

Ecocultures

Blueprints for Sustainable Communities



Edited by Steffen Böhm,
Zareen Pervez Bharucha and Jules Pretty

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ECOCULTURES

The world faces a ‘perfect storm’ of social and ecological stresses, including climate change, habitat loss, resource degradation and social, economic and cultural change. In order to cope, communities are struggling to transition to sustainable ways of living that improve well-being and increase resilience. This book demonstrates how communities in both developed and developing countries are already taking action to maintain or build resilient and sustainable lifestyles. These communities, here designated as ‘ecocultures’, are exemplars of the art and science of sustainable living. Though they form a diverse group, they organize themselves around several common principles, including care for nature, respect for community, high ecological knowledge and the desire to maintain and improve personal and social well-being.

Case studies from both developed and developing countries, including Australia, Brazil, Finland, Greenland, India, Indonesia, South Africa, UK and USA, show how communities have been able to build on these principles to increase social, ecological and personal well-being and resilience. They also demonstrate how other more mainstream communities are beginning to transition to more sustainable, resilient alternatives. Some examples also illustrate the decline of ecocultures in the face of economic pressures, globalization and climate change. Theoretical chapters examine the barriers and bridges to wider application of these examples. Overall, the volume describes how ecocultures can provide the global community with important lessons for a wider transition to sustainability and will show how we can redefine our personal and collective futures around these principles.

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Dedication

To all nature-based communities

AUTHORS

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Steffen Böhm is Director of the Essex Sustainability Institute and Professor in Management and Sustainability at the University of Essex. He holds a PhD from the University of Warwick. His research focuses on political economies and ecologies of organization, management and the environment. He directs the inter-disciplinary Ecocultures research programme (www.ecocultures.org) as well as the Essex Sustainability Institute (www.essex.ac.uk/esi) at the University of Essex. He also runs a variety of research projects on the resilience and sustainability of food systems. He is also known for his research and critiques of carbon market approaches to climate policy. His books include *The Atmosphere Business* (Mayfly), *Upsetting the*

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We would like to thank all participants of the Ecocultures conference, which took place at the University of Essex in May 2012. It was an inspiring and memorable event, celebrating inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural approaches to thinking about the sustainability and resilience of ecocultural communities around the world. We also would like to extend our gratitude to the members of ecocultures that have been studied for this project, giving up their time to talk to researchers and sharing their experiences. We would also like to thank the authors of further case studies and thought pieces that were submitted to us, some of which are available on our project website at www.ecocultures.org. We are grateful for the generous funding provided by the University of Essex for the Ecocultures research project.

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PART I

Established ecocultures

ECOCULTURES

Towards sustainable ways of living

Steffen Böhm, Zareen Pervez Bharucha and Jules Pretty

On Christmas Eve 1968, from high above the Earth in lunar orbit, American astronauts Frank Borman and William Anders added image number AS8-14-2383 to NASA's catalogue. It went on to become one of the most iconic photographs of all time. 'Earthrise' shows our planet rising above the empty lunar landscape, back-dropped by the cold emptiness of space. The dull brown of the lunar surface and the pitch dark of space dominate most of the image. But at the centre, Planet Earth glows with colour and the patterns of life. Oceans, swirling clouds and landmasses all crowd the arc of planet that hangs above the lunar horizon.

It is home.

Viewed thus from space, it became plainly obvious that life, and all that supports it, is quite distinctly bounded within the thin layers of water, land and air that form our biosphere. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 'Earthrise' is widely regarded as one of the catalysts for the modern environmental movement, compelling us to recognize our fundamental dependence on our planet amid a seemingly empty universe.

Forty years later, a quite different set of images shows our world in a very different way. In 2011, Canadian scientist Felix Pharand-Deschenes put together a composite image of the Earth, showing major road and rail networks, transmission lines and underwater cables superimposed over a satellite image of cities lit up at night. These pictures show our world's roads and railways, electricity lines, shipping lanes and air-traffic (Globaïa, 2013). This 'cartography of the Anthropocene' is a different take on life on Earth than what was captured in Earthrise. Instead of foregrounding 'spaceship Earth', these newer images highlight the buzz of human life in our world. Our species is everywhere: trading, talking and travelling all over the planet. If Earthrise showed us our one home, Pharand-Deschenes shows us what we are doing there.

To put it in the form now ubiquitous in environmental scholarship and activism, Pharand-Deschenes's images represent the *Anthropocene*: a time in the planet's history when human influence predominates.