows that Australians today are using over 7 times the per capita amount of productive land that would be available to all in 2050. (WWF, 2018.)
2. That Footprint measure takes into account only a limited number of factors. A full accounting of the sustainability overshoot would reveal a much higher multiple than it indicates. The Planetary Boundaries approach identifies limits in 9 realms and states that sustainable limits have already been exceeded in 6 of them. (Rockstrom et al., 2023.)
3. Almost all global resource sources are depleting. Mineral oil grades are falling, water resources are increasingly scarce, most fisheries are over fished, forests are

diminishing, agricultural soils are being lost or damaged causing concerns about global food supply. It is likely that petroleum supply will peak within a decade, due to decline of the fracking sector. (Jereolmak 2021, Peterson 2024, Eckhouse 2021, Today in Energy 2024, Messler 2023.) And the overall Energy Return on Energy Invested is declining; it is taking more energy to provide each unit of energy.

4. Massive and accelerating damage is being inflicted on the ecosystems of the planet. A major consequence is the huge loss of species. This is mainly due to loss of habitats, and that is a consequent of economic growth. The damage is generating cost increases of many sorts especially due to storms, fire and floods, and is producing rapid rises in construction, production and insurance costs.

5. The major environmental impact is the climate crisis. Various scientists say there is now no possibility of limiting temperature rise by 2050 to 2 degrees, let alone 1.5. We are heading for over 3 degrees by 2050, and possibly 4.5 eventually which would almost certainly mean the end of civilisation. Carbon emissions continue to rise. Environmental problems are primarily due to the amount of production and consumption going on. There is a strong case that renewables cannot eliminate dependence on fossil fuels. (Trainer, 2022, 2023.)

6. Rich world affluence is built on exploitative resource extraction from poor countries, estimated by Hickle to be worth a net annual flow of \$2.5 trillion (2021), not including the environmental damage, low wages and social disruption left in poor countries. The global capitalist economy inevitably generates this grossly unjust situation, trapping billions of people in poverty while their resources are extracted.

8. But there is one factor which is more important than all of the above. It is the probably immanent collapse of the global financial system. The the global economy has been kept “healthy” by pumping in vast amounts of money created by the banking system and issued as debt. Global debt has tripled in three decades, is much higher than before the GFC, and is now generally regarded as totally unrepayable. It is not possible for the borrowed money to be invested in ventures that will repay it plus interest, mainly because people suffering cost of living increases do not have the surplus purchasing power to buy more products. Unless sales of additional products valued at over \$300 trillion plus interest can be made the debt cannot be repaid. It is difficult to imagine how this deteriorating situation can continue for much longer. At some point borrowers and lenders will realise that the debts are not going to be repaid and they will suddenly panic to retrieve their loans. Catastrophic effects will quickly cascade, including widespread bank failures and loss of savings, bankruptcies, inability to finance business and trade, etc.

This has only been an indication of the present grossly unsustainable situation. We must add the effect of economic growth. If but 2050 the expected 10 billion people were to rise to the GDP per capita Australians would have by then given 3% p.a. economic growth, total world economic output would be over 12 times the present amount. But the present amount is grossly unsustainable: the WWF estimates that as present 1.7 planet Earths would be needed to meet the present global resource demand sustainably.

Too few realise the magnitude of the combined sustainability and injustice predicament set by these figures. They mean that solutions cannot be achieved by reforms or action on the supply side; that is by attempting to find more resources or reduce impact in an effort to meet existing demand. The overshoot is far too great now. Solutions can only be achieved by enormous and radical transition to a very different social form, primarily defined in terms of degrowth to much simpler lifestyles and systems.

Rejection of this limits to growth case is usually based on the belief that technical advance will deal with the associated problems, that is, it will enable continued increase in production and consumption to be “decoupled” from resource demand and environmental impacts so that these can be brought down to sustainable levels while production and consumption and GDP continue to rise. But there are now many studies finding that this is not happening and is not likely to happen. (For lengthy reviews see Parrique, et al. 2019, Haberl et al., 2021.)

To conclude, the foregoing summary information constitutes a strong case that there must be dramatic “degrowth” down to levels of production and consumption and therefore GDP that are a small fraction of present rich world levels. There is only one general social form that can enable this.

### **The village alternative.**

Only if most people live in small, highly self-sufficient, cooperative, self-governing, needs-driven (not profit-driven) and frugal village communities is it possible to get the per capita resource and environmental impacts right down, while actually improving the quality of life. The following discussion provides detailed support for this claim.

### **Self-sufficiency.**

This is the crucial concept. Converting our towns, neighbourhoods and households into thriving local economies producing many of the basic goods and services they need from local resources of land, labour, skill and capital can greatly reduce many costs, such as for transport, infrastructures such as roads and ports, packaging, and waste recycling. These effects can be most effectively illustrated by the food provision sector.

### **Food.**

(For the more comprehensive 9000 word account see <https://thesimplerway.info/AltAg> .)

In a well-designed village or small town economy almost all food can come from home gardens, community gardens, “edible landscapes” of fruit trees etc. packed into commons and public spaces, and small farms within and just outside settlements. The smallness of scale and proximity of producers and consumers enables nutrients to be totally recycled in closed loops from gardens through kitchens and animal pens to compost heaps and methane digesters and back to soils. Thus there would be no need for a fertilizer industry, sewer systems, supermarkets, food packaging, advertising or transport. Food would be fresh, not

processed. Following are indications of potential and merits associated with these systems.

### **Home gardens.**

It is commonly believed that small scale localised agriculture cannot produce sufficiently or at costs compared with the yields achieved by large scale mechanised and industrialised agribusiness. Considerable evidence indicates that this is incorrect. (Author 2025a, Key 2019 Holmgren, 2018, pp. 236.)

The significance of the following evidence might be judged by reference to the Australian commercial wheat production average of between 2 and 3.5 tonnes per ha. (Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2024), and the overall commercial vegetable production average of 3 tonnes per ha reported by McDougall, Kristiansen and Radar, (2018.)

Records for an intensive Permaculture garden in Melbourne show that after only four years after it was established it was producing at a rate equivalent to 6.6 t/hectare, for a labour input of only around two person-hours a week. (Holmgren 2018, Alexander and Gleeson 2018.) Another study of 13 community gardens in Sydney found that they were producing at twice the rate of the typical Australian commercial vegetable farm. (Hume, Salomon, and Cavagnaro 2022. See also McDougall, Kristiansen and Radar 2018.)

Holmgren reports on two Permaculture gardens in Victoria producing the equivalent of over 20 t/ha. He refers to a number of cases where yields per ha were around four times commercial figures. Zainuddin and Mercer (2014) report on a similar study. See also Leahy (2020, p. 235.) Hume, Salomon and Cavagnaro, (2022) found that 23% of the average lawn area would be sufficient to produce the recommended vegetable intake for a family of 2.5. In Havana 90% of fruit and vegetables consumed are reported to be grown within the city. Williams (2018) and FAO (2022) report Cuban urban small farms, cooperatives and home gardens, totalling 93,000 ha, are reported to produce an average of 3 t/ha/pa of vegetables, fruit and root crops, along with 10.5 million litres of cow, buffalo and goat milk and 1,700 tonnes of meat<sup>7</sup>. A study of Sheffield (Edmondson, 2020) found that there is more than enough urban land available within the city to meet the fruit and vegetable requirements of its population. Watson (2015) refers to the “Victory Gardens” planted by ordinary people in England during World War 2 and says these achieved on average 10 times the typical agricultural area yield. Jevons (2017) reports much the same for home gardens. Trainer (2025a) provides further detailed evidence.

There are a number of reasons why the foregoing evidence is likely to significantly underestimate the potential of urban agriculture. Most of it refers only to household property. In most settlements an area that might be much larger is currently available but not used for food production. This includes “nature strips” between the road and front fence, other roadside land, walls and rooftops, land beside railways, and parks and playing fields. More importantly, in the transformed landscape to be discussed below there would also be much land freed by digging up the many suburban roads that only enable vehicles to move out for the drive to work each day. In that localised and highly self-sufficient landscape there would be little need for associated

infrastructures including home garages, parking lots, through roads and freeways, petrol stations, car sale yards, and premises dealing with vehicle servicing and repairs, let alone freeways. There would also be savings in many other traffic and transport costs, vehicle production, policing and legal costs, road accidents and associated medical costs avoided.

Vertical walls, and rooftops are additional spaces can be used for food production. Food can be grown on concreted surfaces using tubs. Use of miniature fruit trees in pots can enable a much higher density than in the field, and can reduce water demand. Vines can be planted at the foot of walls, enabling roots to use soil under floors and paths protected from evaporation, and can be trained up vertical surfaces.

Home food production figures typically do not include fish. A suburban fishing industry can be based on small tanks in confined spaces. Synaptoman, (2013) reports on an 18 square metre fish pond producing 150 kg of fish p.a., plus 1,300 kg of tomatoes from trays the nutrient-rich water is circulated through. Poultry production should also be included in overall yield estimates. It also enables kitchen and garden scraps to become animal feed and fertilizer

Another large area in almost all house blocks is that devoted to lawn. Synaptoman, (2013) says that if the space occupied by American lawns was converted to food gardens, the country could produce four times as many fruits and vegetables as it does now. She says in the United States there are 40 million acres of lawn, and lawns are the single largest irrigated “crop” in the U.S. “Lawns are the most destructive monoculture on the planet, absorbing more resources and pesticides than any other crop. Vegetable gardens use 66% less water than lawns.” “Americans use about 800 million gallons of gasoline per year just mowing their lawns.” Hume, Salomon, and Cavagnaro, (2022) found that 30% to 60% of residential water is used for watering lawns. In addition there is the cost of mowers, dumping grass cuttings, and fertilisers and pesticides, and of carbon emissions from these processes.

A study of egg supply (Trainer, Malik and Lenen, 2019) provides strong numerical support for the reduction potential of these small scale localised production processes. The usual supermarket supply path involves global supply chains, fish catch, processing and shipping, trucks, feed mills, power, chemical feed additives, packaging, supermarkets, insurance, expensive professionals and unacceptable conditions in factory sheds. However this study found that eggs produced in back yards or local cooperatives involve few of these factors. Their energy and dollar costs were found to be around 1% of those created by the supermarket path.

### **Commons.**

Much space within an ideal settlement is given to commons, that is land and facilities owned and managed by the community, including vegetable gardens, parks, pastures, orchards, road side apace, woodlots, ponds, sheds, clay pits, windmills, tool libraries, a few vehicles to borrow or hire, and the community centre containing a café, workshop, meeting space, craft rooms, library, art gallery, recycling racks, and tool library. One product of the commons would be honey. Smith and Vidot (2016) report estimation of a remarkable possible yield of 200kg per ha p.a. in densely gardened suburbs. The commons would mostly be where many roads have been

dug up, because in the new localised economies few cars would be needed to get to distant work places. Communities would own and run some of the small farms within and just outside the settlement.

One overlooked possible use of the commons is for an urban fishing industry base on sewage ponds. These can be used to trap nutrients in sludge or to feed plant, fish and bird life. They can purify water for reuse via a long series of ponds in which plants and animals extract nutrients. Since the 1890s Werribee farm outside Melbourne has absorbed city waste water in grasslands that were then drained and later grazed by sheep, over a two week cycle. (Melbourne Water, 2024.)\_

Vansintjan (2021) reports that by 1995 40% of Hanoi's fish consumption came from such ponds. But the most impressive example was to be found in Calcutta's 12,000 ha of ponds taking in 80% of the city's sewage and providing 8,000 tons of fish per year to the city, or 40% of the region's fish production. Vansintjan refers to evidence that the nutrient value involved would have cost India \$2 million a day to purchase as fertilizer.

The city of Munich made extensive use of these systems in the 1990s. Vansintjan says there is good evidence showing that sewage treatment in properly managed fish ponds can be as safe as conventional methods of fish production. He notes that a small sewage-fed fish pond can provide a family of six with 8 kg of fish, per person, per year. It is disturbing that large numbers in poor countries use pit toilets, thereby throwing away the highest quality fertilizer. (Wikipedia, 2025.)

Good settlement design maximises collection and storage of water. Swales and bunds take run off to ponds and storm surges to above ground playing fields and parks where it can slowly soak in for surrounding fruit and nut trees. No underground pipes are needed, avoiding use of concrete and enabling easy access to any blockages. In existing neighbourhoods almost all rainwater is thrown away via expensive sewers and pumping stations.

Village-level systems facilitate multiple and overlapping functions. Doing one thing also does many others. For instance woodlots provide fuel, shade, fruit, honey, timber, windbreaks, foraging and amenity. Manures become fertilizers. Ducks eliminate snails, fertilise ponds and produce ducklings and entertainment. Bee hives improve pollination as well as provide honey and wax, and an interesting hobby. Trucking of hives to remote orchards is not necessary. Fish ponds provide nutrient-rich water for aquaculture. Chickens roosting in greenhouses overnight raise carbon dioxide levels. Many systems can be designed to maintain themselves and eliminate work, for instance geese, sheep and goats can keep grasses down in the firebreak areas. Poultry can clear old garden sites while fertilizing for the next crop. Poultry foraging in the orchards can clean up fruit fly larvae in fallen fruit. Goats can keep blackberry vines under control.

Multiple cropping would be practised. Wheat is usually planted only once a year but urban agriculture enables new vegetable seeds to be planted as soon as a small area is cleared. Some commercial compost producers use flocks of chickens to turn their heaps rather than tractors, avoiding fuel use while minimising chicken feed cost.

## **Small farms.**

The third component of the village agricultural system is the small farm sector, located within the settlement and close by. The proximity enables return of nutrients to the soils, possibly transported by donkey carts on the return journey after taking produce to the town market place. (Donkeys find their own fuel, do not need grease and oil changes or spare parts, or assembly lines to produce, and provide leisure resources.) The town might own a dairy. Many farms could be owned and run by cooperatives.

On average food in the US travels 1,500 miles before it gets to the kitchen, and large amounts are wasted, including for appearance reasons. Transport involves packaging, and nutrients are lost in the process. (Brown 2022.) In the new sustainable localised landscape food would travel about 3 km at most, it would be fresh, and would involve negligible processing, packaging or waste removal.

There might need to be longer distance transport of some items from larger scale farms located in the best regions for their crops. Grains and dairy produce are among the few items that might best be produced outside the town.

In his book Small Farm Future Smaje (2020) details the case that small farms could feed Britain using around only 18% of the workforce. The need would be far less when the output of the above home and commons output is taken into account.

Local agriculture also eliminates most of the need for storage and especially refrigeration. Root crops can store in the ground until needed. Mud brick cool rooms and storage in sand can keep various fruits and vegetables for long periods. Drying and bottling can be small businesses or domestic hobbies. The neighbourhood might need only a few fridges and freezers in the community centre.

Seed saving and sharing can eliminate the need for purchasing seeds, while facilitating selection of varieties most suited to the locality. This counters the present tendency to use only the few varieties that maximise marketing gains, such as tough (and tasteless) tomatoes that tolerate long distance trucking.

Small anaerobic digester tubs in backyards taking kitchen scraps and toilet flushes can provide significant quantities of methane for cooking. Alexander reports that an input of roughly 1.5 kg per day into his system generates sufficient gas for around 38 minutes of cooking each day. He says this is more than enough to allow households to disconnect from fossil gas supply. (Alexander and Gleeson, 2018, p. 125.)

Localised agriculture avoids most if not all of the problems associated with conventional agriculture. These include the high energy and carbon costs, the latter now possibly contributing up to 30% of global emissions, (Ritchie 2019), heavy use of artificial fertilizers generating nitrogen and phosphorus runoff problems, soil-mining of carbon, depletion of biological resource stocks, notably fish stocks, and soil quality damage such as acidification, salinity, erosion, and soil compaction due to use of heavy machinery. Competition for control over water sources is generating international conflict, for instance over access to glacial flows from the Tibetan plateau. There are unsustainable rates of water withdrawal, for example from the Australian Murray-Darling system. The general increase in soil chemical toxicity is

one of the Planetary Boundaries that have been exceeded. There is continued large scale clearing of native vegetation for agricultural production, and logging of native forests. These are the major factors causing loss of biodiversity. There are unacceptable conditions for many animals in factory production, notably poultry, pigs, and live animal exportation of sheep and cattle. Food prices and availability are problematic, even in the richest countries. “Get big or get out” agribusiness contributes to the death of country towns.

Agribusiness tends to focus on the few most profitable plant varieties, which has resulted in the loss of many. Wilson (2013) estimates a 93% loss of food variety in 80 years. Roberts (2017) reports USDA studies showing a steady decline in nutritional quality in commercial fruits and vegetables since around 1950.

A geography involving many small plantings, little storage and minimal transport is not prone to the spread of diseases. Problems tend to be rapidly identified. Nearby hedges and forests enable birds to deal with pests. Pesticide use could probably be entirely eliminated.

Conventional food supply involves large numbers of expensive highly trained people with degrees, sitting at computer screens, with expertise in finance, personal relations, management, OH & S, logistics, engineering, bio-chemistry, marketing, insurance, law etc. Home gardening and cooperatives avoid almost all of these costs while enabling ordinary people to be excellent food producers. The agriculture committee would organise field days, visits and educational activities, and update the community on new developments.

Agribusiness also involves a great deal of borrowed capital and thus compounding interest payments at all levels. Costs at one level include interest payments at all the previous level, adding to perhaps 40% of the price paid by consumers. (Kennedy, 2010.) Local agriculture often involves little or no use of money or borrowing of capital.

Above all are the energy implications. These alternative ways involve very low non-renewable energy inputs, many of them in the form of human exercise. There is very little use of machinery, transport, refrigeration etc. Small farms might share a few small tractors running on local biofuels.

### **Social and ecological considerations for agriculture.**

Agribusiness has a strong tendency destroy rural life. Large corporations using expensive machinery need few low skilled and low paid workers, and “Economies of Scale” drive out small farmers and weaken small farming communities.

Then there are the implications for national security. Conventional food supply chains involving international transport lack the resilience and redundancy that provide security. The system is fragile and insecure, vulnerable to major disruptions and uncertainties. Supply can be cut by transport failures, warfare, trade disputes, financial collapses, environmental disasters and epidemics far away. Prices can suddenly rise to unaffordable levels. Just-in-time deliveries mean that supermarket shelves could be bare in a few days. Increasing global materials and energy

scarcities are likely to impact severely on costs and prices within the resource-intensive conventional food supply system. There is serious concern with rising food prices and there are now estimates that 30% of Australians are finding it difficult to afford sufficient food.

Highly self-sufficient local economies are free from all these concerns. Towns can always have crops in the ground within and close by them, and bins of grain and dried fruits stored in cool rooms, and poultry in their paddocks. They can have the networks of familiarity, redundant skills, trust and care that will ensure that difficulties will be quickly dealt with to provide for all cooperatively. Banking collapses or runaway inflation need not jeopardise the capacity of their citizens to access necessities.

### **Products.**

Materially simple but sufficient/frugal lifestyles in a zero-growth economy can be ensured mostly by items produced within and nearby the town. Many can be made by craft and small businesses, as distinct from distant mass production factories. Many of the inputs can be from local sources including plants, fibres, leather, wool, earth, foundries and timber grown on community land. Small mass production factories in the region might provide basic clothing, shoes, appliances and materials such as glass. Dwellings and community buildings can be made extremely cheaply from earth. Localising these industries to the village or region eliminates the many and significant kinds of costs evident in the above egg supply example.

Here???

A major source of satisfaction in work would be the ability to exercise skills in the creation of good quality products, and to see these in use. Consider the satisfaction involved in baking a good cake or dinner, bringing in perfect tomatoes from your garden, or finishing making a table that will last hundreds of years. You would frequently see people benefiting from your work and skills. Because the amount of production needed would be greatly reduced you would have the time to do things well. William Morris argued for craft rather than mass production as a source of these kinds of experiences. There would of course still be a place for some mass production factories but there would be much scope for hand production, hobby and craft production, which is enjoyable; no one likes working in a factory.

### **The neighbourhood centre.**

Most petrol stations could be converted into neighbourhood centres containing a workshop, recycling racks, surplus food sharing, tools to borrow, a library, an art gallery, craft rooms, a café, recycling racks, a stage for performances and space for community assemblies.

### **Commons, committees and working bees.**

The town would own and maintain many commons, such as the parks, some of the farms and cooperatives, workshops, quarries, ponds and energy systems. These would be maintained by committees and working bees. There would be much less for councils to do, meaning far lower rates. There would be committees for agriculture, looking after elderly people, youth affairs, education and especially leisure. Contributing to working bees would be a way of paying tax.

Because there will be little need for the car when production and consumption in most workplaces are localised, many roads could be dug up, possibly converting one quarter of urban land area to agriculture and other community uses. The community orchards, bamboo clumps, herb patches and forests, and ponds for ducks and fish would be commons providing many free goods for all to use.

### **Transport.**

Few people would need a car, as most could get to nearby work on foot or bicycle. A few community cars might be available for hire. Many basic goods would be produced in small factories within the town or close by, cutting delivery and supply logistics. Few trucks would be needed to bring goods into the town. There would be little need to build or maintain road infrastructures including freeways, toll roads, tunnels and bridges. The space currently given to domestic garages could be converted to gardens. Far less international trade would be needed, thus reducing the need for trucks, aircraft and shipping and associated infrastructure such as airport and shipping terminals.

### **Work**

Because we were living simply and many things would be “free” from the commons (e.g., fruit) we would not need to buy much. Most people might only need to work for money two days a week. Much producing would be by hobby and craft activity, and much would be done on enjoyable working bees. Unpleasant tasks could be shared or performed by working bees. The work distribution committee would make sure everyone had a livelihood.

These arrangements could ensure that everyone had a job if they wanted one, and experienced work as an enjoyable and fulfilling activity, providing a sense of contributing. All would be secure; there would be no such thing as unemployment. That would be easily eliminated if we want to do it.

Because there would be so much less work to do the pace of work could be very relaxed. Thus the work-play distinction which is so sharp in present society would collapse; producing things would be something we would want to do in leisure time and the many hobbies and arts and crafts we would look forward to as leisure activities would produce useful things.

These changes would remedy some of the worst faults in consumer-capitalist society, especially the way a few are allowed to take most of the productive activity by driving rival firms out of

business, the alienation and deprivation large numbers experience because of the way work is organised, and the inexcusable misery and waste that is unemployment.

### **Alternative Technologies.**

The new neighbourhoods would mainly use low to medium alternative technologies, such as windmills, Permaculture, hand tools and building houses from earth. In the village there would be many people capable of maintaining the mostly simple machinery and systems.

Although The Simpler Way looks for the simplest ways of doing things, it is not opposed to modern technology. However, much sophisticated modern technology is mostly unimportant and technical advance is of little significance in solving the world's problems or in providing a high quality of life. When we reallocate presently wasted resources and transfer their resources to socially useful purposes we could still have (small) cities and technically sophisticated procedures and research in those fields where it is important, such as medicine.

### **Child care.**

With few people away at work and communities with many people around all the time there would be no need for a child minding industry. There would be few if any isolated nuclear families struggling on their own with child raising problems. Adolescents would have far more interesting things to do than watch screens, given the leisure-rich environment created by the leisure committee, and their valuable contributions to community functioning, such as being in charge of the poultry cooperative. At present young people are expected to make little or no contribution until they are around twenty years of age. In the village they would accompany adults on working bees and help in home production from early ages. They therefore would be more integrated and less isolated as individuals or as a group.

### **Housing**

One of the main ways we can reduce our dollar and resource costs is by living in small, ecologically sensible houses mostly built from earth, using locally grown timber and eventually tiled from local clay. Mud bricks or rammed earth construction is by far the best, costing little or nothing in energy or non-renewable resources, being fire-proof, cool in summer and warm in winter, quiet, and capable of lasting maybe a thousand years or more!

In recent years new Australian houses have been built with the biggest floor area of any country in the world. The first benefit of a quite small but big-enough house is that anyone can afford one, thereby avoiding decades of work and worry about paying the bank 2.5 times the cost of a too-big McMansion. In 2020 that's probably

\$400,000 to \$800,000 and ten years work saved! (For detailed numbers [for a c. \\$7,000 house](#) see.) Many single people or couples would be delighted to live in a one or two room small/tiny house, which they could build for under a thousand dollars.

The second major benefit is the satisfaction that can come from building your own house, assisted by friends and guided by experienced builders in the neighbourhood. It's easy and good fun; no rush, just put up a roof over one room, move in, slowly add more rooms. You might pay your building adviser by helping him build from time to time, learning the craft as you do. The house you have built is then not a commodity or an investment, it is an important part of your life. Remember, in a stable economy there will be far less mobility so people will be more able and willing to put down roots in a town and live there a long time. (Again see [Housing.](#))

### **Activity.**

A huge amount can be cut off the money we have to earn to buy things if we make and grow and do things ourselves. The typical Simpler Way of life is very productive at the level of the home economy, involving gardening, preserving, repairing, fixing, looking after animals, making furniture, toys, chicken pens and gadgets, keeping bikes going, recycling, cutting fire wood, maintaining pumps and machinery, and engaging in hobbies, arts and crafts. Most of us will be a Jack-of-all-trades most of the time, although many will also become specialists and experts in one or more fields. Respect and reputation will depend largely on how capable you are at doing many varied useful things around the town. Grandmas will be recognised as among the most valuable people!

Being as self-sufficient as is reasonably possible is central to The Simpler Way, especially at the household and community level. The central theme must be the highly self-sufficient local economy. The town's resilience will be a function of the number of its people who can make and grow and do and fix many things. It will not depend much on highly credentialed specialised experts, professionals, let alone on distant corporations or government bureaucracies. If/when the global economy self-destructs the supermarket shelves will be bare within a few days, but we will be all right if we have a town full of skilled productive people capable of running a highly self-sufficiency local economy that depends mostly on simple systems and technologies.

So you will have an abundant range of interesting and useful things to do or watch others do all day and you will be able to enjoy exercising many skills. Most of these are not difficult to master but

there will be many people close by who are experts in anything you need to know and are eager to advise and help.

Learning and using these skills gives a sense of being competent, effective, able to do many important things, and being an important contributor to the welfare and security of the town.

### **Living frugally and self-sufficiently**

At first a frugal lifestyle might sound like an intolerable cost, but simpler lifestyles can have big benefits. It can be very satisfying to run a household economy effectively and efficiently, using as little as you need to, recycling, avoiding waste, and planning and organising the use of the resources you have. When you are producing some of your own food, entertainment, repairs etc. you have an incentive to save time and materials, and there is satisfaction in being able to organise and produce well. You will be proud of your well-stocked pantry, your safe chicken pen fences, your thriving vegetable patch. One of the activities I enjoy is gathering sticks for lighting the open fire. This gives a sense of being able to provide for myself, and not having to use fossil fuels to keep warm. I made the open fire that the sticks light from a sheet of tin. When I pass a neat stack of sticks or firewood ready for next winter I recognise my wealth, and my skill and good sense in organising this aspect of my “oikos”, my household economy.

Another of my treats is taking a bucket to collect horse manure. I also enjoy dismantling unused machinery and putting the greased bolts back on the shelf for re-use. There is satisfaction in not using much, not having to buy much, being able to make it not buy it. I like the fact that I have only one pair of going-out shoes.

The focal concern here is what's good enough, what will do the job well enough. This contradicts the obsession in consumer society with maximising, with having the best, the most luxurious (car, house, clothes, handbag, etc.) There is satisfaction in knowing you are living lightly on the earth. We are not likely to save the planet until most people come to see that being a heavy consumer is morally unacceptable. That's why I don't travel.

When you have thought about global problems and resource limits you come to see frugality, simplicity, recycling, repairing, old things and the good-enough as not just morally desirable, but as noble and beautiful. I find most new, glitzy and expensive things disturbing and ugly; they are not nice. They are often not much good either, being shoddy and built not to last. The old tools I buy at second hand and antique shops have far better steel in them. Most furniture is trashy; my lounge was acquired second hand in 1950. My stove was made in the 1930s.

### **Collectivism, community, solidarity.**

The above discussion has been about individual lifestyles. However there is a much more important factor in getting our national resource and footprint figures right down; there must be

fundamental system change, especially to a new economy, a new settlement geography, and a new political system.

In the coming era of intense scarcity it will not be possible to develop and run satisfactory societies unless most of us live in small self-sufficient and self-governing communities that are focused primarily on the common good, the welfare of the town. These cannot exist unless we manage to replace the individualistic, competitive quest for profit and wealth that drives consumer-capitalist society. People will have to be content with a low but sufficient and stable “income” or “living standard”, and to derive satisfaction from living in and contributing to a spiritually rich town, and they will have to think all the time in terms of what is good for the town. The dominant orientation will have to be giving not getting, and people will have to derive satisfaction from caring, helping, seeing others and their town thrive, and knowing that the more of these things they do the richer their own lives will be. In other words, the main source of our individual wealth will not be our private bank balance or property but the richness of the town, its gardens, committees, skills, leisure resources, activities, institutions and arrangements, and above all its spirit of community, friendliness, comradeship, solidarity and helpfulness.

Unless we get to this situation our communities will not work well; people will not contribute to working bees eagerly, the informal networks that spot problems and head them off will not function satisfactorily. The town cannot thrive without good, responsible, conscientious citizens. Nothing is more important than maintaining the town solidarity, community, cohesion, which both requires and produces good citizenship.

Community is made up of these social and spiritual bonds, the feelings of familiarity and friendship, mutual dependence, good will to others, appreciation for benefits received and obligation to reciprocate, and concern for the welfare of the town. Living in settlements which are highly dependent on themselves will generate and reinforce community, because all will be acutely aware of how much their own individual welfare depends on the town being in good spiritual shape, with a strong caring collectivist climate.

The collectivism required does not have to interfere seriously with the freedom of the individual. Sensible communities would strive to maximise the freedom for individuals to do what they wished. Town control of town affairs does not mean total control of everything. It need only be the readiness to do something if a problem arises.

A sensible community would have formal arrangements and procedures for constantly monitoring, reviewing and maintaining solidarity, morale and how satisfied people were with arrangements, just as it would constantly oversee its water and food systems. Contrast this with the present situation in which people live in isolated households with no involvement at all in the running

of their localities, let alone any incentive to think collectively about the welfare of the neighbourhood, or arrangements for dealing with social problems.

### **Aged care.**

Most old and infirm people would be able to remain in their homes, looked after by the relevant committee, working bees and rosters. They would continue as valued, experienced members of the community, serving on committees etc. Sudden retirement could be avoided as older people phase down their work contributions and continue to feed their experience into committees etc. Hospitals and hostels would be in the centre of town amid gardens and animals, enabling continued involvement in public affairs, and making it convenient for people to drop in for a chat. (One quarter of people in Australian aged persons' hostels never receive a visitor. ABC New 2025.) Working bees and rosters would get much of the caring work done. Similarly there would be little need for a child minding industry, partly because few would need to be away from home for fifty hours a week.

### **Education.**

Education could be radically transformed. The main goal would be to help young people to become good caring, cooperative and skilled citizens of the town, aware of how the town depends on prioritising the welfare of all, of the need to care for local systems, conscientious, and with the multi-skills needed to maintain things. Young people would learn these skills and values by participating in working bees and committees. We would introduce them to a wide range of hobbies, leisure pursuits crafts, ideas, literature, philosophies etc., and especially to limits to growth themes showing that affluent lifestyles and resource intensive ways must be avoided. Children would have useful functions and responsibilities. They could go on to professional training as at present, but we would need far fewer technocrats, lawyers, engineers etc.

### **Leisure**

These settlements would be leisure-rich. The neighbourhood would contain many familiar people, interesting things to do, common projects, animals, gardens, forests, wind mills, lakes, small firms and community workshops. The leisure committee would organise visits, local holiday sites, talks, festivals, weekly concerts, and celebrations. There would be many hobby and craft groups, with people eager to teach their skills and much time to devote to them.

Because the town would be leisure-rich people would be less inclined to go away at weekends or for holidays, thereby reducing national energy consumption. The leisure committee would work out resource-cheap holiday options, e.g., hire a horse and Gypsy wagon and follow a map through interesting nearby towns.

### **Retirement.**

Older people will phase down there in part, continuing to contribute as they wish, specially to committees and training. Retirement will not suddenly terminate and waste the community's access to skills acquired over a lifetime.

### **Patriarchy.**

A village of the kind being advocated enables (but does not guarantee) non-hierarchical relations between men and women. All share in important activities and roles, within a community that realises that it has to organise cooperatively to function well. Women and men would chair committees, contribute to working bees, run small businesses etc. Men would not be away at the office all day but would be partners helping to run productive households. The village ethos of cooperation for the common good would involve a determination to avoid domination and to enable equality. The high quality of life and strong community all would share would defuse the struggle and discontent that fuel much domestic violence in isolated nuclear families.

### **The economy**

These alternative ways cannot be implemented unless the present economic system is more or less totally replaced. It causes most of the global problems, firstly because it allows market forces and profit to determine development, meaning that the most urgently needed things are not developed and output goes mainly to richer people because they can pay more for them. Above all, it must have growth, meaning that it inevitably generates increasing resource and environmental problems. As shown above, a sustainable economy must have undergone a great deal of degrowth. The goal must be highly self-sufficient and self-governing stable town or regional economy operating on minimal resource use. These features mean that it cannot be a capitalist economy

The basic economic priorities must be worked out according to what is socially desirable, democratically decided mostly at the local level, not dictated by distant state bureaucracies. However, much of the economy could remain as a (carefully monitored and regulated) form of "free/private enterprise" carried on by small firms and farms, households and cooperatives, so long as their goals were not profit maximisation and growth. Small businesses would be regarded as tools enabling a steady income by contributing to meeting town needs.

The economy might have a relatively small cash sector in which (regulated) market forces could operate. But the important policies, arrangements and enterprises would be planned and run by collective or public agencies, firms and town meetings, mostly by local community development cooperatives. For instance, the town or regional dairy farm could be a cooperative. One large sector of the economy would involve barter and gifts (i.e., just giving away surpluses) working bees and free goods (e.g., from the roadside fruit and nut trees.)

Communities would be in control of their economies. All decisions would be made via discussions among citizens, referenda, and town meetings, aimed at consensus on what is best for the town. Market forces would not be allowed to determine what is done. This would devolve much governing down from the level of the state and

national governments, although it would still be within the framework of national laws and systems. Thus representative democracy would be replaced by participatory democracy

There would be no unemployment and no poverty. These could easily be eliminated as communities set up the cooperatives and small firms to make sure everyone who wants a job can have a livelihood enabling valued contributions to meeting local needs.

What would matter would be the public wealth one has, the access to the landscapes, facilities, concerts, company etc. Again, one's welfare would depend on how well the town was functioning, not on how much money or property one possessed.

Because most economic activity would be taking place at the local level there would be a much diminished national economy beyond the towns and their regions. There would be far less transport, importing, heavy industry, infrastructure, big corporations and banks, and a negligible financial industry. There would be much less for the (remnant and much revised) "state" to do in regulating, setting standards, coordinating, informing, maintaining communications, legal and transport systems, and running any ventures that are not best left to local cooperatives and small firms. (But the state would have little or no legislative power; see below.)

### **Money, banking, interest, finance, capital.**

None of these would be very important. The finance industry is currently so predominant that at times it has accounted for over 40% of U.S. national income. We would be able to live in very low cost housing, without needing to earn much or own a car. Town banks would hold most savings and lend only to ventures likely to benefit the town and its inhabitants.

Many purchases and projects could be carried out without spending money, by versions of the basic LETS approach, whereby a transaction involves notifying the recording agency that A should be debited an agreed amount for a purchase from B and B's account should be increased by that amount. Thus the "money" involved can be instantly created and "spent", enabling production and exchange between people without any normal money. The town bank might be the recording agency for this alternative currency, enabling people without any normal money to work, trade and receive goods, from participants within the system. Everyone in the town could be a participant. The town would then be able to set up ventures that meet needs and eliminate employment.

There could be no interest paid on loans. For interest to be paid the economy must grow. Because they will have been large scale degrowth there will be little need for investment, which will be confined to dealing with depreciation or adjusting productive capacity. Consequently in the zero-growth economies there will be only a very small financial industry and little need for capital investment. Bank charters drawn up through public discussion will determine lending priorities.

Towns would need separate accounts to keep track of town exporting and importing activity, so that it can make sure it is only getting from the national economy goods and services equal in value to that of the things it is importing from that economy.

### **Government.**

In a nation made up mostly of largely self-governing villages government would have been radically transformed. Firstly the national economy would be geared mainly to providing the towns with small quantities of light machinery and materials etc. which they cannot produce for themselves.

There would be far less for national governments to do given the devolution of so many functions to the local level. Most and ideally all of the decisions would be taken at the village assemblies. Issues involving regions beyond the village, such as a valley's water supply, would be dealt with by federations and other arrangements focused on the region, to which town delegates are sent, but they would take recommendations back down to the village assemblies for acceptance.

The basic nature of the governing process would also be quite different. It would be geared to seeking consensus decisions. At present within representative democracies participants compete to get what they want via majority votes, meaning 49% of those concerned about the issue might fail to get what they want. But a good village does not function on zero-sum principles. The goal must be to search for the solution that is best for the community and as acceptable as possible for all involved. All would realise the importance of finding solutions everyone is as content with as possible. Awareness of this goal would increase the readiness to accept the costs affected parties might be asked to bear for the common good. Governing would no longer be primarily about zero-sum conflicts between self-interested groups. It is not clear whether there would be any need for political parties, elections, campaign donations or politicians.

High priority would be given to monitoring. No system can be expected to work well without continual attention to how well it is working. The remarkable success of the Spanish anarchists in the 1930s was due in large part to their determination to constantly monitor how arrangements were working out. (TSW 2024.) Measures of social cohesion and quality of life would be especially important.

A huge amount can be cut off the money we have to earn to buy things if we make and grow and do things ourselves. The typical Simpler Way of life is very productive at the level of the home economy, involving gardening, preserving, repairing, fixing, looking after animals, making furniture, toys, chicken pens and gadgets, keeping bikes going, recycling, cutting fire wood, maintaining pumps and machinery, and engaging in hobbies, arts and crafts. Most of us will be a Jack-of-all-trades most of the time, although many will also become specialists and experts in one or more fields. Respect and reputation will depend largely on how capable you are at doing many varied useful things around the

town. Grandmas will be recognised as among the most valuable people!

Being as self-sufficient as is reasonably possible is central to The Simpler Way, especially at the household and community level. The central theme must be the highly self-sufficient local economy. The town's resilience will be a function of the number of its people who can make and grow and do and fix many things. It will not depend much on highly credentialed specialised experts, professionals, let alone on distant corporations or government bureaucracies. If/when the global economy self-destructs the supermarket shelves will be bare within a few days, but we will be all right if we have a town full of skilled productive people capable of running a highly self-sufficiency local economy that depends mostly on simple systems and technologies.

So you will have an abundant range of interesting and useful things to do or watch others do all day and you will be able to enjoy exercising many skills. Most of these are not difficult to master but there will be many people close by who are experts in anything you need to know and are eager to advise and help.

Learning and using these skills gives a sense of being competent, effective, able to do many important things, and being an important contributor to the welfare and security of the town.

### **Living frugally and self-sufficiently**

At first a frugal lifestyle might sound like an intolerable cost, but simpler lifestyles can have big benefits. It can be very satisfying to run a household economy effectively and efficiently, using as little as you need to, recycling, avoiding waste, and planning and organising the use of the resources you have. When you are producing some of your own food, entertainment, repairs etc. you have an incentive to save time and materials, and there is satisfaction in being able to organise and produce well. You will be proud of your well-stocked pantry, your safe chicken pen fences, your thriving vegetable patch. One of the activities I enjoy is gathering sticks for lighting the open fire. This gives a sense of being able to provide for myself, and not having to use fossil fuels to keep warm. I made the open fire that the sticks light from a sheet of tin. When I pass a neat stack of sticks or firewood ready for next winter I recognise my wealth, and my skill and good sense in organising this aspect of my "oikos", my household economy.

Another of my treats is taking a bucket to collect horse manure. I also enjoy dismantling unused machinery and putting the greased bolts back on the shelf for re-use. There is satisfaction in not using much, not having to buy much, being able to make it not buy it. I like the fact that I have only one pair of going-out shoes.

The focal concern here is what's good enough, what will do the job well enough. This contradicts the obsession in consumer society with maximising, with having the best, the most luxurious (car, house, clothes, handbag, etc.) There is satisfaction in knowing you

are living lightly on the earth. We are not likely to save the planet until most people come to see that being a heavy consumer is morally unacceptable. That's why I don't travel.

When you have thought about global problems and resource limits you come to see frugality, simplicity, recycling, repairing, old things and the good-enough as not just morally desirable, but as noble and beautiful. I find most new, glitzy and expensive things disturbing and ugly; they are not nice. They are often not much good either, being shoddy and built not to last. The old tools I buy at second hand and antique shops have far better steel in them. Most furniture is trashy; my lounge was acquired second hand in 1950. My stove was made in the 1930s.

### **Collectivism, community, solidarity.**

The above discussion has been about individual lifestyles. However there is a much more important factor in getting our national resource and footprint figures right down; there must be fundamental system change, especially to a new economy, a new settlement geography, and a new political system.

In the coming era of intense scarcity it will not be possible to develop and run satisfactory societies unless most of us live in small self-sufficient and self-governing communities that are focused primarily on the common good, the welfare of the town. These cannot exist unless we manage to replace the individualistic, competitive quest for profit and wealth that drives consumer-capitalist society. People will have to be content with a low but sufficient and stable "income" or "living standard", and to derive satisfaction from living in and contributing to a spiritually rich town, and they will have to think all the time in terms of what is good for the town. The dominant orientation will have to be giving not getting, and people will have to derive satisfaction from caring, helping, seeing others and their town thrive, and knowing that the more of these things they do the richer their own lives will be. In other words, the main source of our individual wealth will not be our private bank balance or property but the richness of the town, its gardens, committees, skills, leisure resources, activities, institutions and arrangements, and above all its spirit of community, friendliness, comradeship, solidarity and helpfulness.

Unless we get to this situation our communities will not work well; people will not contribute to working bees eagerly, the informal networks that spot problems and head them off will not function satisfactorily. The town cannot thrive without good, responsible, conscientious citizens. Nothing is more important than maintaining the town solidarity, community, cohesion, which both requires and produces good citizenship.

Community is made up of these social and spiritual bonds, the feelings of familiarity and friendship, mutual dependence, good will to others, appreciation for benefits received and obligation to reciprocate, and concern for the welfare of the town. Living in

settlements which are highly dependent on themselves will generate and reinforce community, because all will be acutely aware of how much their own individual welfare depends on the town being in good spiritual shape, with a strong caring collectivist climate.

The collectivism required does not have to interfere seriously with the freedom of the individual. Sensible communities would strive to maximise the freedom for individuals to do what they wished. Town control of town affairs does not mean total control of everything. It need only be the readiness to do something if a problem arises.

A sensible community would have formal arrangements and procedures for constantly monitoring, reviewing and maintaining solidarity, morale and how satisfied people were with arrangements, just as it would constantly oversee its water and food systems. Contrast this with the present situation in which people live in isolated households with no involvement at all in the running of their localities, let alone any incentive to think collectively about the welfare of the neighbourhood, or arrangements for dealing with social problems.

### **Ecological implications.**

Because living in a village makes people heavily dependent on their local ecosystems it also keeps them acutely aware of the importance of ecological sustainability. Caring for the environment is not a distant in-principle concern one can ignore.

### **Much (materially) simpler lifestyles.**

It would have to be a far less affluent way of life. The goal would have to be producing and consuming only as much as was needed for comfortable and convenient living standards. This means living very frugally, recycling, designing things to last and to be repaired. It means phasing out many unnecessary products and industries. But it does not mean hardship or deprivation; the goal would be what is sufficient for a good quality of life.

It will be obvious that the Simpler Way will not be taken unless there is fundamental change from presently dominant values and habits. There must be a much more collective and less individualistic outlook, a more cooperative and less competitive ethos, a more participatory and socially responsible orientation, and above all a willingness to be content with much less affluent lifestyles. This will be the biggest difficulty in the transition to a sustainable society. However The Simpler Way offers many satisfactions and rewards.

None of this value change is possible via coercion. The simpler way must be willingly adopted by people who have come to understand the need for it and who enjoy

being frugal and self-sufficient, and who recognise desirability of the new ways. That means profound cultural change is required.

### **Robustness and resilience.**

Current complex globalised systems are fragile and vulnerable to disruptions at many levels. One bank failure can trigger cascading damage to whole nations. But the village has great resilience, evident in the food in the ground, the established simple and easily repairable infrastructures, the mutual support networks, and above all in the skills and values of its conscientious citizens.

### **Social cohesion and quality of life.**

In present individualistic, competitive and acquisitive society the quality of life is far inferior to what it could be. People even in the richest countries struggle with increasing difficulties, especially insecurity, depression and loneliness. Social cohesion is deteriorating and many indices of quality of life are falling. There are disturbing rates of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and obesity. Mate and Mate (2023) emphasise how stressful modern living has become, and the seriousness of the resulting monetary, health and psychological costs.

In a sensibly organised village few if any of these problems would exist. All members are secure from worry about unemployment, poverty, economic recession, isolation, loneliness, stress etc. The village would be a community of caring, familiar, co-operative people, bound by mutual concern, driven mainly by the realisation that these values and predispositions are crucial for the community's spiritual health and survival. All would be acutely aware that unless the town runs well their own individual welfare will suffer. But in addition living securely in an atmosphere of care and mutual aid would be intrinsically rewarding. We would know that we were living in a community to be proud of. The situation would require good values and strong citizenship ...but it would reward these.

Studies by Lockyer (2017) and Grinde et al. (2017) find that the quality of life in ecovillages is higher than in mainstream society. In the village you would know that members care about you and will make sure you are secure and provided for. The causes of the huge present toll of struggle and despair and the resulting social wreckage would have been more or less eliminated.

### **Town self-government.**

The kind of settlements The Simpler Way argues for would have to be largely self-governing, as distinct from being run by external, distant professional governors. People will have to take responsibility for running most of their town's systems, from orchards, water retention, care of old people, cultural affairs such as leisure committees and drama clubs. This is partly because in the coming era of resource scarcity centralised governments will not be able to afford to run everything. More importantly, they couldn't run our town because they couldn't possibly understand its unique

situation, the soils, the needs, what people want, its history. Only the people who live there can make the right decisions. They will have to implement them, and do most of the maintaining of systems and they will not do those things well unless they feel in control.

Above all the town must control its own economy, making sure it has the capacity to produce basic necessities, that all are provided for, that social and ecological needs are being met, that no one is unemployed, poor or neglected. Most of the things needed would have to come from the local economy of the town and its surrounds. We would study the town's needs and resources, and when a neglected need is seen, we would organise to deal with it, using those powerful working bees and the skills the town has. For instance it might set up a fish tank cooperative, or assist a family to establish a bee-keeping venture. The Mondragon cooperatives show what can easily be done along these lines. If a small enterprise was failing we would help to find a solution, possibly providing a loan from the town bank, organising skill development, or helping the owner to move to some other activity. It's our town and we must make sure it works well.

Thus we would have the sense not to leave the town's fate to the predations of the market system. We would not let a small firm become bankrupt because it couldn't compete, wasting its resources and skills. We would support or help to restructure or to transfer, to ensure town productive capacity was retained and used in the best way.

This is a quite different role for government. In competitive-consumer-capitalist society government is mostly an arbitrator in struggles and disputes between interested parties out to maximise their gains in zero-sum competition, as when a citizens action group wants the forest preserved but a developer wants to build a supermarket there. Town government will focus on the question, what can we the people of this town get together to do to meet the needs of this town and provide all its members with a good quality of life. The town will have the power and responsibility to look after itself, making the decisions and implementing them using its working bees and skills.

Again, it is important not to give the impression that the town assemblies must run everything. Eventually the town's government might not need to do much at all, (... because good citizens spontaneously and informally see things that need doing and quickly take action.) Even in the early stages it would only need to do what is sufficient to attend to neglected needs, e.g., to make sure no one is unemployed, that no elderly people are lonely, that there are enough orchards, and that the local environment is not being damaged. Outside this sphere there might be a very large area in which people could set up whatever kind of business they wished. It is obviously important in a good society to guarantee as much freedom as possible. However the community would have to decide whether a proposal had harmful effects, e.g., whether it

would take up too many scarce resources or would enable someone to take over the livelihoods of others.

The community must retain the power to come in and guide or block, although in a good society this power would be exercised by citizens simply refusing to buy from any shopkeeper who is trying to drive the others bankrupt, etc. Ideally it would deal with problems in a friendly and helpful way, knowing that the top priority is town solidarity, looking after everyone, making sure no one is dumped into poverty, and finding win-win solutions for all.

Now consider the immense sense of security and support this situation would give us. We would know we were valued members of a supportive community and if we got into difficulties there would be help available. We would especially be reassured by the fact that the town would not let anyone fall into unemployment or go bankrupt. Of course we would also need ways of making sure that people didn't loaf or run inefficient firms, but there are far more sensible and humane ways of doing that than letting the market bankrupt businesses and throw people into unemployment.

Consider also the security that comes from your town's fate not being left to the whims and predations of the global economy. That economy could self-destruct if it wished and we would still be able to provide ourselves with food and entertainment etc.

Also, knowing that the town cared about you would reinforce your commitment to it. You would appreciate the security and care, and thus be more inclined to contribute conscientiously. This illustrates the synergism that works powerfully in a good community. When you know people care about you and will assist you, you are more likely to care about others. Goodness multiplies goodness, whereas in competitive, selfish consumer society we are typically in situations that require us to beat others or be suspicious and thus unfriendly. This destroys friendliness and good will.

Thus living in a strong and supportive and self-conscious community would be a major source of life satisfaction. You could feel proud of your town, knowing that it was run by values prioritising the welfare of people and the environment, and not driven by the selfishness and acquisitiveness of entrepreneurs big and small. We would have more sense than to let our town's welfare be determined by how profitable isolated individual business ventures were. Instead we would come together to take control and responsibility for the town's welfare. And we would have the sense not to leave our individual and collective fate to be determined by the global economy. That is a very silly thing to do. The global economy will do what suits international capital. It forces you to search for something/anything to sell into it, in order to buy from it. It will dump you into squalor if it thinks it can make more profit somewhere other than in your town.

### **Your landscape.**

Imagine what those working bees could quickly do to the landscape you live in. Your suburb or town could be a magic world of beautiful gardens, forests and woodlots, animals, little lakes and ponds, ornaments, small firms and farms, idiosyncratic earth-built cottages, ornate houses, wilderness areas, magnificent community-built public buildings, and commons. Your garden might be one kilometre across, all fussed over by a thousand manic gardeners, but yours to walk through and enjoy. A major leisure activity would be simply going for a ramble or a bike ride.

### **Your wealth.**

Your personal wealth, savings, income and property would be of little no significance for your welfare or quality of life. Your wealth would depend on how good a town you lived in. In other words what would matter would be public wealth, the quality of the community orchards, the committees, the concerts, the networks you could get advice from, the readiness with which people would help you out if you had a problem, the familiar people you could get into conversation with. That readiness to come to your assistance could not be bought. It would depend on your reputation as a good citizen, as a person who has contributed well in the past. Thus money, income, property and material wealth would be of no importance. Your high quality of life would come from non-material values and sources.

### **Health.**

Most of us would be very active most of the day, working in our own gardens and home workshops, and contributing to working bees. We would move around mostly on foot or bicycle, getting exercise. Our food would be perfect: varied, fresh, pesticide free, and from the most tasty and nutritious varieties etc. Above all, being embedded in a strong and supportive community, not having to fear unemployment or how to pay the mortgage would mean that there would be far less stress, mental illness, alcoholism, drug use, eating disorders, suicide or other forms of illness

### **Implications for the South.**

There is widespread and increasing rejection of conventional development for poor countries. Many recognise it as a form of plunder siphoning trillions of dollars of wealth from poor to rich countries every year (Hickle et al. 2021) and incapable of providing satisfactory conditions for all. (Author 2021.) In many regions people are turning away from it to form localised self-sufficient and self-governing, cooperative villages of the kind argued for above. (Barkin and Sanchez 2019, Leahy 2009, Leahy and Goforth 2014.) There are now large numbers involved in these ventures such as within the Zapatista, Rojavan Kurd, Ubuntu, Swaraj and Chikukwa movements. (Nelson, 2025.) Long ago Ghandi saw that this is the appropriate development model for poor countries.

### **Geopolitical implications.**

The simpler way prevents most of the big global problems and conflicts. Because it dramatically reduces levels of production and consumption, thereby eliminating most resource demand and environmental impact, it does not generate conflict over access to resources, land, markets and spheres of influence. (Author 2025.)

### **Peace of mind**

One of the biggest benefits would be the peace of mind that would come from the relaxed pace and the freedom from the need to struggle and work hard, the security that would come from knowing that you need not fear being dumped into unemployment by the economy, you need not struggle for decades to payoff your house, and knowing that you have a community that cares about you. Above all you would know that you were not living in ways that cause global problems but were living in ways that all people could practise. You could feel pride in your town and its citizens for exemplifying a sustainable and just society.

### **Conclusions.**

As I see it, living in the ways indicated would make life far more interesting and satisfying than it is for almost all people in consumer society today. Many of us would be happy to live on 5% or less of the dollar, footprint, and non-renewable resource and energy and costs typical of rich countries today. In conventional economic terms we would be extremely poor, but our quality of life would be much higher than it is even for high-income people today. There would be many things we couldn't have, most obviously lots of travel and big and expensive houses and possessions, but the important point is that there are enjoyable alternatives to consuming. In my view those provided by the kind of society outlined would be far more satisfying than those offered by consumer society. We would have been liberated from having to work perhaps three times too hard, from insecurity and isolation, and from needing a high income to purchase a lot of expensive things. More importantly, we would have gained great spiritual riches: time, community, opportunities to create, learn, give and contribute, to be appreciated, to reflect and to grow.

### **Illustrative cases.**

Over the past thirty years a concern to move in this general direction has gathered momentum, most evident in the Permaculture, Voluntary Simplicity, Eco-village and Transition Towns movements. The Dancing Rabbit ecovillage in Missouri has per capita resource consumption rates around 5 - 10% of US averages, while enjoying above average quality of life indices. (Lockyer 2017.) Author (2022) shows how a Sydney outer suburb could be restructured to enable almost all food to be produced from within its boundaries. Author (2025b) details very low per capita dollar and

energy costs for homestead functioning in cooperative and frugal ways. These points are also illustrated in the Pigface point video (Author 2023.)

Possibly the most impressive example is given by [The Catalan Integral Cooperative](#) where by a large number of people have come together to run sophisticated alternative systems meeting needs for food, health services and employment, with no role for the market or the state.

### To summarise.

Above all the village is the. only social form that can diffuse most if not all of the global problems now threatening to destroy us. It cuts resource demand dramatically, thereby diffusing most global conflicts, which are generated primarily by struggles for control of resources, and it eliminates most ecological impacts. It liberates poor countries from the “development” model that gears their economies to supplying resources to rich countries, and it represents the appropriate development path for them. And not the least of its benefits, it eliminates the factors damaging social cohesion and the quality of life of most people today.

The crucial factors determining social bonds and community are to do with incentives and conditions. This is frequently overlooked. Many works seeking to remedy the weakening of community only urge people to make an effort to voluntarily engage with others, the common advice being “... knock on your neighbour’s door”. This fails to recognise firstly that in a robust community there are powerful incentives for knocking on one’s neighbours door, both push and pull factors. In the communities being described here all would realise that if they don’t discuss issues, turn up to working bees, participate in town assemblies, conscientiously observe and fix and consider options then their community will weaken and their own welfare and quality of life will deteriorate. In addition to these push factors they will know that contributing in these ways adds greatly to their own quality and enjoyment of life.

Secondly, the situation involves conditions that throw people together in satisfying interactions and activities. They know many other people and run into familiar others through the day. They help each other, cooperate on working bees, discuss issues in cafes and at town meetings, recognise their dependence on others, and appreciate the skills and contributions of many others.

The coming time of great troubles will create these incentives and conditions. People will realise that their fate depends on knocking on their neighbour’s door and that it will be opened by a friendly helpful person.

Finally, the village enshrines the correct form of government. That form is Anarchism. For at least 10,000 years in Western “civilization” people have been ruled, mostly by tyrants but also by elected governments. The Anarchist vision centres on people ruling themselves, through thoroughly participatory arrangements which strive to avoid any dominating others. This is crucial in the above vision of the village, evident in the principles of town assemblies, focusing on mutual assistance and the welfare of the community, seeking consensus decisions, subsidiarity (taking decisions at the lowest possible level), spontaneity (citizens acting when problems become evident), handling wider issues through federations and delegations to conferences. Even

national policy decisions can be made in these ways, as is done in many regions, for instance Switzerland. The increasing interest in citizens juries represents a step in this direction.

There is now globally a surge of concern to devolve to localist structures and procedures, driven by the realisation that rule by centralised states is failing to solve problems well.

### **So, should we set up many ecovillages?**

The implication of the foregoing argument is not that this should be a primary goal. Although the more ecovillages established on greenfield sites the better, that should not be the focus of the degrowth movement. The need is to transform existing settlements towards the kinds of structures and practises ecovillages exhibit.

It is costly and difficult to set up a new village, requiring a small dedicated group of unusual, energetic and well-resourced people. But about half the world's people are already living in existing villages, and most of the rest live in urban suburbs and neighbourhoods where many of the above practices could easily be established, if that was the intention. This is happening in many cities, under the label of the Transition Towns movement. Existing suburbs and neighbourhoods have many of the structures and procedures that are needed in the new settlements, avoiding the many difficult tasks confronting those wishing to establish a new eco-village. The goal should be to help more people in existing towns to see the wisdom of joining the Transition Towns movement.

It should be stressed that these things can be and are being done within cities. This does not mean that cities can be made sustainable. But the Catalan Integral Cooperative and the Rojavan Kurds are among many cases showing that suburbs and neighbourhoods within cities could develop many of the above village procedures.

The deteriorating global predicament will force people towards this realisation. There is a strong case that a major collapse of environmental, resource, political, social, and especially financial systems is rapidly approaching. This will force people to turn towards the small scale, localised, cooperative, self-sufficient alternative arrangements outlined above. (On Simpler Way transition theory see Author 2020.)

For detailed accounts of the ways being argued for see [The Alternative, Sustainable Society](#) or the 48 minute video [A visit to Pigface Point](#).

A.B.C., (2025), Australian Broadcasting Corporation. [News](#). 20.7.2025.

Alexander, S., and B. Gleeson, (2018), Degrowth in the Suburbs. Palgrave Macmillan. Singapore.

Barkin, D., and A. Sánchez, (2019). The communitarian revolutionary subject: new forms of social transformation Department of Economics, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Xochimilco, Mexico City, MEXICO, [barkin@correo.xoc.uam.mx](mailto:barkin@correo.xoc.uam.mx)  
[https://www.iccaconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Barkin\\_Communitarian-revolutionary-subject.pdf](https://www.iccaconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Barkin_Communitarian-revolutionary-subject.pdf)

Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, (2024), Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (2024) Australian Crop Report.  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/agricultural-outlook/australian-crop-report/new-south-wales>

Eckhouse, G., (2021), United States hydraulic fracturing's short-cycle revolution and the global oil industry's uncertain future, *Geoforum*, December. 246-256.

Fabre, A., (2019), 050: Estimation and implications on prices. Ecological Economics. 164, Oct.

Groehring and Rosencwajg Associates, (2025), Peak Shale Amid Maximum Pessimism. 2<sup>nd</sup> July. <https://blog.gorozen.com/blog/peak>

Haberl, H., et al., (2020), "A systematic review of the evidence on decoupling of GDP, resource use and GHG emissions, part II: synthesizing the insights", Environmental Research Letters, 15 .  
[https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/159384/1/Haberl%2Bet%2Bal\\_%202020%20\\_Environ.\\_Res.\\_Lett.\\_10.1088\\_1748-9326\\_ab842a.pdf](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/159384/1/Haberl%2Bet%2Bal_%202020%20_Environ._Res._Lett._10.1088_1748-9326_ab842a.pdf)

Holmgren, D., (2018), RetroSuburbia, Meliodora, Melbourne.

Hume, I. V., M. Salomon and T. Cavagnaro, (2022), Growing Enough Veggies to Feed Yourself Depends on These 3 Things, Life Hacker, The Conversation.  
<https://theconversation.com/fennel-looking-a-bit-feeble-growing-enough-veggies-to-feed-yourself-depends-on-these-3-things-182475>

Jereolmak, C. , (2021), The fracking boom is over. MIT Technology Review.  
<https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/07/01/1027822/fracking-boom-jobs-industry/>

Kennedy, C., (2025), EIA Says U.S. Oil Production Will Peak in 2027. Oilprice. Apr 16. <https://oilprice.com/contributors/Charles-Kennedy-shale-amid-maximum-pessimism>

Kropotkin, P., (1902), Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution.  
<file:///Users/fredericketrainer/Desktop/MANUSCRIPT/KROPOTKIN%20BOOK%20Mutual%20Aid.htm>

Leahy, T., (2009), Permaculture Strategy for the South African Villages, Palmwoods, Qld., PI Productions Photography.

Leahy T. S., and M. Goforth, (2014), Chikukwa and CELUCT: Sustainable Revolution: Permaculture in Ecovillages, Urban Farms and Communities Worldwide, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California.

Levinson, M., (2022), Australia: Growing Enough Veggies to Feed Yourself Depends on These 3 Things, City Farmer, June 14.  
<https://cityfarmer.info/australia-growing-enough-veggies-to-feed-yourself-depends-on-these-3-things/>

Mate, G., and Mate D., (2023), The Myth of Normal. Vermillion, London.

McDougall, R., P. Kristiansen and R. Radar, (2018), Small-scale urban agriculture results in high yields but requires judicious management of inputs to achieve sustainability. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2019 Jan 2; 116(1): 129–134. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1809707115

Messler, M., (2023), U.S. Shale Production Is Set For A Rapid Decline, Oilprice, May 20. <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/US-Shale-Production-Is-Set-For-A-Rapid-Decline.html>

Parrique, T., J. Bath, F. Briens, J. Spanenberg, (2019), Decoupling Debunked. Evidence and arguments against green growth as a sole strategy for sustainability. A study edited by the European Environment Bureau, EEB, July, Brussels, Belgium.  
<https://eeb.org/library/decoupling-debunked/>

Peterson, A., (2024), The Great Fracking Mirage, Medium. Dec. 28.  
<https://medium.com/edge-of-collapse/the-great-fracking-mirage-5b3bb4cfa9ab>

Rockström, J., Gupta, J., Qin, D. et al. (2023), Safe and just Earth system boundaries. Nature, 619, 102–111 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06083-8>.

Today in Energy, (2024), U.S. shale natural gas production has declined so far in 2024. In Depth Analysis. Oct. 24.  
<https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=63506>

Trainer, T., (2020), Simpler Way transition theory. Real World Economics Review, 91, 96 – 112.0.

Trainer, T., (2022), “How Resource-Cheaply Could We Live Well? “, real-world economics review, issue no. 99, 64 – 79.

Trainer, T., (2023), Storage implications of Australian wind data. Biophysical Economics and Sustainability, Volume 8, Article 7. Oct.

Trainer, T., (2023), On degrowth strategy: The Simpler Way perspective, Environmental Values, December. DOI: [10.1177/09632719231214309](https://doi.org/10.1177/09632719231214309)

Trainer, T., (2025a), Is agribusiness better than small-scale alternatives?, Biophysical Economics and Resource Quality, Springer, vol. 10(1), pages 1-11, June.

Trainer, T., (2025b), How Resource-Cheaply Could We Live Well. A case study.

TSW (2023), A visit to Pigface Point,  
Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9WSfGGdZRs>

TSW (2024), The Spanish Anarchists. <https://thesimplerway.info/Spanish.html>

TSW, (2025), The Simpler Way. <https://thesimplerway.info/>

Vansintjan, A., (2021), Urban Fish Ponds: Low-tech Sewage Treatment for Towns and Cities, Resilience, April 15.

World Wildlife Fund, (2018). Living Planet Report; Aiming Higher. World Wildlife Fund and London Zoological Society  
[https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge\\_hub/all\\_publications/living\\_planet\\_report\\_2018/](https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/all_publications/living_planet_report_2018/)

Zainuddin, Z., and D. Mercer, (2014), Domestic Residential Garden Food Production in Melbourne, Australia: A fine-grained analysis and pilot study. Australian Geographer, Vol. 45, No. 4: 465–484,  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2014.954299>