

Beyond Exploitation – Reimagining Life & Health:

4 building blocks for a different way forward



July 7, 2021

From Knowledge to Transformative Action

For students, trainees, health professionals and everybody interested in Planetary Health



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
DALLA LANA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Blake Poland
Dalla Lana School of Public Health
University of Toronto

Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge the land that the University of Toronto is located on. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, including the Anishinabe, Haudenosuane, Metis and Inuit peoples, and is also host to Indigenous peoples from other countries.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land. It is important for us to recognize colonization as the primary reason for the many social and economic challenges facing Indigenous people in Canada. Beginning with the Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullus – racist ideologies that were used to justify colonization by European settlers of the land we currently call Canada - our government's policies and practices have deliberately marginalized Indigenous peoples to the benefit of non-Indigenous settlers.

Indigenous Treaties & Languages in the GTA
Map Source: native-land.ca

Emerging Threats to Planetary Health & Health Equity

Climate change
Ecological degradation
Resource depletion
Energy insecurity
Widening socio-economic disparities

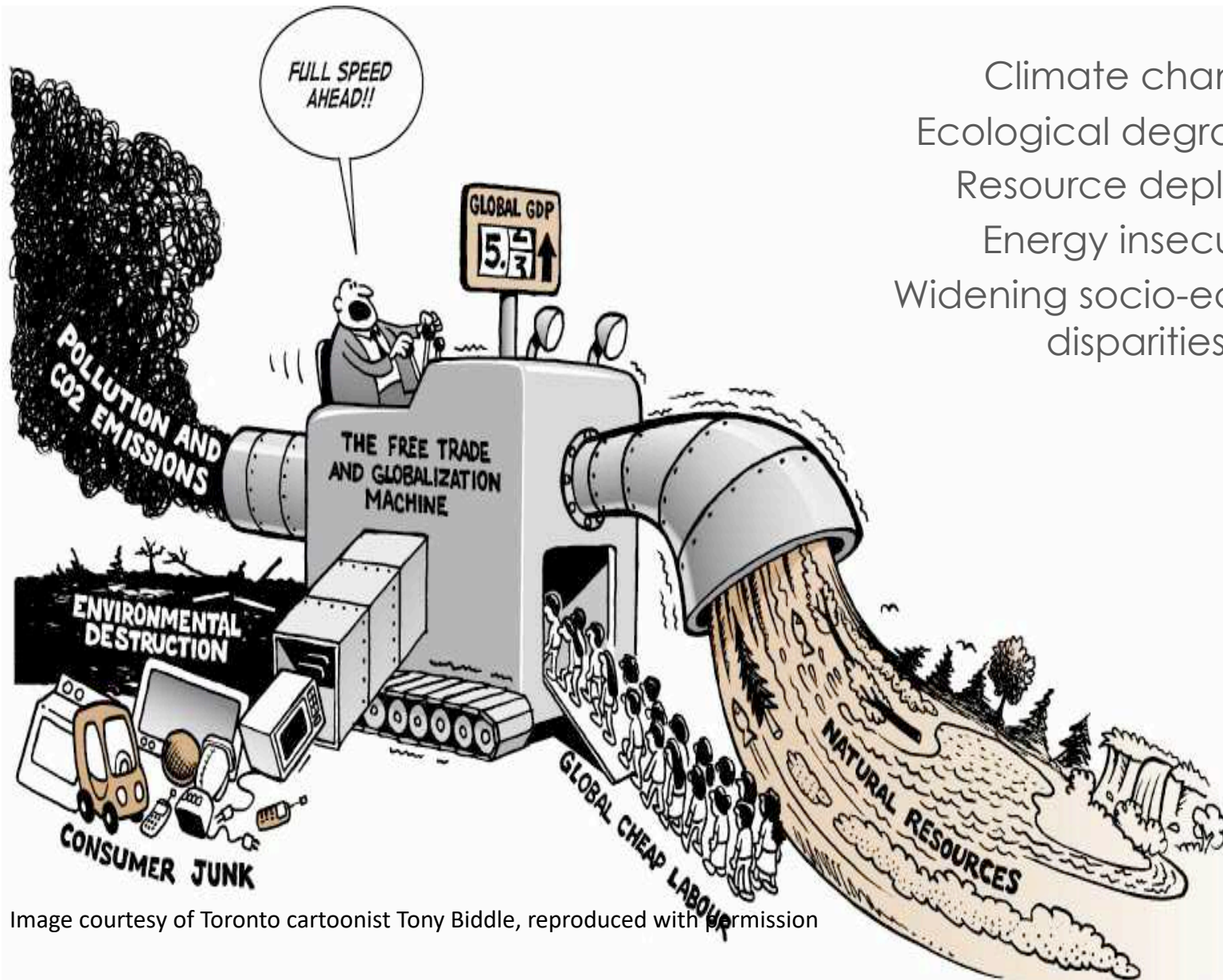


Image courtesy of Toronto cartoonist Tony Biddle, reproduced with permission

THE GREAT ACCELERATION

SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS



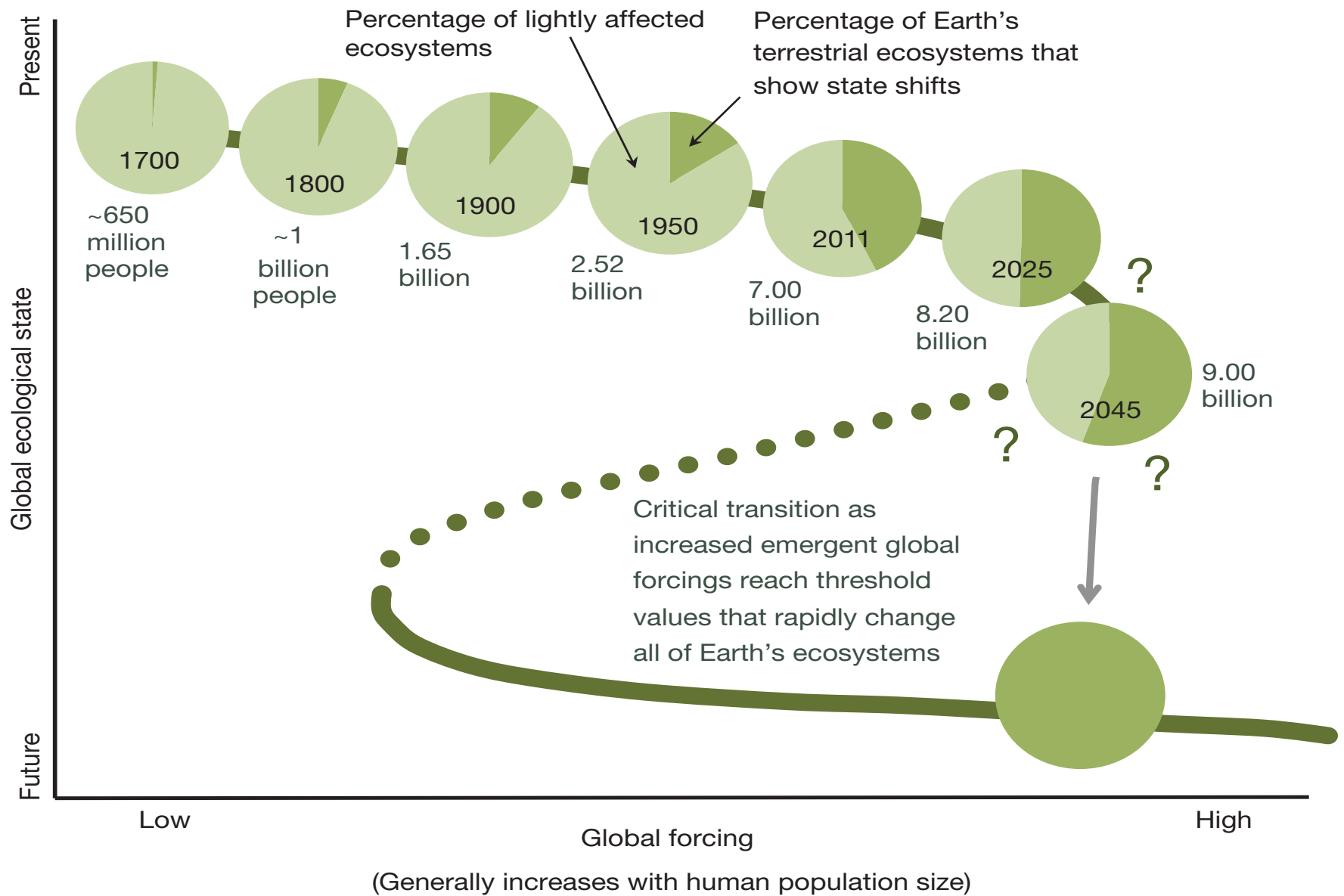
EARTH SYSTEM TRENDS



REFERENCE: Steffen, W., W. Broadgate, L. Deutsch, D. Gaffney and C. Ludwig (2015). The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: the Great Acceleration, Submitted to *The Anthropocene Review*.

MAP & DESIGN: Félix Pharand-Deschênes / Globaia

<http://www.igbp.net/globalchange/greatacceleration.4.1b8ae20512db692f2a680001630.html>



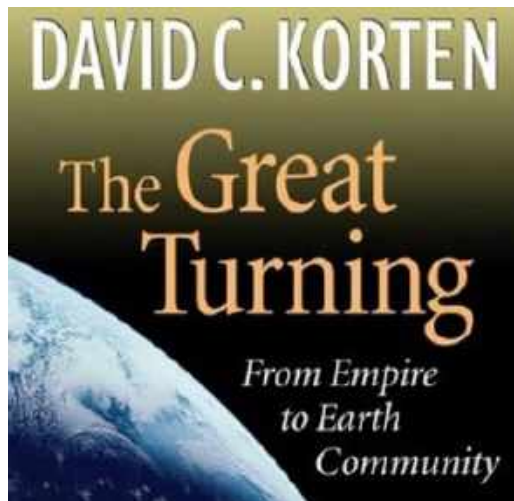
SOURCE: Barnosky et al. (2012). Approaching a state shift in Earth's biosphere. *Nature*, 486(doi:10.1038/nature11018), 52-58.

Is Risk Management Up to the Challenge?

"We cannot solve
our problems
with the same
thinking we used
when we created
them."

Albert Einstein

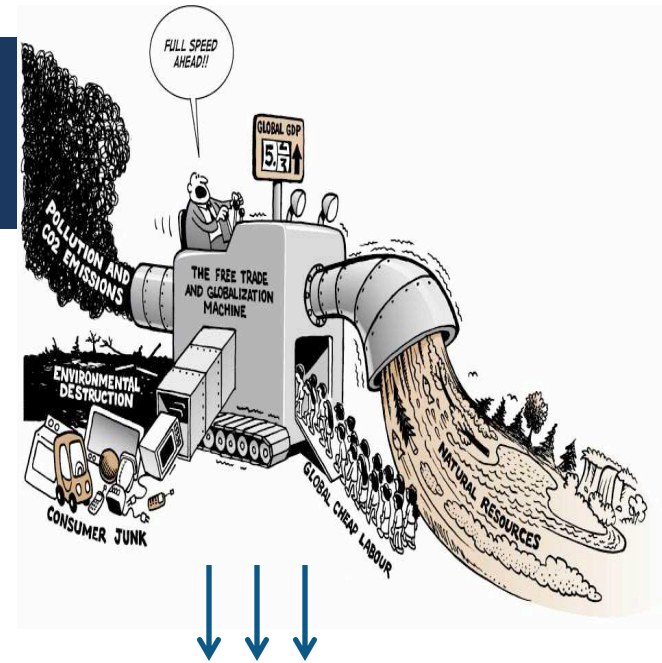
- Risk management is the default modality for public health, but it is proving increasingly ineffective and even counter-productive
- It's also mostly about maintaining the status quo (e.g. resilience as bouncing back from adversity)
- control is elusive: living in increasingly interconnected and complex world
- path dependency, sunk costs, and diminishing marginal returns: more and more effort required to prop up status quo
- deeper paradigm shift required



Re-Imagining Planetary Health?

4 promising directions from an emerging (and also established, but often ignored) landscape of possibility:

- ❑ **Change from the margins:** social movements & niche innovations in sustainability transition
- ❑ **Decolonization** from dominant world view that keeps us stuck in stress, reactivity, despair, & ineffectual action
- ❑ **Animism & relational worldview:** honouring the sacredness and interconnectedness of all life
- ❑ **Watering the seeds of what we want**

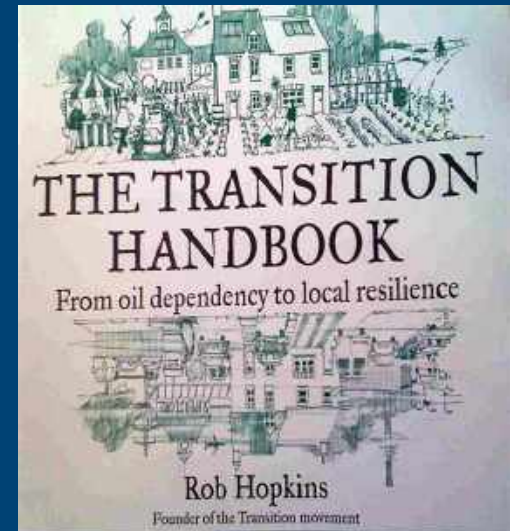


Social Movements Respond

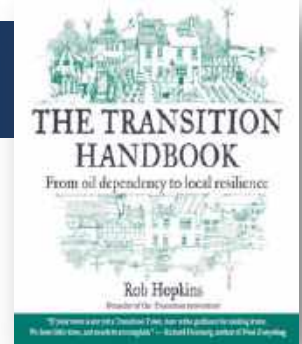


Convergence of Movements for Change

relocalization, urban homesteading,
BLM, #MeToo, Fridays for a Future, Idle No More, Tiny
House Warriors, ecovillages,
voluntary simplicity, resilient cities, permaculture,
active transportation, urban agriculture, social
enterprise, sharing economy...



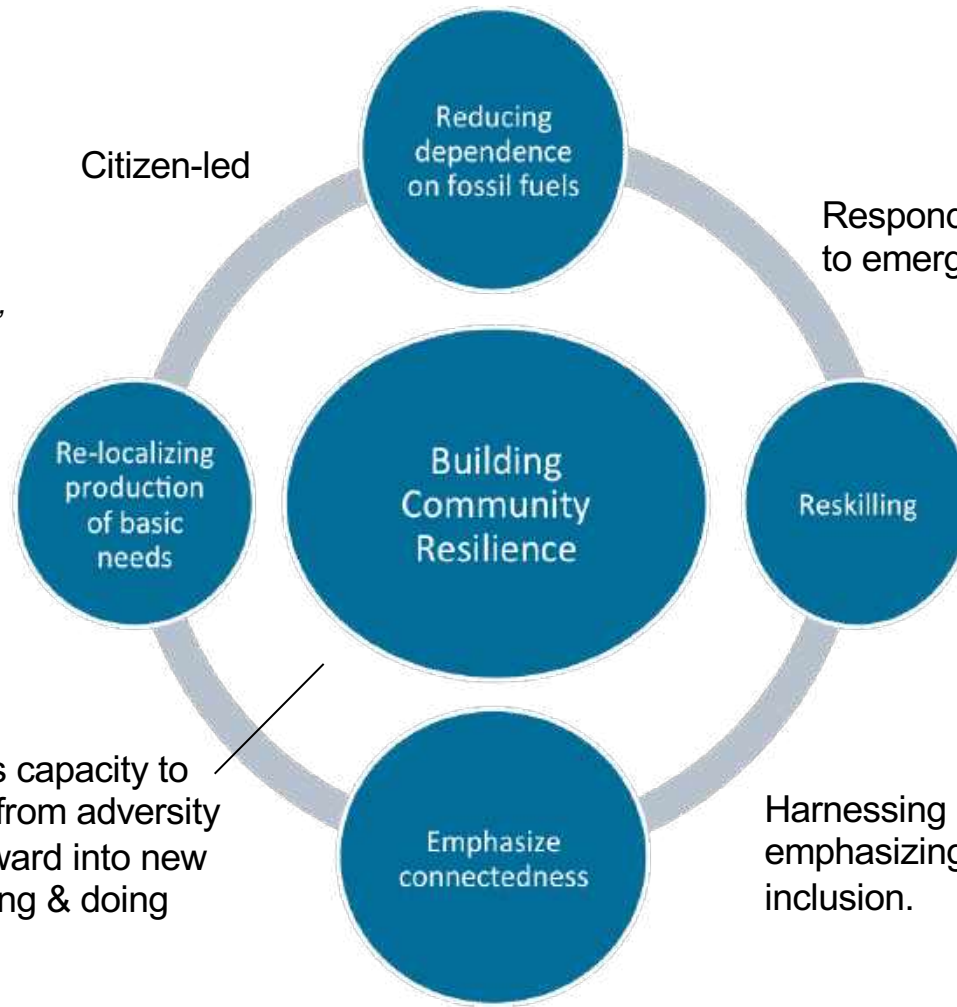
The Transition Town Movement: A Social Technology for Building Resilience



"If it isn't fun, it isn't sustainable"

"we want to be known by what we stand FOR, not what we stand AGAINST"

"an experiment in engaged optimism"



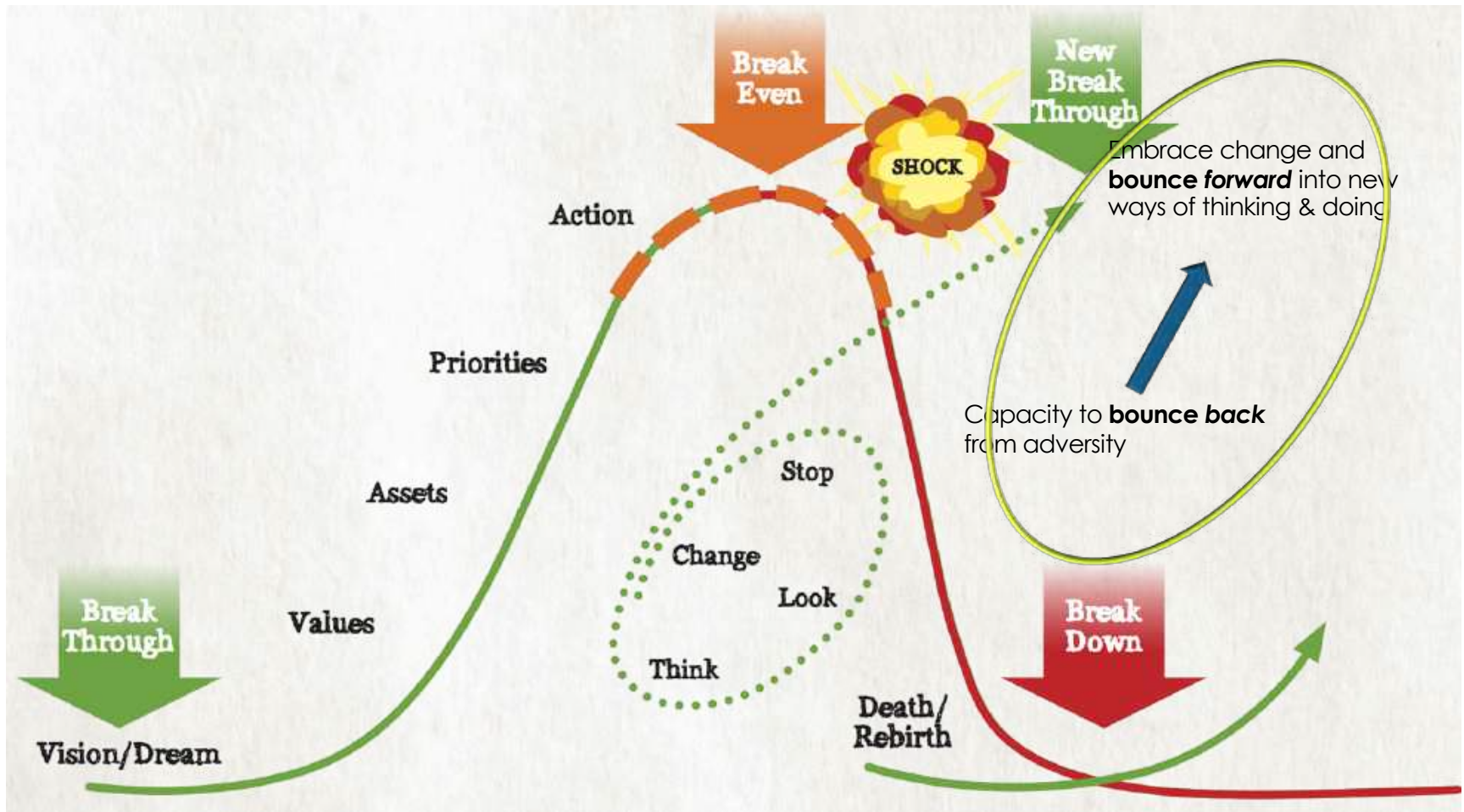
Resilience as capacity to bounce back from adversity & bounce forward into new ways of thinking & doing

Transition Movement Practice in Canada



Poland, B, et al. (2019). The emergence of the Transition movement in Canada: Success and impact through the eyes of initiative leaders. **Local Environment**. 24(3): 180-200

Parabola Model of Community Lifecycle



Source: *Training for Transformation*, Appendix 3 in Wilding, N. (2011). *Exploring Community Resilience in Times of Rapid Change*. Carnegie UK Trust. With bounce back/forward edits by B Poland, 2015.

Harvard Business Review

Support what you are buying. (By Heather Huxford and David W. Foray)

GREENING YOUR BUSINESS PROFITABLY

By David W. Foray and Heather Huxford

-

Drawing inspiration from non-dominant knowledge traditions

- ▣ **Critical & progressive traditions at the margins in the Global North** – degrowth, political ecology, critical race theory, ecofeminism
- ▣ **‘Earth’ traditions at the margins in the Global North** – deep ecology, neo-paganism, druidry, animism
- ▣ **Indigenous ways of knowing** – connection to the land, ancestors, “all my relations”, sacredness of all life
- ▣ **Global South epistemologies** – Buen Vivir, Freirian critical pedagogy, liberation theology, ‘collective health’

But note the dangers of cultural **appropriation**, and the need for real **reconciliation** and **repatriation**, Indigenous people’s **sovereignty**, resolution of unresolved land claims, honouring of Treaties, and the meaning of genuine **allyship**

Rethinking the Problem

What if the sustainability crisis is not a technical problem but a relationship problem?

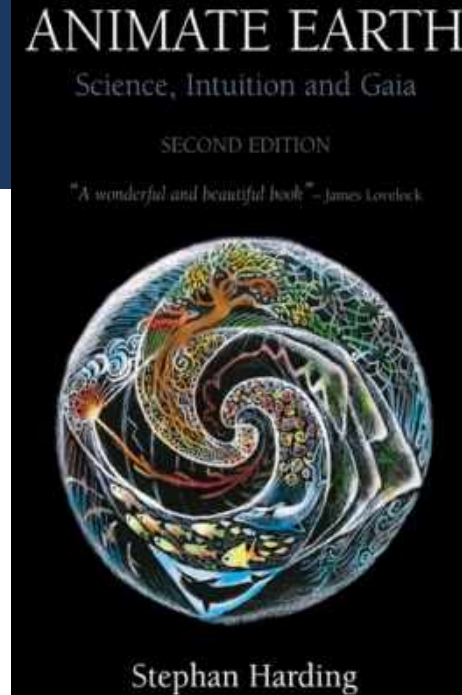
Have we fallen out of (right) relationship with ourselves, each other, and the more-than-human world?

Rethinking Social Change

Usual Way of Thinking About Change	Emerging & Non-Dominant Perspectives
<p>Act to reduce harm (humanity is a blight on the planet)</p> <p>Being green = what should give up, do without</p>	<p>From reducing harm to mutual benefit, regenerative sustainability, reciprocity</p> <p>Crisis as an opportunity to create the kind of society we always wanted</p>
<p>Social change is hard work (burn out trying to make change happen)</p>	<p>Doing what you love and inviting others to join ("if it's not fun, it's not sustainable")</p>
<p>So few people know what's going on – the amount of work to be done to educate everyone is overwhelming</p>	<p>A few key trigger events can spark a rapid change in awareness and willingness to act</p>
<p>Change is linear and predictable – you can compare energy expended with expected returns/impact, and decide whether it's worth it</p>	<p>Social change is almost always non-linear & unpredictable, building critical mass can take time but social 'tipping points' come surprisingly quickly</p>
<p>Unlikely to act if it seems like it won't make a difference.</p> <p>Hope is a prerequisite for action</p>	<p>What we do and how we are in the world is an expression of alignment with what we value</p> <p>Hope is generated through action</p>

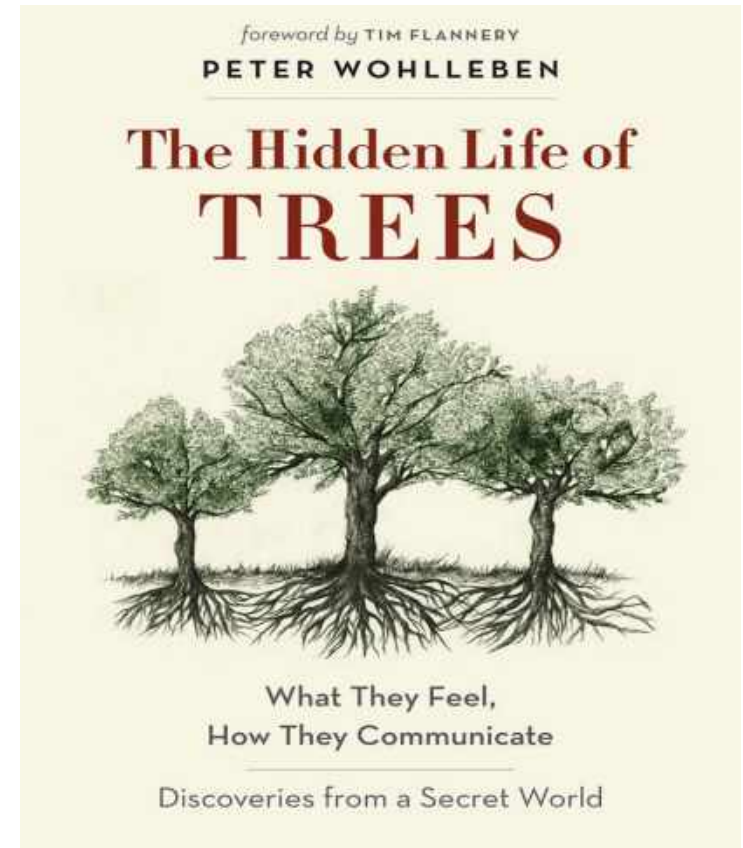
3. Embrace Animism & A Relational World View

- ❑ world views and ways of being, common amongst Indigenous peoples as well as European neo-paganism, shamanism, and Shinto traditions in Japan, that see all life as **animate**, **sentient**, and possessing **agency** and **spirit**.
- ❑ **a world that is fully alive**, that speaks to us, and that works together to co-create reality is quite a different world from the one that modern Western culture sees as a world of 'things', 'resources at our disposal', with humans at the pinnacle of evolution



Animism cont'd

- ❑ What if we not only learned about nature, or in nature, but also from nature?
- ❑ What kind of **deep listening** (to self, to each other, to the land) engenders transformative change?
- ❑ **What is the quality of being from which we source our knowing & doing?**



Many Lenses For Planetary Health

New ways of seeing for new times

The Many Lenses Project invites residents of Toronto to participate in a dialogue circle about new ways of seeing the challenges and opportunities of our time:

- Monday, April 1st, 1:00pm-3:00pm: 155 College, WBIH Board Room
- Tuesday April 2nd, 3:30pm-5:30pm: 155 College Street, RM 208
- Tuesday, April 16th, 9:00am-11:00am: 155 College Street, RM 696
- Wednesday, April 17th, 1:00pm-3:00pm: Gerstein Library, RM 1230
- Wednesday, April 17th, 6:00pm-8:00pm: 155 College Street, RM 696

Refreshments will be provided to those who are able to attend as well as a \$30.00 honorarium for those who are students, unwaged, or otherwise requiring compensation.

ABOUT THE PROJECT: Our health is affected by the environments in which we live, work and play. But every day we hear that our environment, and the health of the planet, is in trouble. We know we need to transition to a more sustainable state of affairs. But how to do this? And what kind of future do we want to build together? Often citizens are asked to say what they would like to see, but rarely are they invited to see things 'outside the box' of conventional thinking. What would happen if we could plant the seeds for seeing things in new ways that invite new possibilities, drawing on indigenous, global south, critical, animistic and other perspectives? Come find out and explore this with us, in circle, in an Indigenous way.

WHO WE ARE: Indigenous and non-Indigenous social and health researchers/activists working on issues of planetary health, social justice and citizen engagement. For more information about the project please visit our website:

<https://manylensesproject.home.blog>

RSVP on Eventbrite at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/many-lenses-project-dialogue-circles-tickets-59378376322>

Dalla Lana
School of Public Health



- Rethinking conventional citizen engagement on sustainable futures
- Seeding discussion with other ways of seeing
- Indigenous talking circle methodology
- 5 pilot circles
- Intended as input to larger sustainability dialogues and futures co-creation processes

Canadian Journal of Public Health
<https://doi.org/10.17269/541997-020-00424-0>

SPECIAL SECTION ON MOVING ON IPCC 1.5°C: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



Many lenses for planetary health: seeding citizen engagement for sustainable futures visioning with new ways of seeing

Blake Poland¹ · Angela Mashford-Pringle^{1,2} · Andrea Bowra^{1,2}

Received: 2 November 2019 / Accepted: 21 September 2020
© The Canadian Public Health Association 2020

Abstract

Objectives This pilot project sought to seed citizen engagement processes for sustainable futures visioning with ideas, perspectives, and processes informed by Indigenous ways of knowing.

Methods Five circle dialogues were convened with students, faculty, and members of the public, in the spring of 2019, using Indigenous talking circle methodology and intentionally seeded with “disruptive” ideas to encourage reflexivity and open space for “out-of-the-box” thinking. These were complemented by a series of one-on-one dialogues with members of the pan-Canadian research team. Pre- and post-dialogue surveys, notes taken by participants, team members, and co-facilitators, as well as notes from one-on-one interviews, constituted the data drawn upon for this paper.

Results Participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experience, noting they were able to go further and deeper in their thinking and listening, and that they valued the Indigenous talking circle methodology, even if they stopped short of claiming the experience had transformed their way of seeing the world. Key points raised in the dialogues included the need for a more relational worldview, the need to repair severed relations with the land and nature, the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing, the importance of community building, and the need to question the fundamental assumptions undergirding contemporary Western societies.

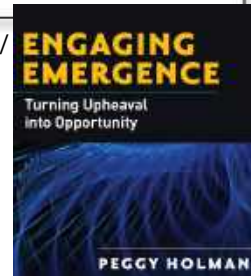
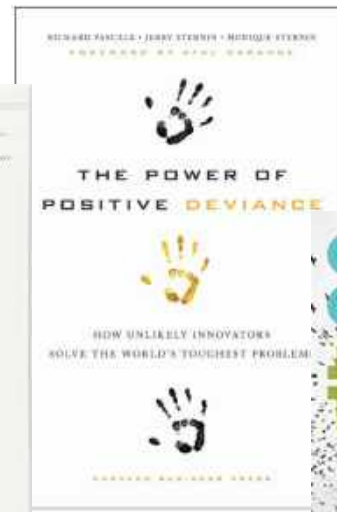
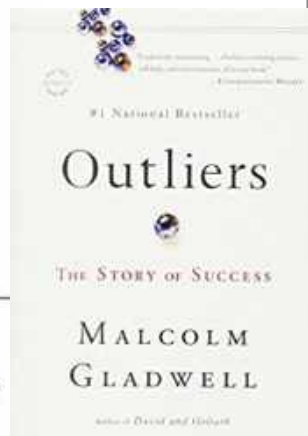
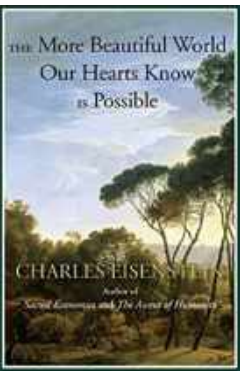
Conclusions While caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions and extrapolating from this modest pilot project, our experience underscores the value of processes that intentionally catalyze critical reflexivity and openness to other ways of seeing, informed by Indigenous ways of knowing and talking circle methodology.

4. Watering the Seeds of What We Want

- conjoin clear-eyed realism about current state of affairs with vision of “the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible”
- energy flows where attention goes
- positive deviance / appreciative inquiry / asset-based community development / post-traumatic growth / community resilience / morphic resonance / quantum social theory / pleasure activism / engaging emergence
- what brings you joy? “If it's not fun, it's not sustainable”

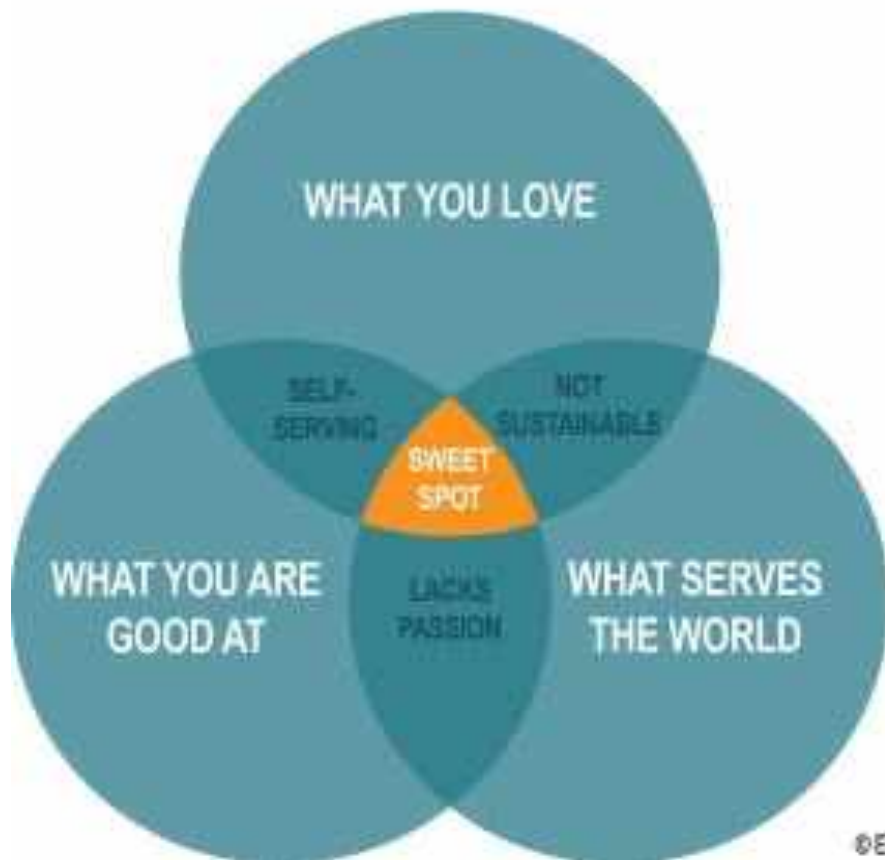


<https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/>



Thank-you!

The Sweet Spot Is Your Calling



© Eric Feng 2012

Blake Poland, PhD

Dalla Lana School of Public Health

University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

<https://manylensesproject.home.blog/>

<http://www.cansee.ca/2017/06/23/pedagogy-for-the-anthropocene/>

blake.poland@utoronto.ca

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/blake-poland-9611504/>