

Statisticians: New Champions for the Future?

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Abstract

Statisticians measure the progress of societies. Like the invisible rudder of an ocean liner, statistics help policy-makers to steer their ships of state. Now statisticians are saying that prevailing measures, especially the dominance of economic indicators like the GDP, are steering us the wrong way. Before they can propose better indicators, however, they must know what our progress is towards. Only the citizens can legitimately decide that, they say, so we must ask communities to describe the futures they want. Can the futurists help?

This feature explores their exciting challenge and asks, how will we respond? The old way, with competition in the marketplace? Or the new way, with collaboration and cooperation?

As well as collaboration between futurists and statisticians, it proposes a prior collaboration between futurists around the world to develop a best practice community visioning toolkit that is endorsed by leading practitioners.

A deceptively innocent discussion about the way we measure the progress of our societies has been under way for decades. Why "deceptively innocent"? Because while government statisticians are more likely to wear white collars than red shirts, right now they are creating a revolution that could change the face of democracy around the world. And they are inviting futurists to join them.

This revolution is taking place in the orderly environment of government departments and universities, and the even more orderly environment of mathematics. How can official government statistics be the root of revolution? And why?

These questions lead us through three dense jungles of complexity to new horizons beyond:

- the Jungle of Statistics and Measures;
- the Jungle of Futures and Related Research;
- the Jungle of Democracy, Society and Humanity; and on to
- the Fertile Plains of Vision.

We cannot avoid this complexity: indeed, there are compelling reasons to work our way through it to the simplicity beyond. The reward could be a revolution that transforms democracy and places futuring firmly at the heart of governance.

Consider this: the reason we explore the future is to inform the choices we make in the present. Clearly we can't make wise choices if we don't understand the full implications of the available options – or even the full range of options. It follows that citizens who have not had the opportunity to study the challenges and opportunities of the future cannot make informed choices.

Nowhere is this deeper understanding more urgently needed than when we track the trajectories of change. An alliance between futurists and statisticians, as they address the challenge of finding new ways to measure progress towards the futures chosen by citizens, would make a powerful contribution to democracy.

"The word statistics comes from the German, 'die Staat': it was the Prussian state using numbers to increase its control over people and over things," Geoff Mulgan, of the UK's Young Foundation, told an OECD conference in Korea last year. "We are now in an era where we need statistics to be a tool of democracy, to democratise in terms of what is counted, how the data is made available, and then how it is used in much richer conversations with the public about policy choices. And this is a great challenge for statistical professions – are they ready to be in the vanguard of a process of democratisation or are they going to hide within the official buildings just as secretive servants of the state?"

The Jungle of Statistics and Measures

Challenging economic indicators

Since Simon Kuznets created a national economic indicator in the 1930s governments around the world have relied on systems of national accounts like his Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as measures of national prosperity and progress. These were useful tools but they were over-used. Measures of economic progress, and their unhealthy focus on continuing growth, have dominated policy-making for years.

More than 10 years ago Australian social analyst Richard Eckersley asked a different question – is life getting better? (Eckersley, 1988) Leading scholars and researchers responded, contributing to the growing discourse on "progress" and how to measure it. Soon afterwards, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) created a special program, *Measuring Australia's Progress* (MAP), to explore alternative ways of measuring progress, and since 2002 it has presented a broader range of Australian statistics in this new framework.

Statisticians in other countries were also exploring these issues, and the OECD began to take an interest in the measures discourse. It arranged a series of international forums that grew into a global network of research networks. Even the most cursory scan of their work reveals an accelerating tsunami of change.

One highlight was the 2007 *Istanbul Declaration on Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies*, jointly agreed by the European Commission, the OECD, the UNDP, the World Bank and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and endorsed by many other government and non-government organisations. The third Forum at

Busan, Korea, in 2009 made further strides forward and is also reported at the OECD website.

Meanwhile, in France, the *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* (the Stiglitz report) commissioned by President Sarkozy won world attention as it cast a spotlight on the fatal flaws of a system that is half a century out of date, yet is still used to steer global policy. It pointed out very clearly that "What we measure affects what we do; and if our measurements are flawed, decisions may be distorted".

At least three other major international reports appeared in 2009 with similar messages: the European Commission discussion of *GDP and Beyond*; the OECD draft working paper – *A Framework to Measure the Progress of Societies*; and the *Canadian Index of Wellbeing* developed by a coalition of organizations and government.

Overall, there's a rich variety of responses to the challenge (see *Figure 1 for some examples*), yet the OECD argues that in spite of different philosophical and conceptual approaches – and the complexity of measures – there is growing consensus among experts on the ways and means for improving the capacity of the statistical system to deliver better information on the status of people's lives.

		HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX	GENUINE PROGRESS INDICATOR	HAPPY PLANET INDEX	LIVING PLANET INDEX	QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX	NATIONAL ACCOUNTS OF WELLBEING	MEASURES OF AUS PROGRESS	STIGLITZ REPORT*
	INDEX								
ECONOMIC	NATIONAL GDP	Y	Y						Y
	PER CAPITA GDP	Y	Y				Y		Y
	INCOME DISTRIBUTION		Y					Y	Y
	EXISTING WEALTH								Y
	DEPRECIATION OF CAPITAL								Y
	DISPOSABLE INCOME		Y					Y	Y
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	LIFE EXPECTANCY	Y		Y		Y		Y	Y
	LITERACY (%)	Y					Y		Y
	EDUCATION	Y	Y					Y	Y
	UNEMPLOYMENT		Y					Y	Y
	UNDEREMPLOYMENT		Y					Y	Y
	UNPAID WORK		Y					Y	Y
	HOMELESSNESS							Y	Y
	COSTS OF ACCIDENTS		Y						Y
	PRIVATISATION OF ESSENTIALS		Y						
	COSTS OF FAULTY PRODUCTS		Y						
	COSTS OF CRIME		Y					Y	Y
ECOLOGICAL	GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS		Y		Y			Y	Y
	LOSS OF FARMLAND		Y						
	BIODIVERSITY		Y					Y	Y
	ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT			Y	Y				Y
	AIR POLLUTION		Y		Y			Y	Y
	WATER POLLUTION		Y		Y			Y	Y
	NOISE POLLUTION		Y						Y
	WATER USE		Y		Y			Y	Y
NATURAL CAPITAL		Y		Y				Y	
SOCIAL	HEALTH		Y			Y		Y	Y
	FAMILY LIFE		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	JOB SECURITY					Y	Y	Y	Y
	POLITICAL FREEDOM					Y		Y	Y
	POLITICAL STABILITY					Y			Y
	LEISURE TIME					Y	Y	Y	Y
	COMMUNITY LIFE			Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	GENDER EQUALITY			Y		Y		Y	Y
SUBJECTIVE	LIFE SATISFACTION			Y			Y	Y	Y
	EMOTIONAL WELLBEING						Y	Y	Y
	BELONGING / SOCIAL INCLUSION						Y	Y	Y

Figure 1. Centre for policy development, Sydney.

Whatever the finer points of difference, those engaged in this global collaboration emphasise that it is about democracy and the public good. They seek:

- (a) to help direct our collective efforts where they will improve the wellbeing of our societies, and
- (b) to improve democracy by keeping citizens, as well as governments, informed of progress through the use of clear and relevant measures.

In doing so, they seek to change the future. As the Draft OECD Working Paper from Busan put it: "There is general agreement that although the past cannot be changed, the future is ours to make."¹

Non-government organizations around the world have been working on these issues too, adding their voices to the call for change. One of them, the US-based Redefining Progress, pointed out that not only is the focus on economic growth unhealthy in itself, but that much of the growth in GDP derives from "fixing blunders and social decay from the past; borrowing resources from the future; or shifting functions from the traditional realm of household and community to the realm of the monetised economy.

"For example, the GDP treats crime, divorce, legal fees, and other signs of social breakdown as economic gains," it says. "Car wrecks, medical costs, locks and security systems, and insurance are also pluses to the GDP." (Coff, Goodman, & Wackernagel, 1999).

But making the change to new measures of progress won't be as easy as writing a new list of indicators.

How, then, do we measure progress?

The "measures of progress" discourse raises complex questions on every side. How do we manage conflict between individual and collective wellbeing? Is there a reliable way to measure subjective wellbeing across different age groups in different locations and cultures? Can we aggregate data to give a clear picture of progress or must we retain distinctions to avoid distortion. Headline or dashboard?

Some research highlights the difference between what we *want* and what we *expect*: "A 1996 study of young Australians' expected and preferred futures for Australia in 2010 found young people's hopes for Australia were not only very different from their expectations, but also different from what they are promised under current priorities. Their dreams for Australia are of a society that places less emphasis on the individual, competition and material wealth, and more on community and family, cooperation and the environment. Some expressed their wishes in terms of a greater recognition of the 'natural', 'human', or 'spiritual' aspects of life.

"For example, asked to nominate which of two *positive* scenarios for Australia in 2010 came closer to the type of society they both expected and preferred, almost two-thirds said they expected 'a fast-paced, internationally competitive society, with the emphasis on the individual, wealth generation and enjoying the 'good life'. However, eight in ten said they would prefer a 'greener', more stable society, where the emphasis is on cooperation, community and family, more equal distribution of wealth, and greater economic self-sufficiency.'" (Eckersley, 1996). Later research shows this gap between the expected and the preferred future has widened (Eckersley, 2007).

The context of geography draws attention to another anomaly: Professor Carol Graham of the Brookings Institution spent ten years studying happiness around the world, in countries as different as Afghanistan, Chile and the USA. As the sub-title of her book explains, she encountered 'the paradox of happy peasants and miserable millionaires' (Graham, 2010).

Then there's the context of time. Some social research tells us that we in the west are growing out of greed and materialism towards voluntary simplicity, even frugality^{2,3}. Other studies suggest that what we *say* about our values may not show up in what we do – that congruence between our words and our actions diminishes as the time for action approaches.

Recent critiques by Richard Eckersley draw attention to still more distortions hidden within traditional statistics.

"It seems self-evident that Western nations represent the leading edge of human progress," he wrote. "As a group, Western nations score highest on most, if not all, of the indicators usually used to measure human development: life expectancy, happiness and satisfaction, wealth, education, governance, personal freedom, human rights. As the terms make plain, 'developing countries' would do well to follow the example of 'developed countries'.

"I want to challenge this supposition, not because Western liberal democracies don't have a lot going for them, but because, firstly, they don't perform as well as the indicators imply and, secondly, continuing on this developmental path will not improve people's quality of life.... it is arguable that Western societies have become increasingly dysfunctional..." (Eckersley, 2010). He adds that the environmental costs of Western, high-consumption lifestyles are additional grounds for concern.

Questions about the process of measurement also arise, with the 'indicators industry' itself being criticised by some for its focus on using quantitative data to try to measure the health and wellbeing of complex living systems.

At a 1996 conference in Sydney, Roger Bradbury said: "Indicators, despite their popularity, are the consequences of an approach to understanding the complexity of the world which is fundamentally flawed. They are wrong because they are a pathological corruption of the reductionist approach to science." He said it was time to come out of the 'cold, shadow world' of indicators, and "to learn to approach the complexity, the richness of the world with theory, data, models and tools which honour that richness instead of subverting it, which acknowledge that complexity instead of denying it." (Bradbury, 1996).

Social development practitioner Allan Kaplan says: "We have to learn to assess change differently.... we can only assess whether real change has occurred through paying attention to the pattern of relationships.... Any social situation – or organism, or whole – is a result of a particular pattern of relationships, and any change will see a change in that pattern. There is simply no other, and no better, way to assess change than by looking to the relationships at work in the situation, and at how they are (or are not) transforming." (Kaplan, 2002)

Changing relationships don't lend themselves to simple or accurate quantitative measurement – but they are the very essence of literature and narrative, from ancient mythology to modern theatre. Practitioners in social development are increasingly

finding the role of story to be a powerful instrument for cohesion, a rich but simple way to incorporate many elements and the complex dynamics between them. That is why the futures tool of alternative scenarios has been so effective in community visioning. Scenarios not only embed the richness of community life in simple stories about how the future might manifest: they also unlock the "probable future" and stimulate the imagination to reach beyond. And they offer comparisons that highlight the choices we make as citizens and make us conscious of our responsibility to make them wisely.

The Jungle of Futures and Related Research

Choosing better futures

Futurists, too, have been writing and speaking about the way we measure progress – especially Hazel Henderson, who for years has been insistently questioning a globally powerful system that measures the wrong things, and thus reinforces the wrong behaviour (Henderson, 1978, 1981, 1991, & 1999).

Using new measures to steer from quantitative to qualitative growth can move countries from environmental destruction to ecological sustainability, she wrote recently in a paper with physicist Fritjof Capra. And it can shift them from unemployment, poverty and waste to creating meaningful and dignified work.

"This global transition to sustainability is no longer a conceptual, or a technical problem. It is a problem of values and political will," they say. Their paper explores changes in measures of progress and traces links between quantities and qualities in Western science. And it points to positive shifts including the dramatic rise in ecologically-oriented design practices and projects (Henderson, Capra, 2010).

The road to acceptance of a new paradigm has been a long one for pioneers like these and others including the world's statisticians. But if revolutions take 40 years, we must be nearly there.

There's certainly change in the air when TIME Magazine runs a story entitled *Is GDP an Obsolete Measure of Progress?*⁴. In January this year, the story quoted Dr Henderson's dismissal of GDP as "a narrow calculation of cash flow".

Activity in the broader field of futures studies is exploding in every direction – some going further into scholarly research and ever-deeper challenges to our fundamental understandings; some focusing on specific areas like environmental sustainability or social processes; some delivering practical strategies to prepare for a changing future in which past experience has diminishing value.

Yet there are fundamental principles that apply across the board, many of them drawn from the "new" sciences of the 20th century and our belated recognition of our own nature as systems of living systems embedded in other systems of living systems. The resulting complex system of biological and social networks requires us to address the fundamental need for effective communication. Indeed, as Fritjof Capra put it: "Social networks are first and foremost networks of communications involving symbolic language, cultural constraints, relationships of power, and so on. To understand the structures of such networks we need to use insights from social theory, philosophy, cognitive science, anthropology and other disciplines...." (Capra, 2004)

So we need to use the power of effective communication to show how exploring the future will inform the choices we make in the present. And if we are to achieve the results that this essay seeks – developing a simple and practical process to help communities describe better futures – we also need to draw on the insights of other work, like the resilience movement, the happiness research, anticipatory action learning, self-organisation, collective intelligence, commons/non-ownership, subsidiarity, place-making, urban fractals and changing criteria for business investment including ethical investment. All this is in addition to vital work now being done by those whose focus is environmental sustainability, dematerialization and energy transition, including community-based initiatives like Transition Towns⁵.

The complexity of this particular jungle may sound overwhelming, but consider the role of the community doctor. She too must draw on the expertise of specialist colleagues. Perhaps we should consider working as diagnosticians, drawing on the expertise of others who specialise in specific areas. For example, the territories of experts in resilience and happiness could provide notional boundaries for the wide range of responses needed to meet possible futures for human societies.

Research from resilience to happiness

Interest in the notion of resilience has expanded rapidly since the beginning of this century.

"There was a parallel, older, interest in resilience in the field of psychology, centred on the characteristics of individuals and the environments they lived in, that together determine how people cope with, or fail to cope with, stress and trauma, says the non-profit group Australia 21." These two discipline areas have recently come together, with insights from both informing new thinking... resilience has become of great interest to people who are concerned with the future of regions, of nations, and of the world. New Centres and Institutes of resilience are appearing.

"To those not involved in this development resilience appears to be a new buzzword taking over from 'sustainability'. This is unfortunate for it is a very important development that needs to be understood..." (Cork, 2009)

The resilience discourse again turns our attention to lessons from systems theory, as Australia 21 suggests:

"Insights from scientific developments have led to awareness that ecosystems, social systems and linked social-ecological systems... behave like complex adaptive systems. That is, they are self-organizing within limits."

There are two important outcomes of this systems behaviour:

- i) It is not possible to tightly control the dynamics of such systems (they shift and change and re-organise if one part is held constant, or 'optimised') and, furthermore, attempting to do so reduces their ability to absorb shocks, i.e. they need to change and vary in order to remain resilient.
- ii) There are limits to how much such systems can change and still recover. The measure of a system's resilience is the size of a shock, the amount of change that system can absorb and still continue to function in much the same kind of way.

"This increasing scientific understanding and awareness is occurring at the same time that society's leaders are becoming increasingly concerned about our ability to cope with a number of looming global and regional scale threats — climate change, pandemics, market collapses, peak oil, ocean acidification, collapsing fisheries, water 'wars', terrorist activity, to name some."

"We cannot prevent or even predict most of them. Defence and security organisations increasingly recognise that bigger walls and more armaments are not the solution; the priority is to enhance our capacity to cope with whatever shocks occur."

In other words, we need to build resilience into our preferred futures.

Though references to 'resilience' now appear in various Departmental vision and mission statements, the report notes that it is not yet being applied or researched in policy development in Australia. Europe is somewhat ahead⁶.

The UK-based Transition Towns movement is a hands-on citizen movement designed to mobilise citizens to prepare their local communities for the challenges of peak oil and climate change. It's time to stop waiting for political leaders to act, they say: here's how we can do it ourselves. Their simple guides for citizen action make outstanding models.

Does preparing for challenging futures mean that our children and theirs are not going to enjoy happy futures? Sometimes meeting challenging demands is exactly what makes us happy. The ancients knew that. In fact many of the ancient sages knew a great deal about happiness, including Aristotle and the Muslim Sufi Al-Ghazali, who wrote perhaps the first text on the subject.

Today happiness claims a place in science – a fact already recognised by the *New Scientist* in 2003: "Over the past decade, the study of happiness...has morphed into a bona fide discipline. You can find 'professors of happiness' at leading universities, 'quality of life' institutes the world over, and thousands of research papers."

Happiness is described by these experts as consisting of positive emotions and positive activities. They distinguish between pleasure and happiness, exploring issues like engagement and meaning as contributing factors to wellbeing.

Some of the west's most popular myths about money and fame were early victims of the happiness research. It showed that key factors contributing to happiness include the quality of relationships, time spent with friends and family, meaningful employment and emotional resilience.

Now a new report on happiness and wellbeing, from the Young Foundation in the UK, offers a "snapshot of a field in rapid development", and traces some of the links between happiness or wellbeing and government policies (Bacon, Brophy, Mguni, Mulgan, & Shandro, 2010).

"Many initiatives around the world testify to the growing importance of wellbeing as an explicit goal of policy, including President Sarkozy's commission into measuring progress, the growing reorientation of healthcare towards wellbeing in many countries, and moves by national governments including Canada, Australia and the UK to invest in different ways to measure wellbeing," it says in its introduction.

Richard Eckersley notes: "Psychological research shows that intrinsic motivation is central to our wellbeing. This means doing things for their own sake; intrinsic goals bring their own rewards and meet human needs for autonomy, competence and relat-

edness. Extrinsic goals, on the other hand, tend to involve ulterior motives, especially the desire for status, money and admiration. These tend not to be good for our wellbeing. Intrinsic values are self-transcending, extrinsic values are self-enhancing."

Aristotle put it this way: "Happiness is desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else. But honor, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves, but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself. Happiness, then, is something final and self-sufficient."

However Australian social researcher, Hugh Mackay, challenges the contemporary love affair with happiness. He argues that it is through sadness, disappointment, grief, failure and doubt that people learn and grow, not happiness. At a recent conference in Sydney, he disputed the idea that happiness was an objective to be pursued and noted that without sadness we would never know what happiness is. Yet as a culture we have become almost afraid of sadness, he said, putting it under the microscope in case it turned out to be "clinical depression", and pursuing the positive with an almost obsessive zeal.

"When parents say 'I just want my children to be happy' I want to say, 'Is that all you want?' An emotional monochrome? Don't you want them to fail so they learn how to cope?"⁷ Here Mackay signals the profound importance of inner development.

The Jungle of Democracy, Society and Humanity

Re-energizing democracy

Reviewing the measures we use to guide our progress is a powerful process of change – even to the fundamental role of government. Ian Macauley argues that the emphasis on financial management, through successive Australian governments has shifted the role of government from planning for responsible management of our society to a narrow accounting of the way the money has been spent – from responsibility to accountability (Macauley, 2006). Other governments have followed a similar path. Better measures of progress may help them find their way back to governing, while helping voters to judge their performance and hold them accountable.

And that's really what all this is about. As the OECD's Jon Hall says, the whole process of discussing and selecting measures can be very useful for democratic dialogue – "perhaps more useful than the measures per se."⁸

At the 1997 conference in Australia on Measuring Progress, Graham Sansom, then chief executive officer of the Australian Local Government Association, said: "Part of our national well-being is the quality of our democracy, and ... people's greatest involvement in the democratic process remains very often at the local level... it's very important that one of the indicators we try to develop is a much better sense of people's feeling of empowerment... If people feel that they're just being tossed around on a sea over which they have no control, then I suspect that well-being declines.... we should focus on local *governance*, not just local government.... I am talking about the shared responsibility of governments to act at the local level."⁹

Professor Sansom is also keenly aware of the complexities and challenges faced by local governments that are being required to consult much more with their communities about desired futures. Now director of the federally-funded Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government, he sees growing concerns about strategic planning processes that are likely to lead to higher community expectations in a climate of scarce and sometimes shrinking resources.

So while some of us rejoice at the growing trend to community consultation, it may become more difficult to ensure that the rhetoric is matched by reality. Already, in what Stephen Gould describes as a "futures tragedy" (Gould, 2008), there have been examples of community consultation processes that haven't worked well, for reasons ranging from poor levels of participation to weak commitment by political leaders. Their failure to deliver on promise leads to scepticism and disengagement, confirming a belief that what citizens have to say is ignored, even after they have been asked to take part in the consultation process. Much of the discussion about the decay of democracy in the west revolves around this "learned helplessness".

All of this presents an unexpected glitch in glocalization: while electronic activism buzzes around the world as our new, planetary society emerges, social research is showing dramatic disengagement from local political processes. There have also been suggestions that glocalization itself – or, rather, its companion, economic globalization – is one of the contributing factors to disengagement: as local governments have less control in a global economy, citizens are asking, why bother? (Jacobs, 2010).

National conversations about alternative futures – followed by completion of agreed projects -- would do much to reactivate voter interest in local democracy, and if the process includes continuing engagement in outcomes it could re-energize a jaded electorate. But clearly these can be no ordinary fireside chats: the facilitation must be skilled and wise and sure. The best practitioners in social process – the people Allan Kaplan calls "artists of the invisible" – use simple but deeply sophisticated approaches to enable complex living systems like communities to manifest themselves as a result of the collective consciousness. And they make sure that citizens know they are being heard.

Futures methodologies provide effective interventions to ensure success in community visioning, with practical tools that use sensitive ways to 'unlock the future'¹⁰ and enable change. They encourage citizens to challenge their inherited present and explore new ways of understanding the world. And they invite them to remain engaged in the process beyond the outputs of the consultation, to ensure real-world outcomes.

There is much we can learn from the work of others, but this essay asks whether the world's professional futurists could do even better.

Turning "progress" inside-out

The term "measuring progress" seems to assume continuity, progress as evolution. Notions of equilibrium, stasis, entropy, which all have their place in the study of the cyclical processes of nature, no longer seem to have a place in the study of human systems. Will they return?

Massimo Salvadori explores this question in a book about different concepts of progress, but concludes: "The idea of the continual progress of humanity as a solid possibility or even a necessary destiny has been overturned; it seems to have become either a fond hope or a myth from the past. Confidence in progress as an ongoing amelioration of spiritual-moral and material conditions – already a regulative ideal of human action in the eighteenth century, then a veritable and triumphal faith in the nineteenth – has been undermined by the spiritual and material evolution of humanity itself." (Salvadori, 2008).

But whatever other "progress" we humans may or may not make, we must at least continue to progress through time. So the core question remains: how will we do it? And to what end?

The Jesuit priest/scientist Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1956) saw human evolution as a journey toward greater complexity with higher consciousness. He believed our duty and our happiness demanded we should make this journey.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow used his famous "hierarchy of human needs" to show how humans evolve from meeting outer needs of safety, food, etc. to more subtle inner needs. His later work, exploring the role of altruism beyond self-actualisation, is less well known but Maslow's work and that of his successors shows a pattern in the path of human development that is explained in the Spiral Dynamics model. This 'stage development', demonstrated by Jean Piaget, is also a feature of the work of later psychologists like Jane Loevinger and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.

It is clear that our overall wellbeing is linked to our emotional development and becomes more accessible as we learn to turn our growth inward, from the material to the non-material; from linear growth to cyclical and spiral growth; from cognitive learning to emotional and spiritual learning. In his report of the famous Harvard studies of ageing, George Vaillant (2002) also links it with our participation in community.

All of this contributes to a growing chorus of agreement about the direction of human development that makes a comfortable fit with the argument of Ervin Laszlo, president of the Club of Budapest, that inner growth and development is the next great phase of human evolution.

Professor Laszlo said that the past 10,000 years of human history have been a period of "extensive evolution": centuries of conquest, colonization and consumption. Humanity has extended its power and influence in space and time. It has sought control and domination of the other, the outside, the external. The next phase must be one of "intensive evolution", he says, with a new value system, a new ethic, a new culture and even a new civilization. It will be about communication, connection and comprehension.¹¹

That shift is now being observed by social researchers: as we have seen, many studies of changing values report trends away from the mindless materialism that has dominated recent decades in western societies (and increasingly in others).¹² They suggest we are at one of those 'hinges of history' where significant social change emerges from changing values, themselves the result of deep shifts in our states of consciousness.

According to biologist Donella Meadows, one of the lead authors in the original Club of Rome publication *Limits to Growth*, deep shifts in consciousness are the most

powerful way to leverage change in complex adaptive systems (like human societies).

Professor Meadows used economic growth as an illustration of an extraordinary discovery about leverage points – that people know intuitively where they are, but always try to push them in the wrong direction. For example: "Asked by the Club of Rome to show how major global problems – poverty and hunger, environmental destruction, resource depletion, urban deterioration, unemployment – are related and how they might be solved, [Jay Forrester at MIT] made a computer model and came out with a clear leverage point: Growth. Not only population growth, but economic growth... The world's leaders are correctly fixated on economic growth as the answer to virtually all problems, but they're pushing with all their might in the wrong direction." (Meadows, 1999)

In other words, they were trying to accelerate economic growth, increasing the unhealthy dominance of this one-dimensional goal, instead of balancing it with the other kinds of growth and development that create truly healthy societies.

A famous hierarchy of key leverage points was created by Dr Meadows in the 1990s. Later she reviewed the list, invited input from colleagues, and extended its range. In essence, her essay says that changing constants, parameters, numbers are not after all the most powerful ways to intervene in a complex adaptive system. Other points are more powerful, including the effects of feedback loops, the structure of information flows, distribution of power, rule and goals. Almost at the top of the list is the mindset or paradigm out of which the system arises, and beyond that – the ultimate leverage point – *consciousness*, with its power to transcend paradigms.

This brings us back to the subject of communication, and especially story, because one of the most powerful ways to influence our individual and shared consciousness is by challenging the narratives we live by... the stories we have inherited from our families and our societies... and imagining new ones.

So what does all this tell the statisticians about the nature of our destination? Is it now an idea instead of a place? Something beyond materialism, like true happiness? Or are we so attached to the notion of progress that "better" is itself the destination? Does our ultimate satisfaction lie in the process of continuing challenge and achievement... new and higher attainments, however we describe them? Inner or outer? Perhaps, as a character in one recent novel (Grunwald, 2005) suggested:

**Happiness = Change
Best is good. Better is best.**

Or can our complex social networks learn what wise individuals have known for ages – that enough really is enough? An abundance of research has shown that improvements in happiness, wellbeing, health and other key indicators level out above a point of "enoughness". After that life satisfaction becomes a matter of comparison with others in our society, with the countries showing most inequality also showing most unhappiness.

So while many people are still choosing a journey doomed to failure... an endless pursuit of the Joneses, with no corresponding improvement in health, wellbeing or

happiness... those who recognise enoughness are offered the true luxury of taking a more reflective, inward path and living their lives from the inside out, instead of the outside in.

The Fertile Plains of Vision

The simplicity beyond complexity

No doubt futurists will continue to explore questions like these, as philosophers (and statisticians) have been doing for so long. But after reviewing the topic from a futures perspective, I have reached the conclusion that this is an indulgence we can no longer afford. The subject is fascinating, but we urgently need to find a way beyond the seduction of the discourse to the profound simplicity of swift and effective action.

As Karl-Hendrik Robert wrote when starting the world-wide sustainability movement, *The Natural Step*, "In order to predict that you will die if you jump off the Eiffel Tower, it is not necessary to calculate that it is 345.23 metres high at 20 degrees centigrade... What the earth needs most is a variety of useful models – model homes, buildings, companies, communities, and countries..." (Robert, 1991)

Canada and other governments, including some in Australia and New Zealand, offer excellent models. They have shown that we know enough now to help communities imagine and describe their preferred futures. I believe we can do even better, using the tools of futuring to challenge our unchallenged futures and offer citizens more information about more alternatives. They can then articulate clear descriptions of new futures they would prefer – and are prepared to work towards. On the way, the process of community engagement with futurists, and with the action learning tools that promote continuing engagement, will lift public awareness of the fact that we are not, after all, powerless. It will show that we can make better choices about the future and we can take action to turn those choices into realities.

So it would be good if the global futuring community could work together to agree on an effective process – ideally, something as profoundly simple and practical as *The Natural Step* or *Transition Towns*.

An Australian prototype

We've made a start in Australia, with a consulting cooperative of professional futurists working with the Australian National Development Index, a citizen initiative aimed at providing a new national framework of measures that track progress towards the futures Australian communities say they want.

Australian social scientist Michael Salvaris, who has been helping the OECD to develop its Global Progress Research Network, is leading the initiative to create a National Development Index at home and seeking a community conversation about what kind of futures our citizens want.

Professor Salvaris describes some indicators of a healthy democracy as

- fair and representative elections
- competent and honest governments
- fair and equal laws
- active and knowledgeable citizens

- shared belief in the public interest
- reasonable equality in wealth and power
- openness and transparency
- devolution of power, 'subsidiarity'
- trust between citizens and governments
- innovation, change and continuous evaluation in democratic ideas and process.

"Progress means movement towards a goal, some future ideal, but without a clear vision of what the destination is how can we measure our progress?" he said. "We need to reconsider what progress is and involve the community in a debate about its preferred futures. We also need to review where we are now: even that understanding is still dominated by the productionist view." (Salvaris, 2009)

Professor Salvaris warns against the tail that wags the dog: "We must select measures that accurately reflect the outcomes that are important, for people and systems, rather than allowing existing measures to predetermine what is important. That's another reason to have a clear idea of what kind of future we want."

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing is often quoted by experts as a model of community consultation. Canadians said quite clearly that their top priorities for quality of life were: primary and secondary education, health care access, a healthy environment, clean air and water, social programs, responsible taxation, public safety and security, job security, employment opportunities, a living wage, balanced time use, and civic participation. These common themes cut across regions, social backgrounds and demographic characteristics. And they said that quality of life should be monitored more systematically and comprehensively.¹³

But let's not forget that the citizens must play their part, too, in reaching these ideal futures. Can we grow out of our need for more of everything? Or do we want to continue what Massimo Salvadori calls our "endless feasting". Could we instead measure and describe what Australian futurist Marcus Barber calls "enoughness"? Can the affluent west embrace satiety in society?

Our cooperative, The FutureMakers Network, is working with Professor Salvaris to help Australian communities address questions like these as they deepen their understanding of alternative futures. Futurists from other countries have volunteered to explore a global network.

We intend to draw on everything we know about community visioning, set it within the context of everything we know about futuring, acknowledge the complexity of related disciplines including statistics, and create a simple, practical process for engaging citizens in shared leadership – with tangible outcomes.

Next year we will be ready to share our work with our global colleagues, inviting comment, criticism and collaboration in the same kind of cyclical process that Karl Henrik Robert used for The Natural Step.

In brief, we propose to:

- research community visioning projects already done in this region;
- explore their effectiveness or otherwise, and analyse the reasons;
- undertake a similar scan of international projects and methodologies;
- develop an action learning package using this and other material;
- circulate this for review by respected colleagues around the world;

- propose a detailed business plan to partners and funding sources
- develop a professional communication program – horizontally to keep participants informed, vertically to demonstrate congruence and integrity and to strengthen the coherence of shared goals
- design cyclical evaluation, reporting and refreshment processes.

A key component will be the action learning approach. With facilitation by professional futurists this process will help communities to achieve concrete results as they explore their alternative futures, understand the dynamics of change and imagine new stories for the future.

Continuing citizen engagement is a powerful way to attack the inertia of embedded systems and enable change. It also improves the wellbeing of citizens, as the Harvard studies of longevity show. And it offers a win-win solution to local councils whose resources are over-stretched, helping them to do more with less at the same time as it improves the wellbeing (and skills development) of participants. Some of the nicest surprises in local government have been the successes of projects entirely planned, managed and implemented by citizens themselves. On the way, citizens have the opportunity to make sure their favourite projects are completed instead of being overtaken by other priorities of over-stretched local government organizations.

Many possibilities for further development include, for example:

- a supplementary program to link local councils and futurists with high schools
- a web-based community action learning program to coordinate continuing projects and deliver additional skills to those who seek them
- closer links with related activities such as Transition Towns, the Natural Step, the resilience movement, etc.
- a fun version of the learning package for wider use (e.g. junior schools).

The toolbox of tried and tested futures methodologies (see panels) already includes Sohail Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis; the community visioning process of Jim Dator's Manoa School at the University of Hawaii; the "aspirational futures" process of the Institute for Alternative Futures in the US; and the Oregon Method used by Steven Ames in many communities around the world, including Australia. It could also include stories of outstanding examples, like the *Bold Futures* program from Australia's Gold Coast¹⁴.

A simple, integrated action learning package could help communities to create new visions for the future that reach far beyond a few more playing fields and extra social services. They can explore the nature of their identity and their social context – and enjoy the process. They can challenge the stories they inherited and write new ones for themselves to provide the benchmarks that the statisticians need to redesign their measures of progress. And in these new stories, citizens will take leading roles.

Isn't that the shared goal of all our deep complexity? At every frontier of change and progress, aren't we recognizing that it's time to rewrite the human story? And the statisticians are right – the people to do that are the citizens in democracies.

Will the futurists help them through the jungles and on to new horizons?

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