



DEVELOPMENT AID FOR THE INDUSTRIALISED NORTH TURNING AN IDEA ON ITS HEAD OR “THE PROBLEM IS THE SOLUTION”

This is the conference paper prepared for presentation to the 3rd European Permaculture Convergence at Prinzhofte in northern Germany in August 1994. It explores the theme of the convergence and the idea that drug addiction is a metaphor for our situation and society. The conference happened to coincide with a low cost six month study and teaching tour in Europe and the process behind my attendance was an attempt to personally resolve some of the contradictions I referred to between networking for and living a sustainable lifestyle.



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Development aid is generally conceived of as assistance to communities and nations who do not have adequate resources to provide for their own basic needs. In this context the theme may appear silly or at worst obscene since the industrialised northern countries by any measure are the most materially rich nations which have ever existed on earth.

Why then is the concept of development aid relevant to the future well-being of industrialised nations?

Evidence of the unsustainability of modern industrialised society's dependence on an ever expanding economy has been strong for at least two decades and continues to mount. In 1994 I don't see any need to enumerate any of this evidence.

Attempts at adaptive response (as opposed to action which increases dependence) to both specific symptoms and the general condition have, and continue to, occur at all levels in the industrialised societies from governmental to the individual.

However much of this activity continues to "reinvent" the problems in new forms.

Examples of this include:

- introduction of pollution control technology which may push the problem elsewhere,
- green consumerism which has inherent contradictions,
- teaching and networking about sustainability may inhibit practising it.

THE DRUG ADDICTION ANALOGY

Detached observation (possibly with the hindsight of history) of late 20th century society might suggest addiction (as with drugs) is the best description of behaviour, both personal and institutional.

In the case of drug addiction it is well recognised that while the addict must want to change, aid from other persons is also important. This is particularly important where the addict lives within a community and culture of addiction which tends to be self reinforcing. The power of ex-addicts to help addicts is well recognised. The ability of the helper to identify with the addict increases the value of their help and its credibility with the person needing help.

Once we understand ourselves and our society as addicted it becomes more reasonable to consider the notion of "aid" for the industrialised north. Reflections on the psychology of addiction may help us to develop solutions even if the scale and depth of the addictive forces and processes are far greater than those involved in any pharmacological addiction.

This may appear to ignore the plight of the majority in the undeveloped world. However we need to understand the processes which lock our over- and under-developed worlds into a destructive relationship. The majority of the adverse consequences of our addiction are externalised via the global economy in the same way that the "junkie" will do anything to

anybody to get a "fix". The phrase "live simply so that others may simply live" is a clear and powerful imperative but it describes an enormously complex process.

THE LIMITS TO DEVELOPMENT

The very idea of development also presents grave problems. Most notions of development are based on growth in material consumption. Even the more radical notions suggest growth in organisational structures and processes. It is inevitable that any progressive or positivistic response to the problems will involve development of some sort. Even expansion in resource consumption will be needed in some areas. But no amount of appropriate development can get around the point that there needs to be a massive net reduction in material resource consumption.

Beyond this I suggest that there is also a need for major net reduction in formal organisational structures (be they economic, legal, social and cultural) as their functions are taken over by more efficient and largely invisible informal processes at the personal, family, neighbourhood and bioregional level (eg less international travel and conferences, more local action).

PERMACULTURE AS A MODEL FOR TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE LOW ENERGY SYSTEMS

Permaculture, in its basic principles and its various forms of practical expression, has much to offer in personal and societal transcendence of addictive consumerism and its replacement with a creative abundance. The original conception of permaculture in Tasmania saw the transition from fossil fuel based affluence to a renewable resource base as driven by personal change and action which reversed many of our assumptions derived from industrial culture.

One of these reversals was to regard the persons and societal recipients of fossil fuel affluence as impoverished and immature and in need of some form of help to make the transition to a sustainable low energy world. Without some hopeful strategy for transition the future may appear entirely alien and dismal to the generations raised in post World War Two affluence.

In this context permaculture is development aid for the industrialised north. In response to a recent request for a definition of permaculture I suggested, only slightly facetiously: "remedial holistics for post industrial survivors".

In all of this there is no room for condescending arrogance, especially from those of us from affluent but sparsely populated countries like Australia. My 6 months in Europe is as much to learn as to teach. But it is another reflection of the cultural inversions of permaculture that much of what I find interesting are traditional systems either taken for granted or in decline in the on-going rush everywhere to be modern. It is very revealing

that the English word "peasant" has very derogatory connotations. For me a peasant is a person who is connected to place and close to the earth in body, mind and spirit. I have worked towards this goal all my life but becoming a post-industrial peasant is no easy task.

By changing ourselves and providing living examples of the new sustainable culture we provide the vision and some of the technical basis for living without destroying the planet. This is probably the most powerful action we can take to bring the sustainable culture to life, out of the conceptual ashes of industrial society, before our grandchildren are forced to build it out of the physical ashes.

Hepburn, Victoria

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