Local Futures

Annual Report 2019
Note from the Director
Helena Norberg-Hodge

I recently spoke with Gail Bradbrook, cofounder of Extinction Rebellion – the game-changing movement for climate action. As is often the case with those who are new to our work, she was shocked when I cited some of the numbers on needless trade – figures that appear in our recently published “Insane Trade factsheet” (see page 6). A prime example of insane trade is that countries routinely import and export huge quantities of identical products on a daily basis – utter madness at a time of climate crisis. This is happening because governments are blindly subsidizing, taxing and regulating in favor of global businesses and banks, enabling them to profit from this “redundant trade” despite the human and ecological costs. Gail was in agreement about the need for this bigger-picture analysis, and when we later sent her our climate paper, we were delighted to receive an emphatic response: “This is incredibly important and useful,” she wrote. “I really mean it!”

Extinction Rebellion and other movements for climate action have been successful in elevating the climate debate this year, but I believe that a deep systemic critique would significantly broaden the movement. A systemic view exposes the corporate-friendly pseudo-solutions that have co-opted the environmental movement, and, crucially, allows us to connect with the huge number of people whose primary concern is securing livelihoods for themselves and their families. This broader perspective makes clear that the wedge between environmental and economic concerns is an artificial one: today, the same global economy that is escalating greenhouse gas emissions is also driving economic insecurity and social breakdown. At the same time, a shift in the opposite direction – towards strengthening local economies – would create secure livelihoods and reweave the fabric of community, while restoring biodiversity and massively reducing ecological impacts.

This is the big-picture perspective that we continue to share at our Economics of Happiness conferences (page 11) and other public presentations (page 14). It is a perspective with the potential to take us beyond an increasingly antagonistic left-right divide, and to transcend the maze of identity politics that serves to polarize urban and rural, vegan and non-vegan, male and female, immigrant and native-born.

We have connected these dots in our new book, Local Is Our Future, which we published in July to a very positive reception (page 4). Many readers have already expressed their gratitude for such a clear, concise and cohesive synthesis of the major issues of the day. This short book also points to the flourishing local economy initiatives that are forging a hopeful path into the future.

There is clearly a need for this message, as people around the world witness the everyday struggles of friends, family and neighbors: it’s becoming virtually impossible for young people to find jobs where they can afford housing, while most of us have been touched by the escalating epidemics of stress, depression, addiction and suicide. Our big picture analysis not only offers hope for the future, it can spark an impassioned fire of committed action. Over the years, this is something we have seen again and again.
Encouraging signs are clearer than ever in South Korea, where our work continues to grow by leaps and bounds. This year, I had a private meeting with South Korea’s Prime Minister, Lee Nak-yeon, and a public conversation with Seoul’s charismatic Superintendent of Education, Cho Hee-yeon. The latter subsequently committed to procuring all of Seoul’s school lunches regionally: that’s 1 million meals per day! I was also invited to address the newly formed Presidential Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Policy. Meanwhile, I’ve been meeting over the past five years with the much-loved, progressive mayor of Seoul, Park Won-soon, who is increasingly championing the cause for economic localization, recognizing that it offers the best way to solve both ecological and social problems.

We are particularly excited that the city of Jeonju, population 650,000, has already taken big steps towards the local: they are actively supporting their local food system, have experimented with a local currency, and are now exploring public banking. After networking with international presenters at the Economics of Happiness conferences there, the city government has sent representatives to Japan and the US to study successful localization initiatives and to return with key policy suggestions.

At the same time, our impact in Japan is expanding. At our third Economics of Happiness World Forum in Tokyo, it was exciting to meet with representatives from various movements for small-scale farming, – and to hear about the growing numbers of young people joining these movements, not only in Japan, but worldwide. Our colleague Professor Wen Tiejun, founder of the New Rural Reconstruction Movement in China, said that their group has been able to shift Beijing’s development policy and to secure more structural support for rural livelihoods. And our new Palestinian collaborator, Saad Dagher, reports that there are more young people than ever coming back to the land in his homeland. (Alarmingly, Saad also told us that UN climate “experts” recently visited him in Palestine to try to sell him on “smart agriculture” – a hijacking of climate concern to promote chemical- and energy-intensive farming, using robots and drones linked to satellites.)

In the face of all the corporate-backed propaganda for a high-tech, jobless, ultra-urbanized and even interplanetary future, we are doing our utmost to raise the voices of the hundreds of millions of people around the world who are opting for a very different future – one that involves coming home to community and to the Earth. In this vein, we continue to highlight real-world examples that demonstrate the benefits of local food and farming – something we have championed since the 1990s (long before it became a popular cause).

As part of our local food campaign this year we published a number of blogs and articles on food and farming, and curated a “farms of the future” film series (page 5) that looks at hopeful trends – including the young farmers movements. Even as they struggle against the structural biases of an inhuman economic system, the localization initiatives showcased in the films and in our Planet Local series (page 4) are truly inspiring examples of human ingenuity and perseverance.

In uncertain times, these quiet, grassroots efforts give me more joy than anything else. At Local Futures, we are in the fortunate and all-too-rare position of hearing good news stories from every corner of the globe on a regular basis, and, from our international perspective, we are party to the global cross-pollination of localization initiatives. It is this holistic, life-affirming movement that we are committed to promoting in all of our work. I hope you will enjoy reading about it in the following pages.
“Local is Our Future is an inspirational manifesto. Globalization is destroying our communities and our planet, but Helena presents a compelling, positive solution.”

~ Alice Waters, restaurateur and local food activist

You can find Local is Our Future on our website, or at your neighborhood bookstore.

**Local is Our Future**

Steve Gorelick

Helena Norberg-Hodge doesn’t waste time getting to the point in her latest book, *Local is Our Future*: the first sentence reads, “For our species to have a future, it must be local.” Helena not only makes a compelling argument for an economic shift from global to local, she describes the steps needed at both the policy and grassroots level, and gives examples of inspiring initiatives already underway. She also counters many of the myths that prevent people from embracing localization.

*Local is Our Future* includes chapters devoted to the root causes of extremism, the inaccurate depictions of traditional ways of life, the crucial importance of local food, the need for “big picture activism,” and many other timely topics. The book concludes with the transcript of a personal conversation Helena had with her good friend, Wendell Berry.

*Local Is Our Future* has received glowing endorsements:

“At a time when any thinking person would have good reason to despair, Helena Norberg-Hodge provides a wonderfully positive vision of the future.”

~ Joanna Macy, co-author of *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in Without Going Crazy*

“The argument for economic decentralization, powerfully and passionately presented in this fine book, is one that we can no longer ignore.”

~ David Suzuki, environmental activist and television presenter

“The wisdom contained in these pages, which reflect a lifetime of Helena Norberg-Hodge’s work in dozens of countries, has the power to pull Earth back from the brink.”

~ Michael Shuman, author of *The Local Economy Solution*

**Planet Local**

Carly Gayle

Planet Local is our web series showcasing some of the grassroots localization projects springing up all around the world. Currently in its sixth year, the Planet Local online library includes nearly 150 projects, now searchable by location on a map. New entries in 2019 take us from a waste-free café in Croatia to a fossil fuel-free electric power grid in Denmark; from harvesting urban fruit in Canada to harvesting plants for herbal medicine in rural
Nigeria; from peer-to-peer solar energy networks in Bangladesh to an entire region of France that is shifting towards organic agriculture.

Planet Local also profiles outstanding initiatives in greater depth through articles on Medium. These include: Tosepan, a 35,000-member network of cooperatives in Mexico that provides for the full spectrum of human needs through agroecology, community banking, and other self-organized systems; and the Seneca Creek Joinery, a vertically-integrated community-scale sawmill near Washington, DC that illustrates how urban wood recovery can preserve forests and support thriving local economies.

In the coming year, Planet Local will continue to expand the library, aiming for 250 entries by the end of next year, and will increase the number of longer articles published, with a continued focus on projects creating land-based livelihoods in the global North and South. We hope these case studies will make the diverse localization movement even more vivid and accessible — inspiring people who wish to embark on new projects and connecting those around the world who are already hard at work in their local communities.

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**Planet Local Short Film Series 2019**

Isabel Marlens

Local Futures has committed to a broad, multi-year local food campaign because we’ve long believed that transforming the food system is one of the most powerful tools for building a more just and sustainable economy. But today, as the average age of farmers worldwide hovers around 60 years old, the question has become pressing: who will grow the food of the future and what will their farms look like?

In February and March, we released the Planet Local Short Film Series, a collection of films — all freely available online — that offer a vision of a future in which farms are small, diverse, and regenerative places of connection and celebration. Many of the films focus on the new generation of young farmers around the world, on the many inspiring forms their farms can take, as well as on some of the challenges they face. To accompany the films, we published a blog post — “The Farms of the Future” — that offers a more in-depth exploration of the ways the food system intersects with other timely issues like climate change, diversity in its myriad forms, economic inequality, and the epidemic of loneliness (see page 19).

The blog post and the films were shared widely online, and will remain available on our website; food and farming groups have also set up screenings to show the series in their local communities. We plan to add to the collection as new films are released, and have encouraged those in our networks — including the International Alliance for Localization — to make and share short films about their own local food projects.
The way trade works in the global economy can be absolutely insane. For example, countries like the US and the UK import thousands of tons of staple food products every year – while simultaneously exporting the same foods; fish caught off the coast of Scotland, meanwhile, are routinely shipped to China to be processed before being sent back to the UK to be sold. Practices like these add to the bottom lines of global corporations, but they waste resources, worsen climate change, and undermine the livelihoods of small-scale food producers and workers in both the global North and South. This damaging system is the inevitable consequence of deregulatory “free trade” agreements, along with billions of dollars in supports and subsidies (both direct and hidden) that make long-distance transport artificially cheap.

As part of an ongoing local food campaign, we decided to highlight the absurdity of global food trade in its current form with a humorous 3-minute film called Insane Trade! The film was produced in the style of a trailer for a 1940s film, and was designed to be an entertaining, tongue-in-cheek introduction to the topics of redundant trade, re-importation and other mind-boggling trade practices.

To accompany the film, we created a referenced four-page factsheet that delves into greater depth on insane trade. The factsheet describes how companies create convoluted global supply chains in order to minimize labor costs and take advantage of lax environmental and health regulations. It also discusses the climate cost of trade: the shipping industry alone is set to produce 17% of global emissions by 2050 if the volume of global trade continues to grow at its current rate. As with the short film, the factsheet aims to make the often bewildering and convoluted issue of trade policy not only comprehensible, but emotionally resonant.

The release of the film and factsheet marked the start of an organized Insane Trade campaign. We reached out to our individual supporters and like-minded organizations with links to the materials, and launched a week-long social media blitz during which we and other activist groups shared stats and clips from the film and factsheet, along with the #InsaneTradeWeek hashtag.

We followed this up with a more focused attempt to reach climate change groups with information about the climate impacts of increased trade. We wrote and posted a blog about this confluence of issues, which was picked up by numerous media outlets, and we organized a conference call with
climate activists from around the world to discuss how the trade-climate link could be incorporated into their work. Among the participants were Rupert Read, one of the leading spokespersons for the Extinction Rebellion movement in the UK; Chitrarajan Kumar of Extinction Rebellion India; Soumya Dutta from India Climate Justice; and others from the UK, US, and Spain – a mix of activists and academics whose work centers on climate justice, local food, and alternatives to conventional development economics. Participants shared lessons learned from their own campaigns, and honed in on the question of how to effectively communicate the relationship between trade and climate chaos to people with differing priorities on different continents. We made valuable connections and planted the seeds of future collaborations.

Some collaborations are already underway. The UK Landworkers Alliance, for example, asked us to help with their position paper on trade. Helena Norberg-Hodge recently met with the head of Greenpeace UK, who expressed interest in the insane trade campaign, and we submitted written testimony to the UK Parliament’s inquiry on trade and the environment.

As topics like climate chaos, Brexit, and the rise of right-wing authoritarianism continue to make headlines around the world, we continue to draw attention to the ways in which trade deregulation is tied up in all of these hot-button topics, often in pivotal ways. We are encouraged that groups like Extinction Rebellion are including economic issues in their analysis, and that Greta Thunberg’s address to the United Nations mocked “the fairytale of perpetual economic growth.” The time is right for economic policy – including government support for insane trade – to be an integral part of the debate around the climate crisis.

“The US imports over $100 million worth of tomatoes per month, even during peak US tomato-growing season.”
~Congressional Research Service, 2017

The Insane Trade! film and factsheet can be found on our website, along with our article about insane trade and climate chaos. We encourage you to share these resources widely as a way to draw attention to both the absurdity of the current system and to the solution-multiplying benefits of localization.

“California imports as many cherries and almonds as it exports.”
~A Place-Based Perspective of Food in Society, 2015
In addition to a truly inspiring Economics of Happiness conference (see page 11), the 2019 season in Ladakh was brimming with activity, from workshops to daily film screenings and discussions to harvesting in villages.

**Mindful Futures 3: Reweaving the Fabric of Community**

For the third year in a row, Local Futures joined with the Ladakhi group Flowering Dharma to organize “Mindful Futures”, a four-day residential workshop for Ladakhi youth that looks at contemporary social and environmental challenges, as well as locally-based, sustainable solutions. Participants included over 30 young people, ranging in age from 14 to late-20s, and coming from all regions of Ladakh. Responding to emerging problems in Ladakh – including the deterioration of mental health among youth – the theme of this year’s workshop was “Reweaving the Fabric of Community.” The role of the globalized economy, consumerism, advertising and other political-economic factors in worsening mental health trends was examined during the first two days; on day three we pivoted to the importance of rebuilding localized, cooperative and sustainable economies and livelihoods as a way to arrest and reverse the social isolation and environmental breakdown tearing at Ladakh today. Sharing their inspirations, motivations, and experiences were young local entrepreneurs who have started traditional Ladakhi food restaurants, and a member of a passive-solar, earthen building design company. We also travelled to the village of Gya to meet an organic farmer and hear about his farming philosophy and approach, camping out in a field next to his house. The following day, we engaged in hands-on work trying out the various stages of woolen fabric-making, from carding and spinning to weaving local sheep’s wool. The participants took to this part of the workshop with an encouraging level of gusto.
The workshop was graced by the presence of renowned Tibetan philosopher, spiritual leader and longtime friend of Local Futures, Samdhong Rinpoche, who delivered two talks full of profound wisdom – one exclusively for the participants of Mindful Futures, another open to the public. In both talks, Rinpoche provided a scathing critique of the values taught by the modern education system and media, and the structural violence inherent in mainstream capitalist economics. He also spoke of the urgent need for systemic alternatives rooted in compassion and tolerance.

**Help with the Harvest**

From mid-August to mid-September we organized a core group of volunteers to travel to villages to live with and help local families at harvest time. This is a very meaningful program for both the participants and the hosts, hitting all the notes of well-being: connection to other people and nature; vigorous physical activity; meaningful work; laughing, singing, cooking and eating together; clean air, water, soil; beauty/awe; and sense of belonging and purpose. The host families of course benefit from the free labor which otherwise must be hired for numerous days, but the scarcity of labor and family members – including children – is a tragedy that our project does not ultimately resolve. Rather, we are simply recognizing and responding to a situation caused by systemic factors, and facilitating the sort of deep intercultural exchange that has always characterized Local Futures’ work in Ladakh.

**Little Tibet Film Festival**

In early August, Local Futures co-sponsored the Little Tibet Film Festival, organized by alternative travel enterprise and community space, Tendrel. Our films *Ancient Futures*, *The Economics of Happiness*, and *Mindful Travel in Ladakh* were each screened twice, drawing a positive response from mixed international, Indian and Ladakhi audiences.
Naropa Fellowship Talks and Workshops
Local Futures was invited multiple times to screen films, lead discussions and conduct full-day workshops for the Naropa Fellowship, a 9-month program in social entrepreneurship for youth from across Ladakh, the Himalayan region, and other parts of India. These interactions were very enthusiastically received, with many of the fellows seeking follow-up meetings and guidance for their projects from Local Futures staff. Two fellows were hired by us for the remainder of the season, and were invaluable in running our programs and organizing our Economics of Happiness conference.

Dhontang: Food in Ladakh
This summer, Local Futures co-published a new book titled Dhontang: Food in Ladakh, with the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in collaboration with the organizations Snow Leopard Conservancy and Kalpavriksh. The book, intended mainly for Ladakhi youth, looks at the traditional food system, recent changes, future challenges and new initiatives for a sustainable food future in Ladakh. The book was formally launched by Satish Kumar at the Economics of Happiness conference. Ladakh Project Coordinator Alex Jensen was one of the editors of the book, and wrote the Introduction and a chapter on Food and Environment.
In 2012, we hosted our first International Economics of Happiness conference, in Berkeley, California. At the time, we had no idea whether other conferences would follow. Yet this year we held our 24th conference in what has become a worldwide conference series with broad impact.

From the beginning, our “big picture” critique of the global corporate economy was eye-opening to most conference attendees, as was our promotion of localization as a systemic solution. As the problems linked to the global growth model became clearer and the search for alternatives more urgent, we increasingly heard from people asking us to host an economics of happiness conference near them. As a result, we have collaborated over the years with a wide range of individuals, groups, institutions and even local governments, to host transformative events that address the why and how of economic models that support the wellbeing of people and planet.

During the past eight years, we have asked ourselves many times whether an international conferences series is worth the long hours and hard work required. But because we receive so much positive feedback – from participants and presenters alike – we are convinced that these gatherings continue to play an important role in paving the way for a new economy. That is because they provide so many people with inspiration and concrete strategies for systemic change, and a broad perspective that allows them to see how their individual and place-based efforts are helping build a global movement for localization.

This year our efforts were focused on Asia, where we co-hosted four conferences: Leh, Ladakh; Bangalore, India; Jeonju, South Korea; and Yokohama, Japan.

**Leh, Ladakh**

It was particularly meaningful for us to hold an Economics of Happiness conference in Ladakh, where Local Futures has deep roots. We co-hosted the two-day event with the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies (CIBS), Julay Ladakh, the Himalayan Film House, and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council. The main themes of the event were traditional wisdom and philosophies, place-based education, and food and farming.

The conference offered a rich pool of inspiring plenary sessions and workshops, combined with festival-feel provided by local NGO and food entrepreneur stalls. Among others, a number of international thinkers and activists spoke:

**Satish Kumar**, the much-loved peace and environmental activist, gave an inspiring talk about re-connection between humans and the Earth, along with lessons from his experiences at Schumacher College, which Satish co-founded.

**Afsar Jafri**, from the international small-farmer advocacy group GRAIN, spoke about the severe threats to Indian farmers and consumers posed by “free-trade” treaties, and how farmers’ movements are pushing back and building healthy local food systems.

**Geshe Dakpa Kalsang**, Dean at CIBS, who questioned the mainstream belief that only economic growth and material accumulation can yield happiness.
Keibo Oiwa, founder of the Sloth Club in Japan, described the spiritual impoverishment and ecological degradation that have come with industrial growth-based development in Japan.

Sonam Wangchuk, founder of the Student’s Ecological and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL), articulated a vision of a localized, re-ruralized future Ladakh.

Tsewang Namgail, Director of the Snow Leopard Conservancy, similarly called for a development model that is “slow, sensible and sustainable.”

Over twenty different workshop sessions provided participants with opportunities for deeper engagement on issues ranging from alternative education to the impacts of globalization on mental health, from natural building to the role of sheep-herding in Ladakh. There were also well-attended sessions on rethinking tourism, on youth perspectives on the future of Ladakh, and on the possibilities for a sustainable future under Union Territory status. The conference celebrated Ladakhi culture with a broad range of local foods and traditional music and dance.

Bangalore, India

For our second conference in Bangalore (we held a conference there in 2014), we again joined forces with Bhoomi College, this time for an event with the twin themes of “Decoding Economics and Rethinking Education”. We were joined by 450 educators, activists, farmers, NGO representatives, entrepreneurs, and young people – all coming together to discuss how to prepare present and coming generations for healthy lives within ecological limits.

Seetha Ananthasivan and Rema Kumar, leaders in alternative education, talked about the Bhoomi experience, which provides a beacon of hope for young activists in search of meaningful lives.

Claude Alvares, founder of the Goa Foundation, spoke with great humor in favor of walking away from meaningless schooling and corporate lives.

Aseem Shrivastava, an environmental economist and philosopher, provided a trenchant critique of mainstream development drawing on Gandhi and Tagore.

Devinder Sharma, a food and trade policy analyst, talked about the social and environmental costs of the global economy, with a particular focus on the plight of Indian farmers.

Rebecca Martusewicz, an educator from Eastern Michigan University, USA, drew from decades of experience to speak about ecojustice education.

Alejandro Lopez Musalem, environmental activist, shared about agroecology and campesino movements in Mexico.

Anja Lyngbaek, Alex Jensen and Henry Coleman, members of Local Futures staff, covered topics related to media literacy, the economics of happiness, and big picture activism, with a particular focus on how to inform others about these issues.
In addition to plenaries and workshops, the conference had its own particular identity that included music, singing and humorous emceeing – including a sarcastic “devil’s advocate” who would continually butt in to express mainstream values and extol conventional measures of “progress.”

As was true of the Ladakh conference, the majority of the participants at the Bangalore event were young people looking for transformation – both on a systemic level and in their personal lives. In Ladakh, the youth were looking for opportunities for dignified lives in tune with their own traditional culture and natural environment, while in Bangalore, many of the young are searching for a way out of jobs in the corporate sector and ways in to more meaningful lives, for example, through land-based livelihoods.

**Jeonju, South Korea**

In Jeonju, South Korea, we co-hosted our fifth annual conference there, in partnership with Mayor Kim Seung-soo’s government.

This year, the focus of the conference was on public banking, urban regeneration and local food policies. Ellen Brown, President of the Public Banking Institute in the US and author of dozens of books about banking, was the keynote speaker. Self-described “renegade economist” Della Duncan spoke about urban regeneration, drawing on experience from the San Francisco Bay Area in the US. Local Futures Associate Programs Director Anja Lyngbaek spoke about the progressive policy initiatives for healthy local food systems underway worldwide.

It is notable that while the push for systemic change in most places comes from the grassroots, in Jeonju the government is leading the way and encouraging civic society to follow suit. Our first Jeonju conference, in 2015, resulted in the Jeonju Declaration on the Economics of Happiness, which established the city’s ongoing commitment to localization.

Among the concrete results of our collaboration with the city of Jeonju is a local food plan supported by public policy measures, with targets that expand year by year. Local Futures remains in contact with Jeonju’s food planning commission, providing information and linking them with international expertise.

After learning about local currencies at one of our conferences, the city government launched and tested its own local currency. The Jeonju Mayor’s office is now looking into the possibilities of setting up a public bank.

**Yokohama, Japan**

Our final conference of the year took place at Meiji Gakuin University in Yokohama, Japan, co-hosted by our close friend and colleague, Keibo Oiwa. This conference – our third in an ongoing series in Japan – was hugely inspiring, with an enthusiastic audience of 1,200 packing the hall.
The conference brought together a powerful and diverse array of voices:

**Saad Dagher**, Palestinian agro-ecology expert and community leader, who brought heartwarming stories of renewal from his homeland.

**Masahiko Yamada**, Japan’s former Minister of Agriculture, who is now one of the country’s leading critics of large-scale farming and the global food system.

**Michael Shuman**, US-based local economy expert, longtime Local Futures collaborator, and core member of the International Alliance for Localization.

**Patricia Moguel Viveros**, a leading ethno-ecologist, who told us that Mexican president Andrés Obrador’s government is now basing its rural policy on the example of Tosepan, the largely indigenous network of cooperatives (see Alex Jensen’s excellent blog, “Tosepan: Resistance and Renewal in Mexico”).

**Wen Tiejun**, co-founder of the New Rural Reconstruction Movement in China, who told us that the Central Committee has reversed course and is now promoting small-scale farming, natural building materials, local food and other features of “ecological civilization”.

**Helena Norberg-Hodge**, who remains an ongoing inspiration to the localization movement in Japan.

Among the conference attendees was the famous Japanese singer, music producer, and activist Takeshi Kobayashi, who was very impressed with our “big picture” perspective. He has already set up a local food and farming education center, and wants to collaborate with us – including screening our film *The Economics of Happiness* on a regular basis.

Our conferences in Japan serve as a focal point for the country’s growing localization movement, and we look forward to many more such conferences in the future.

### Staff Talks and Presentations

Every year, Helena Norberg-Hodge speaks publicly to a wide range of audiences. The far ends of that spectrum were neatly demonstrated this past year by two events, one in Melbourne, Australia, the other in Brussels, Belgium.

The first of these took place at the Sustainable Living Festival, at which Helena and five others – including climate activist Greta Thunberg – participated in “The Great Debate”, with each trying to convince the audience that theirs was “the most effective form of disruptive change.” Helena’s argument for “big picture activism” won the day. Helena also gave a keynote address at the Festival to an enthusiastic packed house.

A very different event was the Brussels Economic Forum, organized by the European Commission. Unlike the Sustainable Living Festival, this was an opportunity for Helena to speak to people firmly committed to the idea of global growth. Other panelists were Marco Buti, the European Commission’s Director-General for Economics and Financial Affairs; Aranch Gonzáles, Executive Director of the International Trade Center; and Hanneke Faber, a top executive at the global food corporation Unilever. Among other things, Helena urged the panelists to “look through their haze of...
numbers at the ecological and cultural realities on the ground.” You can watch the panel here. While at the Forum, Helena also presented a screening of our film The Economics of Happiness, and had fruitful discussions with the IMF’s chief economist, with Nobel Laureate Sir Christopher Pissarides, and with Spain’s Finance Minister. She found all of them surprisingly receptive to the idea of localization as a strategic way forward.

Other events in 2019 included the Newkind Festival in Tasmania, where Helena gave a keynote address, led an Economics of Happiness workshop, and participated in a number of panels; a conference in Madrid called “Despierta, el planeta te necesita” (“Wake up, the planet needs you”); and Defend the Sacred, a conference in Portugal, where she spoke alongside the initiator of the first resistance camp at Standing Rock, Ladona Bravebull Allard, Diné (Navajo) activist Pat McCabe, Palestinian agroecologist Saad Dagher, and Alnoor Ladha of The Rules.

Helena gave other talks, including one at Medicine Festival in the UK, with Gail Bradbrook, cofounder of Extinction Rebellion, and several lectures to students at Schumacher College. She also participated in online events, including: the Power of Community Online Summit, organized by the Global Ecovillage Network; an hour-long webinar called “Transitioning from Global to Local Economies in the 21st Century”, organized by Gaia Education; Findhorn’s Sacred Ecology, Sacred Economy workshop; and Bayreuth University’s Bayreuther Dialoge on “Empowering community-led initiatives for a quicker climate transition”.

Helena had a very productive visit to South Korea, as she mentioned in the Director’s Note. She spoke at the Transition City International Conference, at a two-day conference for teachers, and at the Ecological Civilization conference, along with theologian John Cobb – at age 93 a truly inspiring colleague/soulmate. The interest in South Korea was so great that Helena returned only a few weeks later, invited this time, among others, by the Korean Women’s Environmental Network.

The past year was also a busy one for other Local Futures staff. Associate Programs Director Anja Lyngbaek spoke at our “Happiness in a Time of Crisis” event at The Gaunts House in the UK, gave a talk at the “This is Not a Design” conference in Maastricht, Netherlands, and presented keynote talks at three Economics of Happiness Conferences – in Ladakh, Bangalore and Jeonju (see page 11).

In addition to running a number of workshops in Ladakh this summer, Researcher and Project Coordinator Alex Jensen also presented at the Bangalore conference and gave a keynote talk at the Seoul International Appropriate Technology Festival.

Project Coordinator Henry Coleman participated in a number of events in Australia: he addressed a crowd of young people at the Rainbow Serpent Festival in Victoria, spoke on a food-and-farming panel at the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne, and talked about “Big Picture Activism and Systemic Thinking” at a Deep Ecology workshop in Sydney. He also presented at a number of our workshops in Ladakh this summer, and at our EoH conferences in Ladakh and Bangalore.
“Happiness In A Time Of Crisis”,
Dorset, UK
Anja Lyngbaek

Twenty-four people joined the residential course we organized at Gaunts House in July, arranged with the support of the Richard Glyn Charitable Foundation. The goal was to reawaken people’s deep ties to community and nature, and to explore the actions, attitudes and policy shifts that can lead to a happier, healthier and more equitable world.

Helena Norberg-Hodge brought together several of her friends and colleagues for rich and inspiring days filled with talks, discussions, fireside chats, role playing, yoga, spiritual ceremonies and beautiful walks. With its 2,000 acres of forests, meadows, organic gardens and parkland, Gaunts House was the perfect setting.

Presenters included peace and environmental activist Satish Kumar, eco-warrior Mac Macartney, and Brazilian climate policy expert Camila Moreno. Rupert Read, spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion UK, addressed the climate crisis. Jyoti Fernandes from the Landworkers’ Alliance (the British arm of the worldwide peasants’ movement, Via Campesina), informed us about the People’s Food Policy initiative in England.

David Wilson, who manages Duchy Home Farm at Highgrove and has worked alongside Prince Charles for 30 years, spoke passionately about farming in tune with nature, the importance of farm diversification, and the value of livestock for healthy soils and food systems. Direct democracy champion Peter Macfadyen charmed and inspired us with the story and strategies of Frome, the English town where local residents created a coalition of independents that won all of the town council seats – leading to new community-oriented policies with wellbeing in mind.

The course was a big hit, and we are planning another one at Gaunts House in 2020.

February is in the middle of Australia’s summer – a perfect time for an evening of “Big Picture Activism” at Byron Bay’s Community Centre. All of the 246 seats were full,
leaving the theater packed with an enthusiastic and energetic crowd.

The evening started with series of short talks by each of the speakers: Camila Moreno (Brazil), Manish Jain (India), Michael Shuman (USA), Keiyo Oiwa and Kai Sawyer (Japan), along with Helena Norberg-Hodge and Anja Lyngbaek, followed by a dynamic Q&A session moderated by charismatic radio host Mark Swivel. The evening concluded with an invitation to the participants to share their own big picture activist proposals. This made for an upbeat ending, with ideas and commitments ranging from the creation of a directory of local investment opportunities to the restoration of an abandoned farm, with regenerative farming and community in mind.

The evening event followed on from a closed retreat involving the speakers, as well as a few international observers. The retreat was an opportunity for a deep, face-to-face exchange of ideas about localization as a strategy for systemic change from different cultural and political perspectives.

New Book Collaboration:
Facing Up to Climate Reality

Since 2015, Local Futures has collaborated with Green House – a progressive think tank in the UK – on various projects, including workshops and publications. This year, Green House produced a new book, Facing Up to Climate Reality: Honesty, Disaster and Hope, pulling together contributions from numerous writers, teachers, and activists, each of whom confront climate change adaptation in constructive, radical and creative ways. Kristen Steele, Local Futures’ Director of Special Projects, co-wrote one of the chapters with Extinction Rebellion spokesperson Rupert Read, titled “Making the best of climate disasters: on the need for a localised and localising response.”

As the title suggests, the chapter addresses the inevitability of climate-related disasters – floods, fires, storms and so on – and suggests we use them to transform the future through applying localization principles. For decades, the “disaster capitalism” model has used crises to double down on globalization and corporate control of economies by exploiting people at their most vulnerable. Rupert and Kristen propose a new approach of “disaster localization”, where a vision of localized transformation is already in place for when disaster strikes. Such a vision draws on the natural inclination of people to come together and help each other in times of crisis, rather than depending on government and big business – thus further entrenching dependency on distant bureaucracy. At its core, a localized approach to rebuilding in the wake of disaster would mean a deliberate fostering of community and low-impact living.

The book is available for sale in print and ebook formats and is featured in a recent post on our blog.

Local Futures Blog
Steven Gorelick

We were quite pleased to hear that the Local Futures blog was named one of the “Top 100 Economics Blogs” by the website The Intelligent Economist. If that makes our blog sound overly wonkish to those unfamiliar with it, regular readers will know that not all of our posts have a strictly economic focus: we started the year, for example, with “Old Mother Forest”, Indian writer Suprabha Seshan’s lyrical paean to the natural world.
As part of our local food campaign we ran numerous essays on food and farming, including those by Local Futures staff contributors Anja Lyngbaek, Sean Keller, Alex Jensen, Isabel Marlens and Helena Norberg-Hodge. Several guest authors also weighed in, including Organic Consumers Association founder Ronnie Cummins and journalist Catherine Tumber. Other posts focused on the climate emergency, the rise of authoritarianism, the dangers of technophilia, the healing power of localization, and more.

Below are excerpts from a few of the past year’s blogs. The full posts – and many others – can be found on our website.

**Groomed to Consume**
Anja Lyngbaek

Most of us are aware that excessive consumption is a prime feature of modern life, and that it is the cause of multiple social and environmental problems. We are living in a so-called “consumer culture” – a rather fancy title for something that has more in common with an abusive affliction, like bulimia or alcoholism, than it does with real living culture.

**Variety, Survival, and the Revenge of the Luddites**
Damaris Zehner

Ironically, life keeps growing more complicated for those of us who prefer a simpler life. Every year there are more things I can’t do because I refuse to use a smartphone, for example: parking spaces I can’t pay for, coupons I can’t take advantage of, group activities in meetings I can’t do. I and people like me, however, will persist in keeping more primitive technologies alive, because we know that they may mean survival in an unknowable future.

**Growthism: Its Ecological, Economic and Ethical limits**
Herman Daly

We have many problems – poverty, unemployment, environmental destruction, climate change, financial instability, etc. – but only one solution for everything, namely economic growth. We believe that growth is the costless, win-win solution to all problems, or at least the necessary precondition for any solution. This is growthism. It now creates more problems than it solves.

**Degrowth: A Call for Radical Abundance**
Jason Hickel

For 150 years, economists have predicted that “In the very near future our economy will be so productive and replete that we will all have to work no more than a few hours a day.” But the prediction never comes true, because capitalism transforms even the most spectacular productivity gains not into abundance and human freedom, but into scarcity. It’s strange, isn’t it? The ideology of capitalism is that it is a system that generates immense abundance (so much stuff!) But in reality it is a system that relies on the constant production of scarcity.

Sean Keller’s blog post featured in the Ecologist

**Connecting the Dots: Insane Trade and Climate Chaos**
Sean Keller

Imagine a world where food routinely gets shipped thousands of miles away to be processed, then shipped back to be sold right where it started. Imagine a world in which, in most years since 2005, China has somehow managed to import more goods from itself than from the USA, one of...
its largest trading partners. This may sound like the premise of some darkly comic, faintly dystopian film – albeit one geared towards policy wonks. But it’s no joke – in fact, it is the daily reality of the global economy.

*The 9% Lie: Industrial Food and Climate Change*
Ronnie Cummins

Regenerative food, farming and land use are just as essential to our survival as moving beyond fossil fuels. So why aren’t more people talking about this? Why is it that moving beyond industrial agriculture, factory farms, agro-exports and highly-processed junk food to regenerating soils and forests and drawing down enough excess carbon from the atmosphere to re-stabilize our climate is getting so little attention from the media, politicians and the general public?

*Unlike a Globalized Food System, Local Food Won’t Destroy the Environment*
Helena Norberg-Hodge

To significantly reduce the many negative impacts of the food system, small-scale food and farming initiatives need to spread all over the world. Unfortunately, this has not happened, because the transformation of farming requires shifting not just how food is produced, but also how it is marketed and distributed. The food system is inextricably linked to an economic system that, for decades, has been fundamentally biased against the kinds of changes we need.

*The Farms of the Future*
Isabel Marlens

Every day, food is tended, harvested, transported, stored, and served up on our tables. In a very real sense, food cannot be separated from life itself. And so it has been said that changing the way we grow and eat food is one of the most powerful tools we have for changing our economies and society as a whole. So when we ask: what will the farms of the future look like? We should really be asking — what do we want the future to look like?

*Jacques Ellul: A Prophet for Our Tech-Saturated Times*
Andrew Nikiforuk

By now you have probably read about the so-called “tech backlash” against Silicon Valley and its peevish moguls. This media backlash, however, typically ends with nothing more radical than an earnest call for regulation or a break-up of Internet monopolies such as Facebook and Google. The problem, however, is much graver, and it is telling that most of the backlash stories invariably omit any mention of technology’s greatest critic, Jacques Ellul.

*To Leave or Remain: Dichotomy or Distraction?*
Helena Norberg-Hodge

At first glance, the two sides in the Brexit debate seem to have almost nothing in
common. Dig beneath the surface, however, and a fundamental similarity is revealed: both Leave and Remain are under the spell of the global market and see trade-based economic growth as the panacea for all our problems. They are not alone. Governments worldwide – whether led by nominally left or right political leaders – are systematically encouraging more consumption, more trade, and more energy-dependent, job-destroying technology.

Is 5G Worth the Risks?
Ishana Artra

5G is being touted as a necessary step to the ‘internet of things’ – a world in which our refrigerators alert us when we’re low on milk, our baby’s diapers tell us when they need to be changed, and Netflix is available everywhere, all the time. But what we’re not hearing is that evidence-based studies worldwide have clearly established the harmful effects of human exposure to pulsed radiofrequency radiation from cell towers, cell phones and other devices – and that 5G will make the problem exponentially worse.

Tosepan: Resistance and Renewal in Mexico
Alex Jensen

Throughout Mexico, there is a florescence of inspiring resistance and alternatives, some long-established, some only now springing up. In the southern state of Puebla, the lush, cloud-forested Sierra Norte mountains bordering Veracruz are home to one of the oldest and most inspiring of these movements of “the other Mexico” or México profundo: the Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan.

Old Mother Forest
Suprabha Seshan

If you want to create cultures of sustainability, listen to the green ones, and visit an ancient forest. Here, the mighty trees with their swirls of tender plants, and interweaving fungal allies, and flashes of colorful animals can show you how community, fecundity and diversity lead to immortality. Relearn the old ways here, how to relate with other beings, how to sustain each other and the whole culture indefinitely. Who created the biosphere? And who knows best how to keep it going?
Translations
Victoria Clarke

For a small organization we are remarkably international, with a staff that works in six countries on four continents. Our volunteer base is even more international – especially in Ladakh, where we continue to work alongside young people from all over the world. Just as importantly, we are continually contacted by volunteers eager to translate our books, reports, blogs and films into their native languages. The result is that our materials have been translated into a total of 47 different languages, from Afrikaans to Vietnamese.

In the past year, the Insane Trade! film and accompanying factsheet were translated into 13 languages, ranging from Korean to Spanish to Hindi. We also created a Ladakhi version of Going Local, our short animated introduction to localization, as a way to preview some of the themes of this year’s Economics of Happiness conference in Leh. With an Economics of Happiness conference planned for Mexico City in 2020, we are very grateful to the dedicated volunteers who recently translated nearly a dozen of our resources into Spanish. These will be featured in a Spanish version of our website now being developed for the Mexico event.

To see which of our publications and films have been translated into various languages, check out the new Translated Resources page on our website, where many of the materials can be downloaded for free. And if you’d like to help us expand the list of translated materials even further, contact us at info@localfutures.org.

We were also happy to hear that Los Libros de la Catarata, a respected publisher in Madrid, decided to bring out a Spanish-language version of Small is Beautiful, Big is Subsidized. The book, which details how taxes, subsidies and regulations systematically support the large and global at the expense of the small and local, was last updated in 2002; and though French, Polish, Italian, Russian and Slovakian editions have been published, those translations were done many years ago. But Catarata’s editors believe that the nearly 20 year-old book “is still very relevant and necessary”. Since so little has changed at the policy level in the intervening years, we have to agree with that. The Spanish edition, including a new introduction by Helena Norberg-Hodge and a preface by the ecological economist Federico Aguilera Klink, is now available from Catarata. The English version is available from our online shop.

And finally, the Korean version of Local is Our Future (see page 4) has been a big hit in South Korea: published less than a year ago, it has already gone through three printings!

Scene from Going Local
The Economics of Happiness Film Screenings

Now in its eighth year, our film *The Economics of Happiness* remains as prescient and popular as ever, with numerous public screenings held in Australia, USA, UK, Spain, India and elsewhere during 2019.

As an antidote to the consumerist frenzy that begins with Black Friday each year in the USA, Films for Action asked us to allow free streaming of the film on their site from November 21 through December 4, 2018. The film was seen more than 7,000 times in the span of a week, with clips from the film garnering more than 100,000 views in that same period.

Films for Action describes the film as “one of the most important and useful films for inspiring change that has been made in a generation.” Rob Hopkins, co-founder of the Transition Network and Transition Town Totnes said, “this passionate film presents a clear and articulate vision of what a shift in the scale at which we do things would look like.”

The film has already been translated into 26 languages, but we hope to reach an even wider audience, especially in the global South. For that reason, we continue to seek volunteers to translate the film and its supporting materials into additional languages.

Tribute to Army Armstrong

We were saddened to hear that our friend and collaborator Elmer (Army) Armstrong passed away this summer. Army was the editor of our film *Ancient Futures*, and two decades later worked on an early rough cut of *The Economics of Happiness*.

Sprightly, bearded and ponytailed, Army had boundless enthusiasm and a mischievous smile. Like all of us, he was very troubled by the increasing environmental and social destruction being wrought by modern industrial society, but he was always upbeat, always keen to dwell on solutions rather than problems. He was an accomplished filmmaker, but he believed so passionately in what we at Local Futures were doing that he offered his time for a fraction of his normal fee. What’s more, he and his wife Cec volunteered countless hours to the rather thankless task of organizing the mountains of footage we accumulated for *The Economics of Happiness*.

Army would be proud to know that *Ancient Futures* continues to inspire audiences around the world, and that we are constantly told that its message is as relevant as ever. Just one example: as we go to print, *New Philosopher* magazine – the biggest-selling philosophy journal in the world – has chosen *Ancient Futures* as one of its featured videos.

Thank you, Army, for all your help, creativity and encouragement – and for your unfailing belief that a better world is possible.
Financials
(figures represent the 2018 fiscal year)

Expenses (total: $330,061)

- Global to Local education programs ($135,798)
- Ladakh and counterdevelopment programs ($63,456)
- Economics of Happiness program ($60,344)
- Management and administration ($24,690)
- International Alliance for Localization ($17,306)

Revenue (total: $365,348)

- Donations ($88,868)
- Grants ($238,070)
- Screening, streaming and broadcast fees ($8,461)
- Conference, workshop, study group fees ($5,854)
- Sales of publications and videos ($12,697)
- Lecture and writing fees ($9,637)
- Miscellaneous income ($948)
- Interest ($813)

Local Futures core team

Helena Norberg-Hodge, Founder and Director
John Page, International Programs Director
Steven Gorelick, Managing Programs Director
Anja Lyngbaek, Associate Programs Director
Kristen Steele, Director of Special Projects
Marjana Kos, Executive Assistant
Sean Keller, Media and Outreach Coordinator
Isabel Marlens, Special Projects Coordinator
Anja Light, Social Media Coordinator
Alex Jensen, Researcher and Project Coordinator
Henry Coleman, Project Coordinator
Carly Gayle, Project Coordinator
Laura Tyley, Digital Outreach Coordinator
Victoria Clarke, US Administrative Coordinator
Samantha Salmon, UK Administrative Coordinator
Shankari Raj, Associate Director
Tracy Worcester, Associate Director
Website and Communications
Sean Keller and Laura Tyley

With more and more people visiting the Local Futures website and an ever-growing list of resources, films and publications available to view there, our digital team has been focused on improving the experience of new website visitors and making sure LocalFutures.org is as interactive and informative as possible. As part of this project, we’ve redesigned our homepage and created a number of new website pages, including a Learn and Take Action page, as well as detailed pages that give new visitors an overview of the central issues we explore in our work: Globalization, Localization, and Big Picture Activism. The aim of these new pages is to take our website visitors on an educational journey through the problems with the global economy, the multifaceted solution of localization, and the steps it will take to get from here to there. At the same time, these pages also introduce new visitors to the full array of resources on our site, and point the way towards further actions they can take locally.

At the same time, we’ve launched a new series of welcome emails for our email newsletter subscribers. From now on, people who sign up to the Local Futures email list will be sent a series of four emails over four weeks, introducing them to who we are and to the key issue areas of globalization, localization, and big picture activism. If you would like to access this new learning resource, feel free to subscribe to our email list yourself (or, if you’re already on the list, unsubscribe and then resubscribe)!

Photos: cover Lindsay Charlop; p2 Anja Light; p5 Mass. Office of Travel and Tourism; p8 Jeny Nevard; p9 Alex Jensen; p10 Jeny Nevard, Alex Jensen; p12 Sonam Dorjai, Suhasini Pasbola
p13 Suhasini Pasbola, Jeonju conference organizers; p14 Japan conference organizers; p15 Julian Meehan; p16 Laura Tyley; p18 Isabel Marlens, Peg Diaz; p20 Sarah Sherif Saleh Ali; p22 Lee Waldman

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