

## Local Futures' History: 1975 to 2019

Local Futures has been involved with cultural, economic and ecological issues for more than four decades now, and we are proud of our accomplishments. What follows is far from comprehensive, but gives an idea of the depth and breadth of our work.

Our organization has always been ahead of its time. As you will see, we were warning about the dangers of both biotechnology and so-called "free trade" (and the link between them) three decades ago, while at the same time pioneering the localization movement – the local food movement, in particular. It is very gratifying to see that these issues are finally beginning to receive the attention they deserve.

*(Note: Until 2014, Local Futures was known as the International Society for Ecology and Culture, or ISEC. We are exactly the same organization: nothing has changed except our name.)*

### 1975

ISEC's Director, **Helena Norberg-Hodge**, visits Ladakh ("Little Tibet") as part of an anthropological film team just after the area has been opened up to the outside world. She spends much of the next three years in the region, initially studying the language (she is the first outsider in modern times to become fluent in Ladakhi), and later working with local elders to explore alternatives to conventional development.

### 1978

ISEC's forerunner, The Ladakh Project, is founded by Helena Norberg-Hodge and John Page. We introduce the first Trombe wall passive solar space heating system to Ladakh, showing that it is possible to achieve dramatic improvements in living standards without having to become dependent on fossil fuels. Over the following years, we develop and demonstrate a range of other simple but effective technologies, from ram pumps to micro hydroelectric plants to solar greenhouses. We are told that this is the largest appropriate technology project in the world.

### 1982

We run our first "reality tour", bringing potential Ladakhi leaders to the West to see something of the 'underside' of life in the modern world and to introduce them to projects aimed at restoring community and the environment.

We launch an ongoing program of support for Ladakh's traditional doctors, or amchis: initially helping to establish rural centers and sponsoring the education of students at the Institute for Tibetan Medicine in Dharamsala.

## 1983

Some of Ladakh's most prominent citizens join us to form the **Ladakh Ecological Development Group** (LEDeG). Within a few years, the organization's full-time staff includes more than 100 Ladakhis.

Helena spends a semester as Regents' Lecturer in the Energy and Resources Group (ERG) at the University of California, Berkeley. We set up an ISEC office in Berkeley.

## 1984

The Centre for Ecological Development is opened in Leh, Ladakh's capital. The Centre is inaugurated by Indira Gandhi and blessed by His Holiness The Dalai Lama.

ISEC is invited by the Royal Government to work in Bhutan. For five years, we are involved in a wide range of programs, from the establishment of an ecological library to the demonstration of small-scale wind turbines.

During the same period, we run similar projects with the Tibetan communities in Nepal and Dehradun.

We found Ladakhs Vänner, a support group for ISEC in Sweden.

## 1985

We produce a report for the Indian government, entitled '*From the Ground Up: Rethinking Industrial Agriculture*'. The report warns in particular of the dangerous marriage between 'free trade' and biotechnology, and pioneers the idea of local food economies.

## 1986

We hold Ladakh's first international conference. Members of Parliament, diplomats, economists, writers and academics from around the world come together to discuss Ecology and Principles for Sustainable Development. The inaugural address is given by Sir Edmund Hillary.

Helena and the Ladakh Ecological Development Group share the Right Livelihood Award, commonly known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize'.

## 1988

Helena's book, '*Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*', is published in Sweden and Denmark. The book is first published in English in 1991.

An **award-winning film** of the same title is produced by ISEC's Programmes Director, John Page, in 1993. Between them, the book and film have been translated into almost fifty languages, including Navajo, Inuit, Burmese, Nepalese, Thai, Japanese and all the major languages of Western Europe. In South Korea alone, the book has sold 450,000 copies.

## 1990

ISEC helps to found the **Women's Alliance of Ladakh (WAL)**, whose principal goal is to maintain Ladakh's social, ecological and spiritual values in the face of the new consumer culture.

We organize a three-day meeting of **Ecoropa**, an ecological think-tank with members from across Europe, in Andalusia, Spain. We also serve as hosts for a week in Spain to twenty students from the US-based International Honors Program, as part of their year-long ecological studies curriculum.

ISEC is formally incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in the US.

A number of ISEC reports, as well our brochures, are translated into Mandarin.

## 1991

ISEC hosts a conference in Sweden, with the goal of setting up an international economic forum. The meeting brings together Edward Goldsmith, Vandana Shiva, Martin Khor and Doug Tompkins for the first time. A book and video of the conference, entitled *The Future of Progress*, are released the following year.

The Ladakh Project is one of the founding members of the **Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)**.

We set up the **Roots of Change study program** as a means of encouraging strategic activism. Community groups are guided through a curriculum of writings that highlight the systemic nature of our social and ecological crises. Over the following years, several hundred such groups are established.

Helena is scholar-in-residence for one of the first courses at **Schumacher College**, now the world's foremost academic center for holistic thinking.

LEDeG publishes the first Ladakhi-English dictionary, compiled by Helena and Gyelong Paldan, a Ladakhi scholar.

We work with a group of Muslim leaders to establish the Ladakh Environment and Health Organisation (LEHO).

## 1992

ISEC co-hosts a conference in San Francisco on the role of science and technology in a changing world. Participants include Godfrey Reggio, Jerry Mander and Fritjof Capra.

We hold another international conference in Ladakh, entitled Rethinking Progress. Participants include Gary Snyder, Stephanie Mills and Mohammed Idris.

## 1993

We co-host a follow-up conference on science and technology in Dartington, UK. Speakers include Charlene Spretnak, Sulak Sivaraksa and Satish Kumar.

ISEC Deutschland is established in Germany.

Our report, *'From the Ground Up: Rethinking Industrial Agriculture'*, is updated by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Peter Goering and John Page, and published by Zed Books.

## 1994

A major international conference is held in Mongolia, inspired by ISEC's work in Ladakh. Participants include government officials, academics and representatives of non-governmental organizations from throughout Central Asia. The following year, *Ancient Futures* is translated into Mongolian, and shown on nationwide television.

ISEC is invited into the first Flow Fund Circle, a funding initiative aimed at helping inspirational projects at the grassroots. We support a range of projects around the world, including an indigenous crafts program in Himachal Pradesh, a holistic cancer center in Bristol, UK, and La Ortiga, a farmers' cooperative in Seville, Spain.

ISEC sponsors the appointment of a staff member at the Soil Association, the UK's leading organic certification body, to promote the localization of the food economy. We organize a high-profile conference on Community Supported Agriculture in London, the first of its kind in England. Among the speakers is Derek Cooper, the most respected of British food broadcasters. After the conference, he becomes an important voice for local food.

Helena is a co-founder of the **International Forum on Globalization** (IFG), and serves as a Board member until 2011.

We publish a comic book, '*A Journey to New York*'. It is translated into a number of different languages, and used by schools and activist groups in Europe and Asia.

## 1995

With Tracy Worcester, ISEC's Associate Director, we start an ongoing program of dinner dialogues and weekend meetings with senior British politicians, journalists, business leaders and environmentalists aimed at raising awareness about the social, economic and ecological impact of globalization and the benefits of a shift towards the local.

Helena Norberg-Hodge lectures extensively on the east coast of the United States. Venues include Harvard University, the Worldwatch Institute, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

ISEC commissions Kate de Selincourt to write *Local Harvest: Delicious Ways to Save the Planet*, which is published in 1997.

## 1996

ISEC co-publishes *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies in an Unstable World*, by the economist Richard Douthwaite.

The first year of the Farm Project in Ladakh. This life-changing program gives up to 50 people from around the world the opportunity to live and work on a Ladakhi farm every summer. Over the course of a month, they also take part in seminars and discussion groups on issues related to development and globalization.

## 1997

A photo exhibition by John Page, entitled *Monoculture*, is presented at the Alternatives to Consumerism Center in Bangkok, Thailand.

We play a central role in the setting up of a farmers' market in Bath, the first of its kind in the UK.

## 1998

ISEC publishes *'Small is Beautiful, Big is Subsidized'*, by USA Programs Director, Steven Gorelick.

Helena Norberg-Hodge, John Page and Steven Gorelick become the advisory board of The Ecologist magazine.

## 1999

ISEC hosts a groundbreaking conference at the Royal Geographical Society in London, entitled From Global to Local. The meeting is chaired by the BBC's John Humphrys, and receives widespread media coverage. Participants include David Korten, Vandana Shiva and Peter Matthiessen.

We produce a special 'global-to-local' issue of The Ecologist, with contributions from David Korten, David Orr, Wendell Berry, Vandana Shiva and many others.

Our new 30-minute documentary, Local Futures, looks at the work ISEC has done over the years, in Ladakh and elsewhere, to promote economic localization.

## 2000

We hold a conference in London, entitled Local Food, Global Prosperity, chaired by the distinguished broadcaster Jonathan Dimbleby. Principal speakers include Wendell Berry and Vandana Shiva.

ISEC initiates a committee of prominent local citizens in Byron Bay, Australia, to explore the setting up of farmers' markets. Within three years, four small towns in the area have regular and thriving markets.

## 2002

Our report, *'Bringing the Food Economy Home: Local Alternatives to Global Agriculture'*, by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Todd Merrifield and Steven Gorelick, is updated and published by Kumarian Press in the US and Zed Books in the UK.

We produce a Local Food Toolkit that includes a slideshow and a series of eighteen educational posters (Local Food, Global Prosperity). The Toolkit describes the globalization of food and the benefits to be gained from encouraging production and consumption closer to home.

## 2003

ISEC wins the prestigious Derek Cooper Award for Investigative Journalism from the UK's Guild of Food Writers for its Local Food Toolkit.

We receive a further three years' funding from the Flow Fund Circle, enabling us to support, among many others, a compendium of local medicinal plants in Mexico, a seed-saving project in the Czech Republic, getting-your-hands-dirty environmental education in Ireland, and a community theater project in Thailand.

## 2004

Publication of our report, *'Ripe for Change: Rethinking California's Food Economy'*.

*'Paradise with Side Effects'*, a film about our work in Ladakh, is made by a German production company, and broadcast at prime time in Germany, France and Belgium.

We work as consultants to Heifer International on a feasibility study for a local food demonstration center in California.

US Programs Director Steven Gorelick represents ISEC at the first Gross National Happiness conference, in Thimphu, Bhutan.

## 2005

We begin pre-production work on a feature-length documentary film, *'The Economics of Happiness'*, aimed at making the case for more localized economic structures as an alternative to the globalizing consumer culture.

## 2006

We begin filming for The Economics of Happiness in Japan, China, South Korea, Europe and North America.

Helena is one of 112 activists, scientists, writers and artists from around the world invited to take part in The Table of Free Voices in Berlin, in which participants answer a hundred questions on issues relating to democracy, human rights, economic globalization, and much more. She is also invited to make a special presentation to the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

Highlights of the year in Ladakh include an international conference (Beyond the Monoculture: Strengthening Local Culture, Economy and Knowledge), the publication of a Mindful Travel Guide, and the opening of a local food café.

## 2007

**ISEC France** is launched, together with a French version of our Ancient Futures film (De l'Autre Côté de Développement). The DVD is distributed to activists throughout France.

A new edition of Helena Norberg-Hodge's Ancient Futures (by now a bestseller) is published in Korea by Joongang Press, together with Ancient Futures for Children, a fictionalized account of a 12 year-old girl (called Helena!) and her travels to Ladakh.

We write and produce a short film, *Until the Last Tree Falls*, highlighting the urgent need to reject economic globalization.

In Ladakh, we run our first workshop on traditional skills.

## 2008

Our Local Food Roadshow (including an updated version of our poster series, Local Food, Global Prosperity) is taken to 25 village halls, schools, community events and festivals up and down the UK.

ISEC is represented at the Via Campesina international conference in Maputo, Mozambique.

Among many other speaking engagements, Helena Norberg-Hodge gives presentations to conferences and other events in Japan and South Korea, while Steven Gorelick presents the Ancient Futures film at the University of Texas, El Paso.

## 2009

Eighteen years after its original publication, a new edition of '**Ancient Futures**', by Helena Norberg-Hodge, is published by Sierra Club Books, subtitled *Lessons from Ladakh for a Globalizing World*.

As part of a 'Global Reads' campaign, organized by the UK's Guardian newspaper and The National Book Tokens scheme, British Prime Minister David Cameron names Ancient Futures as his favorite book.

We release an updated version of our community study curriculum, *Roots of Change*, with writings by some of the world's leading thinkers, activists and academics.

We host 'An Evening with Doug Tompkins' in Mullumbimby, Australia, to a sell-out audience of more than 500. Doug presents his recently-completed short film, *The Next Economy*, which highlights the importance of economic localization.

## 2010

We complete post-production on our new documentary, *'The Economics of Happiness'*, and make preparations for its worldwide launch.

## 2011

We launch *'The Economics of Happiness'* on four continents, with major film premières in Oregon, California, New York, Toronto, London, Delhi, Bangkok, Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Sydney. Hundreds of community groups arrange public screenings.

The Economics of Happiness is reviewed in print and broadcast media around the world, including National Public Radio, The Huffington Post and MSNBC in the US, ABC Radio National in Australia, and major newspapers in Japan and Korea.

The film is translated into 26 languages, including Chinese, Japanese, French, Spanish, Italian and German. In Japan, it is screened in 113 different locations on a single day.

## 2012

We host the first of a series of **international Economics of Happiness conferences** in Berkeley, California. Speakers at the conference include Charles Eisenstein, Michael Shuman, Joanna Macy and Gustavo Esteva.

Helena Norberg-Hodge wins the prestigious **Goi Peace Prize** "in recognition of her pioneering work in the new economy movement to help create a more sustainable and equitable world."

Helena is invited to attend a "High-Level Meeting on Happiness and Well-Being" at the United Nations in New York, organized by the Royal Government of Bhutan.

The activist group Films for Action places *The Economics of Happiness* third in its list of "The Top 100 Documentaries Inspiring the Shift to a Sustainable Paradigm".

## 2013

We host the second of our Economics of Happiness conferences in Byron Bay, Australia. Speakers come from five continents; they include Keibo Oiwa (Japan), Bayo Akomolafe (Nigeria), Nicole Foss (Canada) and Winona LaDuke (USA).

ISEC publishes a 64-page **Discussion Guide and Companion to The Economics of Happiness**, fleshing out the key arguments made in the film and providing references, facts and figures, and other supporting material. The film itself has now been translated into almost twenty languages.

Our website is improved and expanded to include regular blogs from ISEC staff members and guest writers, a **Planet Local series** highlighting localization initiatives around the world, and a podcast called **Local Bites**.

A half-hour documentary about Helena Norberg-Hodge is produced by NHK television in Japan, and broadcast at prime time.

## 2014

In collaboration with Indian NGOs Shikshantar and Bhoomi Network, we host the third of our Economics of Happiness conferences in Bangalore, India, including a day-long public event for 1,000 participants and four days of meetings with representatives from more than 100 of India's most prominent environmental organizations.

We produce a short film, *'Localization: For People and the Earth'*, based on interviews recorded at the Bangalore conference.

A one-day conference we host in New York City, entitled **Voices of Hope in a Time of Crisis**, includes an introductory presentation by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Chris Hedges.

The event sees the launch of our **International Alliance for Localization (IAL)**, which brings together like-minded writers, activists and thought-leaders from every corner of the world – among them “unschooling” proponent Manish Jain and Brazilian social justice activist Camila Moreno.

Helena Norberg-Hodge presents The Economics of Happiness film at a special screening in the Italian Parliament in Rome, in an event organized by the Five Star Movement. She also speaks on a panel on food security in City Hall, Vienna, with former EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Franz Fischler. She features prominently in Russell Brand's book, *Revolution*, and discusses trade and other issues with him in two editions of his Trews video blog.

Along with author Charles Eisenstein, Helena is invited by Orion magazine to participate in a webinar titled "Happiness for All", about Bhutan's use of Gross National Happiness as a guide for development decisions.

ISEC changes its everyday name to Local Futures. (Its legal name remains International Society for Ecology and Culture.)

## 2015

Local Futures hosts an Economics of Happiness conference in Portland, Oregon, as well as co-organizing conferences in Jeonju, South Korea and Castlemaine, Australia.

Helena Norberg-Hodge speaks at numerous events in South Korea and Hong Kong, and is invited to be a co-founding member of the Global University for Sustainability, an online initiative born out of the World Social Forum. In the UK, she gives a keynote address at a celebration of E.F. Schumacher's work, organized by the Schumacher Institute.

Local Futures' **Learning from Ladakh** program includes a 3-day Global to Local Workshop, day long Traditional Knowledge & Skills Workshops, and harvesting Crop Mobs.

Following the conclusion of the Paris Climate Talks, we publish our paper, "Climate Change or System Change", which argues that globalization structurally leads to increased greenhouse gas emissions, and that economic localization is the most effective way to reduce emissions.

## 2016

Along with several Italian NGOs, Local Futures hosts an Economics of Happiness conference in Florence, Italy. At least 1,200 people hear from international speakers Vandana Shiva, Rob Hopkins, Michael Shuman, Ashish Kothari, Serge Latouche, Helena Norberg-Hodge and others. Italian speakers include Mauro Bonaiuti, co-founder of the Italian Degrowth Association, and Carlo Sibilgia, the parliamentarian of the 5-Star Movement.

We co-host another Economics of Happiness conference in Jeonju, South Korea, in collaboration with the Jeonju city government and an association of 35 mayors.

We organize numerous events in the UK, including workshops in Totnes and Wales and a day-long event in London. With Green House Think Tank, we co-publish Post-Growth Localisation, a 20-page pamphlet by Helena Norberg-Hodge and Rupert Read.

Our 58-page booklet, *'Localizaton: Essential Steps to an Economics of Happiness'*, is published.

We launch our **DIY Economics of Happiness workshop program**, which enable grassroots groups to organize their own workshops on the global-to-local theme. We also embark on a monthly **webinar series** that brings together cutting-edge thinkers to discuss crucial aspects of the global-to-local argument.

## 2017

In collaboration with local NGOs, we co-organize and participate in five Economics of Happiness Conferences. Events are held in Jeonju, South Korea; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Yellow Springs, Ohio; South Royalton, Vermont; and Port Townsend, Washington. In addition to Helena Norberg-Hodge, speakers at these conferences include Charles Eisenstein, Frances Moore Lappe, Michael Shuman, Vicki Robin, David Korten, Sarah Van Gelder, Judy Wicks, Winona LaDuke, and many others.

We collaborate on a major event in Tokyo – the **Economics of Happiness World Forum** – which attracts an audience of more than 800. Among the organizers is our close colleague and IAL member, Professor Keibo Oiwa, who has the support of his University, Meiji Gakuin.

Our **Global to Local webinar series** continues, with Helena Norberg-Hodge discussing climate change with Bill McKibben, genuine democracy with Christian Felber, and 'Sacred Activism in a Post-Trump World' with Alnoor Ladha. Helena Norberg-Hodge, Stephen Harding and Satish Kumar teach a five-day course at Schumacher College, in Dartington, UK. The course focuses on localization from a global perspective, and on practical strategies for fostering social, ecological, and economic renewal.

We continue our tourist education programs in Ladakh, and run a four-day **Mindful Futures Workshop** for Ladakhi youth in collaboration with local NGOs Flowering Dharma and Juley Ladakh.

Other activities during the year include partnering on the Renew Fest in Mullumbimby, Australia, the Global Ecovillage conference in Sweden, and the New Economy and Social Innovation (NESI) forum in Malaga, Spain.

## 2018

At the start of the year, we create a short 3-minute video to highlight some favorite moments from our Economics of Happiness conferences.

We continue our work in Ladakh by organizing three workshops over the summer:

- 1) a five-day 'Global to Local' workshop for Operation Groundswell;
- 2) a four-day workshop called 'Mindful Futures 2: Creating a Compassionate Economy', co-organized with Flowering Dharma; and
- 3) a 'Media Literacy and Film-making' workshop, co-organized with Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO).

Local Futures co-hosts **Economics of Happiness conferences** in: Prato, Italy; Bristol, UK; Jeonju, South Korea; and Tokyo, Japan. Happy City joins us to organize the Bristol conference, while the Jeonju city government and an association of 35 mayors collaborates with us on the conference in Jeonju.

Helena Norberg-Hodge teaches a five-day course at Schumacher College in the UK titled 'Earth, Culture, Economy: the Power of Local', along with our colleagues Satish Kumar and Stephan Harding.

Local Futures co-organizes and sponsors **Renew Fest 2018**, a festival of ecological and social renewal held in Mullumbimby, Australia. Helena Norberg-Hodge gives a keynote talk and participates in several discussion panels.

Anja Lyngbaek collaborates with Carmelo di Stefano, Senior Lecturer in Design at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts of Fudan University, China, on the development of an Economics of Happiness course with a focus on sustainability. The course is based on Local Futures' Economics of Happiness DIY workshop toolkit, adapted for a Chinese audience.

To complement Planet Local, our ever-growing library of grassroots localization projects around the world, we create a Medium.com account which profiles particularly inspiring initiatives in greater depth.

New episodes are released of the Local Bites Podcast, with guest speakers including Richard Heinberg, Jay Tompt, Diego Isabel La Moneda, Judith Hitchman, and Wendell Berry.

## 2019

We publish Helena Norberg-Hodge's new book, *Local is Our Future*, which lays out the arguments for making an economic shift from global to local in communities around the world.

Our short film and factsheet on the topic of '**Insane Trade**' is released and shared widely.

We also compile the Planet Local Short Film Series on Food and Farming, which collects some of the best freely available online films that offer visions of local food economies. The Planet Local library grows to include nearly 150 grassroots projects.

In Ladakh, we organize several workshops, host a 'Help with the Harvest' program, and co-publish a new book on the future of local food in Ladakh. We also hold an **Economics of Happiness Conference** in Leh at the end of September, and further conferences in Bangalore (Bengaluru), India; Jeonju, South Korea; and Yokohama, Japan.

Other notable happenings this year include our UK-based residential course, Happiness in a Time of Crisis; Helena's participation as a panelist at the Brussels Economic Forum; our Big-Picture Activism evening in Byron Bay, Australia; and a series of other appearances by Helena and other Local Futures staff at events in the UK, Australia, South Korea, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal.

In South Korea, Helena is invited to address the newly-formed Presidential Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Policy, and to continue influencing policy-making at the municipal and national level.

**All our newsletters and Annual Reports can be find here:**  
<https://www.localfutures.org/publications/newsletters/>