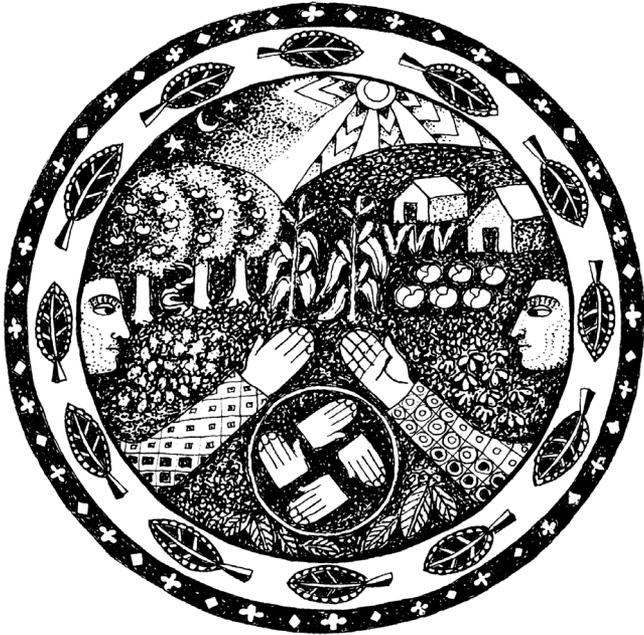


Private Sufficiency, Public Luxury: Land is the Key to the Transformation of Society

presented by
George Monbiot



Fortieth Annual E. F. Schumacher Lecture
October 25, 2020

Private Sufficiency, Public Luxury: Land is the Key to the Transformation of Society

presented by
George Monbiot

Fortieth Annual E. F. Schumacher Lecture
October 25, 2020
Schumacher Center for a New Economics

Founded in 1980 the Schumacher Center for a New Economics works to envision the elements of a just and regenerative global economy; undertakes to apply these elements in its home region of the Berkshires in western Massachusetts; and then develops the educational programs to share the results more broadly, thus encouraging replication.

Private Sufficiency, Public Luxury: Land is the Key to the
Transformation of Society
by George Monbiot

Edited by Hildegard Hannum

© 2021 Schumacher Center for a New Economics and George Monbiot. This text is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>.

Drawing on front cover by Martha Shaw

Printed locally in the Berkshires on recycled paper

Schumacher Center for a New Economics
140 Jug End Road
Great Barrington, MA 01230
(413) 528-1737
www.centerforneweconomics.org

Private Sufficiency, Public Luxury: Land is the Key to the Transformation of Society

by George Monbiot

Welcome to the 40th Annual E. F. Schumacher Lecture. I'm your host, Jodie Evans. I'm from CODEPINK: Women for Peace and a proud member of the Schumacher board. This lecture series presents some of the foremost voices promoting a new economics that supports both the people and the planet.

I wanted to bring into the room some words by Schumacher to set our stage. "Among material resources, the greatest unquestionably is land. Study how a society uses its land, and you can come to a pretty reliable conclusion as to what its future will be" (from *Small Is Beautiful*).

Today's lecture is entitled "Private Sufficiency, Public Luxury: Land is the Key to the Transformation of Society." We're thrilled to have as our speaker George Monbiot, a British author who is famous for his environmental and political activism. He writes a weekly column for *The Guardian* and is the author of many books, including *Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea, and Human Life* and *Heat: How to Stop the Planet Burning*. His latest is *Out*

of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis. George co-wrote the concept album, “Breaking the Spell of Loneliness” with musician Ewan McLennan and has made a number of viral videos, one of them adapted from his 2013 Ted Talk, “How Wolves Change Rivers,” which has been viewed on YouTube over 40 million times, and another on natural climate solutions, co-presented with Greta Thunberg, that has been watched over 60 million times. He is the founder of The Land is Ours, a campaign for the right to access the countryside and its resources in the UK. I am so pleased to welcome George Monbiot.

How is it possible to own land? I find it remarkable that this basic question is so seldom asked. The current pattern of ownership and control of land lies at the heart of many of our biggest dysfunctions: the collapse of wildlife and ecosystems, the exclusion and marginalization of so many people, the lack of housing in many cities — indeed, in many parts of the world — the lack of public space in cities, our exclusion from the countryside.

The pattern of land ownership underlies all of these massive issues, and indeed of many more. Yet we rarely question it. We seldom even talk about it, although its scarcity is a factor in public life. Such a grip does the current pattern have on our imagination that it feels like trespassing even to raise the issue.

At the heart of public life there's a universal unexamined assumption that the money in your bank account translates into a right to own natural wealth. If you have enough money, you can buy a whole mountain range, a whole fertile plain, a whole section of a city. You can buy as many minerals as you want, as many precious natural resources as you want. That money in your bank account gives you a right, a concomitant right to own the Earth's surface. But why? What just principle lies behind that right? Why does the dollar sign or the pound sign make you a more important citizen than someone who has less in his or her bank account? Why can you grab resources, thereby depriving other people of the use of those resources. This applies not just to land; it applies to the atmosphere as well. Why are some people allowed to burn so much fossil fuel? It has to do with the stuff we own. Why are some people allowed to have so much more than others, depriving us

of a habitable planet? It also applies to what we eat. Why do some people aggregate to themselves the right to eat a steak every day or scarce fish when it's destroying our life-support systems?

It does seem incredible to me that we're not asking these questions every moment of every day, and yet they're not being asked at all. In fact, people are completely befuddled if you ask them why money translates into a right to own natural wealth. Most people have never been confronted with this question at all. But often those who have been will turn in a kind of panic to John Locke, the famous 17th century philosopher, and his *Second Treatise on Government* published in 1689. This *Second Treatise* has really become the basis of our property law and indeed of our whole modern economy. Yet in my view, it's completely mad. What Locke says is that we establish our right to own natural wealth by mixing our labor with it. If you pick a fruit from a tree or if you dig a hole in the ground, you own that thing because you have used some of your labor to obtain it. That ground becomes yours because, in this case, you've dug a hole in it.

The notion of mixing your labor with the land or mixing your labor with natural wealth has become absolutely fundamental. Even if it's not actually talked about, it's a tacit assumption behind the whole way in which our lives are structured today. This notion was picked up by the eminent jurist William Blackstone in the 18th century. With his help and that of many others, it was translated across vast tracts of the world into law, whereby basically you can achieve sole domain over attractive land or another aspect of natural wealth on the grounds that at some point you

or your ancestor or the person you bought it from mixed their labor with the land.

Let's just examine this notion for a moment. For a start, it assumes a year zero. You can turn up as the first person who ever arrived—the colonist—on a completely blank slate, on a piece of land where nobody had any rights before because there was nobody there. John Locke is quite explicit on this point. He says, "In the beginning, all the world was America." In other words, all the world was empty of people; it was there for the taking.

Of course all the world was America—but not in the sense that he meant, because all the world was occupied before European colonists turned up—and the Americas particularly so because there were tens of millions of indigenous people who had their own rights to the land, even though they didn't recognize the concept of land ownership in the way that the European colonists did. This idea that you have legal title, which gives you exclusive domain and no one else can enjoy the fruits of that land, was as alien to Native Americans as the idea is to us today that we might own the air that surrounds us.

But in order to create that blank slate which John Locke talked about—that *terra nullius*, that land without people—those people who lived there had to be cleared from it, and that clearance took the form of genocide. Huge numbers of people were killed, many accidentally through disease but many deliberately through mass murder and expulsion in order to create that blank slate, in order to create that place where the colonist could turn up as if he, and frankly it's almost always he, were the first person ever to have stepped onto that piece of earth and to have thrust

a spade into it. By thrusting that spade in, the colonist is able to annul all previous rights to that land.

But not only all previous rights, all future rights as well because according to the Lockean doctrine, by mixing your labor with the land, once you and your descendants or the people to whom you sell the land have absolute rights in perpetuity to that piece of land, this means that someone else can't turn up five years later, thrust a spade in the land and say, "Hey, I'm mixing my labor with the land, so the land is therefore mine." No. You've not only canceled all prior rights, you've canceled all future rights by once mixing your labor with the land.

It gets even crazier than this, because it turns out that your labor doesn't have to be your labor at all but the labor of those whom you employ, the labor you control. So the person thrusting the spade into the ground isn't the person who acquires the rights. The person who acquires the rights is the person employing the person thrusting the spade into the ground.

In 1689, when Locke's *Second Treatise* was published, if you were to establish large-scale rights, particularly in the Americas, you were basically going to be using slaves. You were going to be using slaves to dig that land, saying "I, as a slave owner, am mixing my labor with the land; because that is my labor, I own those slaves."

So what Locke did, maybe purposefully or perhaps inadvertently, was to create a charter of human rights for slave owners. And this is the basis of law, the basis of economic life today. It's essentially a series of humongous lies. The lies are so big and are repeated so often and are embedded so deeply in the way we see the world that we

don't recognize them as lies, we don't question them; we don't even ask the questions that would lead us to question those lies.

As a result, the great majority of people on earth are born on the wrong side of the law. We have a comical concept of equality before the law, yet a huge tranche of law in every nation is based on property rights. What this means is that those who own property have far more rights than those who do not. Property law is designed to preserve exclusive rights for those who own against those who don't—to keep those who don't, the have-nots, out of the domain of the haves.

This series of legal seizures was created through a process we know as enclosure. Enclosure means grabbing, often with violence, the resources that other people were making use of, which was the basis of other people's livelihood, and then, having grabbed those resources, using them as the basis of your exclusive and private wealth.

These processes really kicked off in their modern form in England in the 16th century and spread to Ireland, then to Scotland, then to the English colonies abroad, and then to much of the rest of the world. And it is still going on today. Across huge tracts of the land there is now land-grabbing taking place, which means local people, often indigenous people, are kicked off the land by big corporations, by states, by private enterprise of all kinds, by private owners; that land is grabbed and its wealth exclusively concentrated in the hands of the person who grabbed it.

This is often accompanied by massive environmental destruction. We've seen the felling of forests taking place across South America and Central America, across

Indonesia; we've seen the replacement of those forests and the forest people who live there with monocultures of cattle, of soya, of palm oil, with the replacement of these incredibly rich, irreplaceable ecosystems by monocrops, the purpose of which is to enrich a very few people. That process continues today. Even in the richest nations, enclosure continues, though by different means, and exclusion continues as a result.

Let's take a problem that everybody cares about: housing. Now, in my country, the United Kingdom, it happens that at the moment we have a higher ratio of housing to households than there has ever been. We have a huge amount of housing, but we also have a very large number of homeless people and an even larger number of underhoused people; whole families are crammed into flats designed for one person to live in. People are sofa surfing, people are barely keeping a roof over their heads, sometimes under squalid and inadequate circumstances.

Why should this be? Well, it's because very rich people tend to own a lot of property, whereas very poor people don't own any at all. Those very rich people tend to have multiple homes—second homes, third homes, fourth homes, fifth homes—many of which are left vacant for much of the year. Each of the homes they own has enough room for a big family, maybe even more than one family, and yet they often are occupied by just one couple or perhaps even by only one person.

There exists a grossly unequal distribution of housing, and it's becoming more unequal all the time because the current pattern of land ownership drives a powerful spiral of patrimonial wealth accumulation. If you own property,

you can leverage it to buy more property through the rents you get as well as through the rise of the value of that property; then you can buy more, and then you can buy even more. That spiral just keeps building and building if left to its own devices. It doesn't all work out well in the end, unless government intervenes and deliberately breaks the spiral, primarily through taxation and through regulation. Otherwise we find fewer and fewer people with more and more property in their hands and ever more people excluded as a result. That exclusion extends to all sorts of aspects of our lives.

One of the things we've discovered during the pandemic is just how important green space is to us. It is crucially important to our mental health and to our physical health, particularly to that of our children. Children brought up in areas with plenty of green space generally do a lot better on a series of indicators, including mental and physical health, than those who are surrounded by concrete and hard surfaces everywhere. And yet, despite the fact that even in densely populated nations there is a great deal of green space, we're excluded from the huge majority of it. In most cities, the provision of parks and green places is woefully inadequate. We find ourselves walking round and round little green areas in the countryside. Even in a country like mine, which prides itself on being a great nation of walkers, we are confined to a few footpaths with barbed wire on either side, crossing depressing landscapes, while big estates have enclosed the most beautiful parts of the countryside and built walls around them, putting up "no trespassing" signs.

Even though in the UK we provide three billion pounds

a year to landowners with taxpayers' money in the form of farm subsidies, we don't get access to what we pay for, except on 8% of the land in England. We're excluded from 92% of the land. For many people in parts of the country where there's almost no access to land at all, there's no sense of escape from the gridded, managed, human-made landscape that we often feel trapped in. It's also a potent driver of environmental destruction.

To stay for awhile with my own country, the UK has very large tracts of land in the uplands, which you would expect to be great wildlife havens because the land is really poor for any form of farming. Many of these tracts are located in our national parks, which again you would expect to be ecologically rich places, but they are used instead for shooting grouse. Now, the grouse is a wild bird, at least in theory, but the grouse moors are owned by some of the richest people in the world, who are not just the very rich aristocrats in the UK but also Russian oligarchs and oil sheiks and Texas minerals barons and all sorts of people from around the world. A lot of the time you can't even find out who owns the land because it's registered in the Cayman Islands or the British Virgin Islands, in the secrecy jurisdictions. This land is owned by these big owners exclusively for shooting these little birds, these red grouse.

In order to maximize the number of grouse, the owners systematically destroy the ecology of these great areas of land. They do so by burning the land, because that way you create lots of little green shoots coming up the next year from the heather, which the grouse like to eat. These landowners do so by also killing any predator which might eat the grouse—from foxes and weasels and stoats

to eagles and hen harriers and peregrines. It doesn't seem to matter whether it's legal or illegal to do so. They will trap them, they will shoot them, they will snare them, they will poison them, and they get away with it because they are effectively above the law.

So the pattern of land ownership there has turned what should be extremely rich and vibrant ecosystems into monocultures, effectively upland chicken runs that are massively overpopulated by red grouse and almost nothing else. We see a similar pattern all over the world: the demands of the very few who own large areas of land supersede the demands of the majority who might want that land protected for wildlife; instead, that land is very often destroyed at the behest of the owners.

The Canadian social science professor, Kevin MacKay, points out that when you look at the history of civilizational collapse, you find a very interesting and disturbing pattern: there's an association with complexity, there's an association with soil loss, there's an association with energy use, but the strongest association of all is with oligarchic control of those societies. When you have a very few people in charge, and everyone else is excluded from the crucial decisions, such as what to do with the land, those civilizations collapse. They collapse because what the oligarchs want is not in the interest of society as a whole but is in their own exclusive interest. By pursuing those exclusive interests and shutting everyone else out of decision-making, they drive societies to ruin. And that's just what we're seeing today.

I've mentioned the foundational lies of our legal system and our economic system, but there's also another huge foundational lie, which could be called the foundational lie

of capitalism. This is the idea that everyone can justifiably aspire to private luxury, that however poor you might be now, however excluded, however marginalized, you have a chance under capitalism of becoming extremely rich and owning a huge amount of natural wealth. In fact, that's the only thing which really allows capitalism to continue, because vast numbers of people are—in a quote misattributed to John Steinbeck—"temporarily embarrassed millionaires." We believe we are going to acquire vast wealth even if we are poor at present.

That is why we allow the system that permits a few people to acquire vast wealth to continue, even when it's clear that the system is not in any sense distributional but acts instead to concentrate wealth and make those who already possess it much richer than they are, while ensuring that those who don't possess it scarcely get a look in.

But the premise is that you too can be like those people you see on TV; you too can be like the Kardashians, you too can be like the Koch brothers, you too can be like Donald Trump and have a great big gold tower with your name emblazoned on it; you can have a private jet, you can have a huge ranch, a great big country estate. That's the promise on which the whole thing is based.

Now, even if capitalism were distributive, even if it did ensure that everybody has a chance of becoming very rich, that promise would still be impossible to fulfill simply because there isn't enough space in which it can be fulfilled. You can't all have a ranch or a giant estate or a tower in your own name. You can't all have a private jet and a runway to land it on, because there simply is not enough land. And of course, there's not enough ecologi-

cal space either. If everybody lived like the very rich, we would cook the planet in a matter of years. It would become uninhabitable even more quickly than it's becoming uninhabitable at the moment.

This notion that we can all acquire private luxury is fundamentally untrue. To give you one example, even if you're not going to own your own private jet, if everybody owned a tennis court and a swimming pool and a private art collection and a big garden with play equipment for their children, then the city of Newcastle would be as big as London and London would cover most of England, England would cover Europe, Europe would cover the world. There isn't enough space for everybody to live like that. The possibility just doesn't exist. That much available space is an illusion.

Of course, alongside that illusion comes an even bigger illusion: that we can all just continue to grow, that the economy can grow and grow and grow infinitely on a finite planet. As a result of this illusion, again to draw on my own country because I've always felt the need to bring these things home rather than just pointing to other nations, our global ecological footprint amounts to around five hectares of land and sea per person per year, yet our biocapacity in the UK is one hectare.

In other words, to pursue our rich lifestyles and to pursue as much or as little private luxury as each person has in this country, we need to be taking resources away from other people. We exclude and deprive people in order to live high on the hog today in our own nation. If everybody tried to do that, well, we would need five planets. Clearly, we don't have five planets, so we've got to be much more

careful about the way we use the resources we do have on this one planet.

This means we can't allow a handful of people to take more and more, excluding everybody else, depriving others of a chance for a good life and at the same time destroying our life-support systems. Our private luxury deprives other people of their private sufficiency.

So what do we do? Everybody wants a good life, we all want to share in the natural wealth of the planet, we want to share in prosperity, we want to live decently, we don't want to be excluded, we don't want to be marginalized, we don't want to be so poor that we have a rubbish quality of life. But how can we possibly attain all that if there isn't enough space?

Well, there is. There's not enough space for a private luxury, but there is enough space for everyone to enjoy public luxury. If only we use the space more intelligently, there is enough space for everyone to enjoy magnificent public parks and public swimming pools and public museums and public tennis courts and public art galleries and public transport. By creating public space we create more space for everybody, whereas when we create private space, we exclude the majority of people and create less space for others.

Particularly in cities in the poor parts of the world, you see this profound inequality, with huge numbers of people crammed into tiny living quarters under really squalid and impoverished conditions, with no public space at all, with scarcely any public amenities, public transport, and the rest, whereas in other parts of the city, you see enormous villas with huge gardens and their own swimming pools and huge

cars which fill up the roads every day. It's because some people have taken so much that other people have so little.

This is a zero-sum game. Land stopped being made long ago, so if we take more land than is our due, we are excluding other people from that natural wealth. But if we use urban land wisely, and if we ensure that we concentrate primarily on public amenities—on public transport, on public space, on public goods—then we can have public luxury for all. My catchphrase has become “private sufficiency, public luxury.”

Am I saying that vast amounts of land need to belong to the state? No. I think the state has a very important role to play: it's crucially important for providing education and public health as well as public transport, for regulating society, for ensuring that some people don't become so big and powerful that they destroy democracy, for ensuring that everybody has an economic safety net. The state has many crucial roles to play, but if we rely on state provision alone and if we look to the state to meet all our needs, then the state itself becomes too powerful and threatens democracy. Also, state provision alone leads, I think, to a cold transactional set of relationships.

Alongside state provision in the crucial areas, I feel we need much richer and stronger communities. Community power, community strength, comes from something we call the commons. Now, it seems crazy to me that we have to explain what the commons is, because it's so fundamental to our well-being that everybody should know. But because of the huge lies we tell that sit at the basis of economic thought, the very notion of the commons is alien to perhaps the majority of people.

A commons tends to consist of three elements: there's a resource, which could be a piece of land or it could be a forest, it could be an internet platform, it could be community broadband, it could be a community energy company, it could be a housing co-op. There is the community of people who manage that resource. And there are the rules and negotiations that those people create to ensure that this resource is well managed.

The commons is a distributional system. It ensures that everybody has an equal share, either to the resource itself or to the product arising from that resource. It's also a system which tends towards much better environmental protection, because the resource which the commoners look after is meant to be inalienable. You can't sell it, you can't give it away; rather, you're meant to pass it on to the next lot of commoners—the people who come after you, after you've died—intact, without degrading the commons.

A classic example which I benefit from greatly are the allotments we have in the United Kingdom to which, since the beginning of the 20th century, everyone in this country is entitled, if he or she wants it, to a small patch of land for growing fruits and vegetables. These patches of land are parts of bigger patches of land called allotments, run by an allotments association controlled by its own members. There might be 100 or 200 or 300 plots on the allotments, and the members decide how those plots are to be managed, making sure that they're equitably distributed.

Within your own plot, you can do more or less what you want within the broad rules created by the association, but across the allotments you've got a democracy, and you've got consensus being built through deliberative democracy

by the members of the allotment association. It's a classic commons. And it's one which brings enormous benefits to the lives of many people in this country who don't have land of their own.

Indeed, by sharing and distributing that land you make sure that far more people have access to it than the market economy alone ensures, i.e., that only those who are rich enough to buy land have access to it. This is a fair distributed system, and that's basically how commons work in general. They're not capitalist, they're not communist. They exist in a sphere of their own. It's a different economic dimension. And what we see all over the world is that where commons exist, the general prosperity tends to be greater, societies tend to be more just and more democratic than where those commons have been destroyed.

If you go back far enough, the commons were once the fundamental economy. They were the basis of people's economic life. But those commons were seized during the process of enclosure under the Lockean proviso that the person who turns up as a private owner in the commons, as a colonist, and sticks his spade in the ground is the person who gets to own that land. It's partly because of the termination of the commons across the world that we find ourselves in such an extraordinary mess in so many ways, both economically and politically.

I would like to see a restitution of the commons to the greatest extent possible. I think this is essential, not just for justice within generations but also for intergenerational justice. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights tells us that all of us are born free and equal in dignity and rights. We know that's not true, but

even if it were true within any generation of people born it's invalidated by the fact that one generation can steal the resources, the environmental resources in particular, on which subsequent generations depend. So you might all have equality when you're born into this theoretical world, created by the Universal Declaration, but it might be equality in sharing a degraded planet.

What we need to see added to that Declaration is, I think, the notion that every generation should have equal rights to the enjoyment of natural wealth. If this were added, it would in theory—on paper, at least—change everything because it would say that no generation is allowed to create a net reduction in the amount of natural wealth. You can't burn up resources and dump them. There has to be a circular economy. You can't use fossil fuels at all, in that case, because then you would be making the atmosphere less habitable; you would be destroying the natural wealth of a benign climate, which would in turn destroy people's chances of experiencing dignity and having rights in the next generation.

But what does this say about the land itself? Obviously, if you are born into a situation where some people own almost all the land and the majority of people none, you're not born free and equal in regard to dignity and rights. And when you turn to Article 17 of the Universal Declaration, you will notice a fundamental contradiction within that article because it says everyone has the right to own property, but it doesn't set any limit on the amount of property that anyone can own. Thus, if some people have the right to own property and accumulate more and more property, it means that other people don't have the right to

own property. The Declaration as a whole makes no sense because it hasn't considered these issues and because it's based on the false Lockean premise.

So I think we should add a new article to the Declaration, which is that everyone has the right to use property as long as they do not infringe on anyone else's rights to use property. And that again could change our fundamental relationships with one another and with the land.

But how might you bring this about, especially in a situation where those with the land have the law on their side and have the money on their side? Well, if I ruled the world, which I will do imminently, I would impose much higher taxes on the ownership of land. Land ownership is massively undertaxed. It provides you with tremendous amounts of wealth for which you don't have to work. Wealth for which you don't have to work is known as economic rent, the wealth that should be taxed most but tends in practice to be taxed least, principally because even in our so-called democracies, those with the money determine to a very large extent the course of politics. They are not very democratic at all but tend to be quite plutocratic.

If we were to impose much higher taxes on the ownership of land, particularly extremely valuable land, then we could start using the money gathered by those taxes to buy land. We would buy that land, or rather produce a pot of money with which communities can buy land through the use of a community right to buy. The local community and the organization it finds to represent itself — the commons, in other words — would have right of first refusal on any land that came up for sale within the neighborhood and would have a pot of money with which to buy that

land. It might even have the right through compulsory sale orders to buy land which has been left vacant or derelict, particularly urban land where there's a desperate need for public amenities or for housing, so that the community could then step in and buy that land.

This way, incrementally and slowly and without any of the violence with which the land was taken from us, we can gradually rebalance this severely unbalanced situation, once more getting for ourselves a universal foothold on the land and starting to see a democratization of land use as well as the establishment of the principle of private sufficiency and public luxury.

But even this is insufficient to ensure that the land works for us rather than against us. In addition, we need to democratize the decision-making processes that determine how land is used. Often these processes are hoarded by governments; often highly vocal people who feel empowered and entitled get the greatest say in how the land is used, even during what are purportedly democratic planning processes.

Perhaps we need to start considering planning juries when it comes to deciding what the local plan for a city might be. There could be a form of jury service, co-opting randomly chosen people onto a panel to make the decisions rather than allowing the big developers to bend the ear of the local authority and to say they want the land used in this way, for this purpose, because they're going to make a lot of money from it.

Perhaps we need a community participation agency to ensure that far more people are involved in the democratic decision-making process so that people who are usually

not heard become heard. I would like to see every local authority all over the world have a future-generations commissioner to represent the people who have not yet been born but whose interests will be strongly affected by the kind of development which is allowed or not allowed on a particular piece of land. Thus, we would see a gradual democratization of the use of land as well as the democratization of the ownership of land.

I see such proposals meshing with some of the innovative moves being made in certain parts of the world. For instance in Paris, where the far-sighted mayor, Anne Hidalgo, now talks of the 15-minute city. I think this is a lovely concept. Initially, it was proposed as a means of solving our massive urban-transport dysfunction, where we have horribly polluted cities, where so many people are using their cars to commute because there are no sensible transport policies. People are also tremendously unfit, because instead of walking or using bicycles, they move around in a ton of metal, one ton of metal per person. This is why we have very little public space, because a lot of the space which could be used for communities is instead used for parking and for roads.

Hidalgo is trying to address this by saying, “Let’s not see this just as a transport problem but as an urban design problem.” It’s not only a matter of what vehicles we’re using, it’s a matter of why we need to travel so far in the first place, of why people need to go so far to get to work, to get to school, to get to the shops and all the other places they might use. What Hidalgo said is, let’s divide the city into 15-minute neighborhoods, where within a 15-minute walk you have all the basic things you might need. We

create enough local employment so that a large proportion of the population of that 15-minute neighborhood actually has their place of work within their own neighborhood.

She sees that not just as a means of addressing Paris's massive transport issues but of creating much richer and more vibrant and participatory communities, much stronger neighborhoods, where people look out for each other and people are much more likely to know each other because it's quieter and they can actually talk to each other in the street. The street is actually a nice place to be; local businesses are doing much better, are much more embedded, and there is much more sense of localism within the community.

On the back of that, Anne Hidalgo is starting to build new forms of democratic participation. We have, let's face it, a pretty crazy system, where a government comes into power as a result of a vote every five years, which might involve 30% of the electorate voting for that particular party, or it might be just 20% of the total population, because of course children and various other people don't vote. As a result, that government can then determine for the next five years everything that happens as long as it continues to command a parliamentary majority. It can say, "Well, it's in the manifesto, it's on our platform; therefore we presume we have consent to do whatever we want for the next five years."

We don't accept the idea of presumed consent in sex, why should we accept it in politics? A government can say, "Well, tough, you voted for us." Why can't we modify that decision, day by day, to actually determine what we want, rather than what the government presumes we want? For this to happen, we need participatory deliberative democracy.

Paris is showing the way, Madrid is showing the way with its “Decide Madrid” program, Reykjavik is showing the way with its “Better Reykjavik” program, the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre showed the way with its participatory budgeting, whereby people now have control over how the money that is spent locally is actually used, rather than allowing a small mafia of developers and people close to government to determine it. This has led to a massive improvement in people’s quality of life: better sanitation, better water quality, better primary health care, better education, lower maternal mortality, lower infant mortality, better public transport, you name it. As a result of that program, Porto Alegre went from being a dysfunctional city to being the capital city of the state of Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil, placed highest on the human development index.

I see no reason why we can’t use participatory democracy everywhere to temper representative democracy. Sure, we still need parliament; sure, we still need local authority, we still need government, but we can also have far richer political engagement by the people all the time. A large part of that engagement is, I believe, built on the land. If we have control over the physical fabric of society—that is, the ground on which we stand—and if we can decide what happens to that ground and how it is used, then we can determine that it’s used for the benefit of all, rather than just for the benefit of a few. We can use that as a basis for the wider democratization of society, the wider protection of our living planet, the wider sharing of the prosperity of our living planet and its natural wealth, not just within generations but between generations.

Let's democratize the land. Let's share the land. Let's use it much better, and let's use the land as the basis for the transformation of society.

Thank you.

Question & Discussion Period

Wow! So inspiring. Thank you, George. I want to break into a chorus of "This land is our land." Everyone, take a moment to breathe deeply and feel the beauty, community, and connection of the comments and the liberation of the land that we were taken to. And yes, to the restoration of the commons and us being stewards of the land. We would be so much more grounded. Now, for our time of questions I want to bring in Greg Watson, who delivered last year's 39th Annual Schumacher Lecture. Greg is Director of Policy and Systems Design at the Schumacher Center for a New Economics. He has spent nearly 40 years, inspired by Buckminster Fuller, learning to understand systems thinking and to apply that understanding to achieve a just and sustainable world. In 1978 he organized a network of urban farmer markets in the greater Boston metropolitan area and later served as Commissioner of Agriculture in Massachusetts under governors Dukakis, Weld, and Patrick. Greg, let's start with some questions for George from you.

Thank you, Jodie. And George, thank you so much for your inspiring talk. I must say that the power of dominant narratives came through to me as an important concept. Your talk resonated with me partly because I have a background

in community organizing, partly because I'm not wealthy. But I do suspect that among the thousands of viewers of this lecture, you may have exceeded the comfort level of some folks. I think what you're saying is both important and fundamental. The power of the dominant narrative, I think, stems in part from the fact that it's pretty straightforward, it's quantitative. People can grasp what it's all about, although the alternative you laid out so beautifully is more nuanced. It's a more difficult concept to grasp. My question to you is, how important is it to establish this alternative narrative in order to replace the dominant narrative—which I think most people don't even understand, as you pointed out—with the assumptions they're working under? How important is it to establish and propagate that alternative scenario, and whom do you target as the most important audience for it in the beginning? You mentioned the crucial role that state or government can play. As a policy maker, I'm interested in that too, but let me begin with one other caveat, which is that the private-sufficiency argument is important, but I wonder if it could be interpreted as saying, "You're denying me the ability to hedge my bets against uncertainty." That notion of sufficiency is somewhat limiting for a number of folks, and they might see your argument about the inability to enjoy private luxury because of the limited amount of land—which is very persuasive to me—as a driver for some people to say that's why they adhere to belief in the survival of the richest, because they want to get their share before it runs out.

Thank you very much, Greg. All great questions, really important ones to ask. If we start with the question of nar-

rative, I think that movements around the world have been far too slow to understand the crucial role of narrative in driving political change. What we see consistently across successful political and religious movements, going back thousands of years, is a very effective use of narrative. And interestingly, not just narrative in general but a particular narrative structure that I call the restoration narrative. This is a structure which can be adapted to any kind of politics, to any worldview at all, but it's a structure that seems to resonate very powerfully with people if you're trying to reach them in the hope of precipitating political, social, cultural, economic change.

It goes like this: the world has been thrown into disorder by powerful and nefarious forces exploiting humanity and bringing great harm upon us. But the hero of the story—who might be one person, might be several people, might be an entire community, might be the people of an entire nation—rises up against those powerful and nefarious forces, overthrows them, and restores harmony to the world. That's the Bible story, it's the Harry Potter story, it's the Narnia story. It's *The Lord of the Rings* story. It comes up again and again. But it's also the driving force, the narrative force of political change. It's the story that John Maynard Keynes told; conversely, it's the story that Friedrich Hayek told, the story that Marx told, the story the Fascists told.

Whichever way you look, it's that narrative framework adapted to their own aims, which of course are wildly different but which attract people to put themselves into that narrative and say: "Oh, this story applies to me and tells me who I am. It tells me how I got here. It tells me

how we got here into the state that we're in, but it also lights a path to another world. It's like a path to the future that I see myself following." That's why this restoration narrative, this idea of restoring harmony in a world that has been corrupted and co-opted by evil forces, resonates again and again. It has resonated for thousands of years across so many generations, yet we continue to neglect the role of narrative in political change. I'm grateful to you for bringing that up because I think one of the reasons we're so stuck at the moment, apparently so stuck, is that we haven't consciously developed new narratives to get us unstuck.

After the Great Depression in the early 20th century, John Maynard Keynes sat down and wrote his General Theory, which was a highly powerful and effective restoration narrative. He said: "Here's our way out. Here's how we're going to do it." And people immediately chimed in to that narrative because it fit the narrative structure very neatly. It fit exactly. It went like this:

"The powerful and nefarious forces of the economic elite grabbed everything for themselves, destroying effective demand. But we the people, the working-class, the middle-class people acting through benign government, will tax those powerful people, use that money to spend it into the economy in the form of public services. To do so, we will employ people, we will distribute wealth, we will generate effective demand, and we will kick-start the economy again".

Then, when that approach got into trouble in the 1970s, the neoliberals came forward with almost the exact opposite story but using precisely the same narrative structure, saying that the powerful and nefarious forces are the state, and

the hero of the story is the freedom-seeking entrepreneur who seeks to overthrow the power of the state by creating an effective market in which, through buying and selling, we liberate ourselves from that powerful force and generate wealth, which will eventually trickle down to enrich everyone. They're opposite stories but with exactly the same narrative structure.

When neoliberalism collapsed spectacularly in 2008, its opponents came forward with nothing, with no new narrative to fit that structure. And so we're stuck. Because we're stuck, all these monsters, these demagogues, came in and filled the gap, the narrative gap which we had left, giving rise to people like Trump and Bolsonaro and Johnson and Duterte and Erdoğan and Orbán. All over the world, similar people came to power because there was political failure in their country. There was universal, catastrophic political failure because we had generated no new narrative. If we want to get out of that era—and hopefully we might be beginning to, fingers crossed—if we're going to lock in change and start to progress toward a different place, then we desperately need new narratives.

Yes, of course people are going to feel worried by what I'm talking about. They are thinking, "Well, I spent my whole life trying to grab my share so that I can gain some security against the extreme insecurity that so many people, the great majority of people in the world, feel and face." We're in a situation of growing precariousness. In environmental terms, precariousness has been rising. In economic terms, where we see great inequality, a small number of extremely rich haves and a growing number of have-nots will find themselves insecure in all sorts of ways.

They might not have health insurance, they might not have an economic safety net, and they might not have a firm job because jobs all over the world have been replaced with contracts, replaced with the gig economy, replaced with zero-hour work, which means you don't know from one hour to the next whether you're still going to have work.

What I would say is that this system in which we seek our own security and in which we've been promised we will find security, this system we call capitalism, has failed. We haven't found security through it, we've found precariousness. Only a few people have found sufficient security so that they can secure themselves against everything undesirable. Indeed, they've been buying security condos for when everything breaks up. If there is a total social collapse, they can stay in their security condos with their armed guards and all their tinned goods and everything else they need, while everybody else is fighting it out on the toxic wasteland. Or you see billionaires buying great tracts of land in New Zealand or trying to build artificial islands in the middle of the ocean to make themselves secure.

Yet even they feel insecure. You'd say these are the people who've achieved security through capitalism, but actually they are so insecure that they're having to try to find their way out, buy their way out in case everything goes horribly wrong, as we know it will if we don't change course.

What I would say to people is: Look, this dream of buying yourself security, achieving security through private luxury, through private wealth, is a bubble that has popped. You can try to cling to it, but there's really nothing left to cling to. So let's look for a way of achieving security for

all of us together, where your security does not depend on depriving me of my security, where we achieve a common security based around the commons.

Greg Watson: Thank you, George. I appreciate what you've said. And may I follow up with a question about something that intrigues me: the allotment program in the UK. Long before I was Commissioner of Agriculture, I was an organizer for community gardens and for a group called the Boston Urban Gardeners. The closest similarity I can see to what's happening in the UK with the allotment program is our community gardening effort here in the US, the big difference being that the government has taken the lead in the UK—both, it seems to me, in identifying and then allocating land. In the US—or at least in Boston, where I worked—community gardens were part of the struggle led by organizers, not by the state, for all incoming new communities. I will say that this was a very empowering process, at least for a good part of those who were the organizing community. They got to know how government works. They got to know how to make government work for them. So that was a benefit; nonetheless it was still a struggle.

You mentioned and described the UK allotment program as equitable and democratic. Does this mean that anyone who would like to have a garden in the UK can get one? Are there costs involved? Could you give me a little more of a sense of just how the allotment program works?

Thank you, Greg. Again I'm grateful to you for asking that and for making the important comparison with

community gardens. Our allotment program also arose out of struggle here. When our land was grabbed by a few big landlords in this country, it wasn't done quietly and it wasn't done smoothly. There was a massive series of revolts and riots around the country. There were the Swing Riots, there were a whole load of rick burnings and people pulling down fences and trying desperately to get their land back because their land was their livelihood. Partly as a result of that, almost as a sop, the government said, Okay, you can have some land back; we're going to let you have land. And so in the 1880s the government started giving little bits of land back in the form of allotments. Then, in 1908 there was the Allotments Act, which basically said that all local government, local authorities, have a duty to provide land for gardening to anyone who wants it. Anyone who wants to grow vegetables or fruit should be allowed to have a plot of land. From that point on, it became a legal duty. Unfortunately, what wasn't specified was how long you had to wait to get that land. As a result, what we find in many communities is that there are allotments but not nearly enough. In some places there's a 20-year waiting list.

A group of us has been pushing for a change in that 1908 Allotments Act to ensure that the waiting period can be no longer than one year so that allotments actually make sense of that idea of a universal right to a plot. It's not as if the struggle is over. It would definitely be helped by the fact that for once we've got the law on our side in this case: we've all got the right to a plot, which is sized in theory so that you at least get a big enough plot to grow all the vegetables your family will need. That's the idea if you garden it intensively. Getting that law on our side

helps a lot, but it's still a struggle, partly because there's not enough land allocated in the first place and partly due to constant pressure on that land because Councils are saying: "Well, we're very short of funds. If we sold off the allotments to a developer, we'd make lots of money." But if an allotment is properly occupied, a Council is not allowed to sell it off as long as the demand is there, and from time to time the demand drops. There was a drop in the 1980s and 1990s.

There will be some generations who are much keener on gardening than others. Members of the old wartime generation who were digging for victory had died off, and some of the Windrush generation—people arriving in the UK between 1948 and 1971, particularly Caribbean immigrants—who were keen on gardening were getting old as well, and so there were fewer people using the allotments.

It wasn't until the late 1990s that suddenly there was a great resurgence of interest in gardening, and by then many of the allotments had been sold off. A lot of people fought to protect them, but Councils said, "Well, the Act says we have a duty to provide land only if the demand for that land is there."

This takes us back to intergenerational justice. What they were effectively saying was, "Right at this minute the demand for land isn't there; therefore, under the Act we can sell off the land." And what we were saying was, "But it can take 10 years until the next generation of gardeners might want it, so you're effectively stealing that land from them. It's intergenerational theft." And that's exactly what turns out to be true.

Greg: Thank you for your clarification. I know there are a lot of questions people have, but I want to make one last point, that the place where the state, at least Massachusetts, has intervened constructively is in its support for commercial farming within the city, for urban agriculture as distinguished from backyard and community gardens. I think some strong statements have been made. Perhaps one of the most important things that has been done in the city of Boston and I think Somerville, in the greater Boston area, is rezoning in order to allow commercial farming within city limits. As you know, zoning is like a myth that says it's allowable. Without zoning, it's not an allowable activity. I think we are seeing a growing consciousness and understanding of the importance of making land available, particularly in order for people to be able to meet basic needs such as food. That is critical. So I really appreciate your comments and your efforts in that regard. And thanks for explaining the allotment program. Maybe we can get that going here as well.

George: I just realized that I didn't answer one part of your question, which was what amount we pay for the plots of land. I'm sorry, I forgot that bit. In the association I'm a member of, it's £25 a year for the plot. In other words, about \$30. That money pays for the allotment association—for the commons—to function because there are certain requirements such as maintaining its shed and sending out its newsletters. It's small change, and of course that means a plot is effectively accessible to everyone. Almost everyone can afford £25.

Jodie: Thank you for a great conversation. I saw you both with fingers crossed. I don't think fingers crossed gets us there, and so I want to ask a question that our fearless leader at Schumacher, Susan Witt, asked. Could you tell us about your Land for the Many report, and how we can access it? Because it isn't fingers crossed that's going to get us there, it's plans, it's what's happening today. Everybody is stuck in an old way of thinking; we need to have new breadcrumbs out.

George: Thank you. I guess from the point of view of everyone else in the world, the US election is a matter of fingers crossed. You shouldn't have mentioned it because it affects us so strongly.

Jodie: Yes, but there are a lot of people out working in the street very, very hard.

George: Of course, and absolutely yes. Nothing good ever happens by itself. Good things happen because people are active and people remain active. In fact, if you go to a neighborhood and it's a great neighborhood to live in, a neighborhood *you* would want to live in, that is because people have fought for it, people have struggled to make it a good place. You can sense that almost immediately. Good people have expended their energy to make sure this is a good, equitable, fair, pleasant place to live. We produced a report here in the UK called "Land for the Many" for the Labour Party, which sadly did not win the last election. The report is free online. You can find it at our website, which is also called "Land for the Many," and download

it there. Our report was trying to bring back the issue of land into British politics, where it hasn't been featured for about 80 or 90 years. The last time it showed its face in a significant way in this country was in 1911. Maybe a little bit in 1947, but now land is off the agenda. This is quite amazing because nothing can happen without it. Land is the most fundamental thing.

We can't float around in the air. Our wealth is rooted in the land, our lives are literally rooted in it. But it's so big, it's so important that you can't even name it without instantly being called a communist and all sorts of other names because, of course, people who own the land and large tracts of it rightly feel profoundly threatened by anyone calling for land reform, which is what we found when we published our report. It took us a year of work. I was the editor, but there were six experts in different areas working on it. They were the top people in the country, an amazing team. I can say without boasting—because they did most of the work—that it is a brilliant report. We did a great job on it. It's balanced, it's subtle, it's nuanced. We didn't just go in and say, "Right, we want everyone's land." We worked through all the arguments very carefully. There's a lot of complex stuff in it, complex economics, everything very well thought through.

We needn't have bothered because the billionaire press in this country completely made up what was in the report. They said, "Those communists are going to steal your garden." This appeared right across the billionaire papers. Every single one of them basically said, "They're going to grab your land and they're going to socialize it; they're going to steal your land, and they're going to throw

you off.” They used this language to beat up the Labour Party, as they always do. But none of it was in our report. We’re not saying any of those things. We are talking about totally different mechanisms for really asserting democratic control of the land.

I knew that this was a sort of trigger issue. That’s why we don’t talk about it, because it is at the root of power, at the heart of power, in this country and all over the world. Who owns the land and what are they allowed to do on that land are questions right at the heart of power. If you touch that heart, boy, that causes an explosion, and people go absolutely berserk. However cleverly you do it, and however thought-through and nuanced and well researched and well referenced and well written your report might be, it doesn’t make a damn bit of difference. It’s just the sort of ferocious frightened reaction that you get from the big landowners and the billionaire press that supports them. They throw every kind of insult and accusation at you, which made me realize what it must be like to be a Labour politician, because they get this all the time. We proved that land is the important issue, because if it wasn’t, they wouldn’t be saying what they are.

Jodie: Greg, do you want to ask a fresh question?

Greg: I’m going to ask a couple of questions that are fairly similar. Is there a distinction in your view between personal property and private property? Is there any room for individual ownership? And similarly, does the shift toward common ownership of land necessitate a shift away from familial connection to land?

George: Both excellent questions and really worth exploring. Nothing that we've been doing in this report or elsewhere is saying, "Look, we want to take from you the land that your ordinary house and your small garden sit on." That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about big owners either in cities or in the countryside who have a huge and disproportionate share of our natural wealth and use that wealth to further enrich themselves, to rack rent from other people, not through any enterprise of theirs but just because they've got it and we haven't, and they can charge us fees for the use of it. Unless we seriously address those fundamental unfairnesses, then we really have little chance of progressing, little chance of addressing our environmental crisis, our social crisis, our economic crisis. We're going to remain stuck. So we have to raise these inflammatory questions and propose, however gentle and careful we are, answers that are by their very nature inflammatory. I've forgotten the second question, sorry. What was the second one?

Greg: Pretty much the same. I think you've answered both of them with that response.

Jodie: A question we have received is, What do you mean by common-ground trusts? How are they organized?

George: Many thanks for raising that too. I'm delighted that the questioner must have read our report. This is a proposal put forward by Beth Stratford, who was one of our team. She points out that there are a couple of issues missing in most of the discussion about how to change land

relationships. One of them is how to start acquiring land for low-cost housing when land within the city envelope is already almost entirely acquired for higher-cost housing, for example. But the other one is, if everybody is going to have a decent home, we must start trying to take the heat out of land markets and housing markets. I don't know what it's like where you live, but here in the UK it's almost impossible now for young families to get on the housing ladder, even for people with average incomes. Just 20 years ago, to get the deposit for a mortgage, you needed to save on average for three years; now it takes 19 years just to lay down a 10% deposit for a mortgage because house prices have become so high. Somehow we need to take the heat out of that, but at the same time there needs to be effective demand to make sure we don't trigger a total collapse in house prices, which would trigger total economic collapse.

Beth has attempted to solve both problems with her proposal for a common-ground trust, which effectively says: If you want to buy a home but can't afford it by yourself, then we, the Common Ground Trust, which is a national agency that she proposes to set up, will buy the land portion, which in this country is approximately 70% of the cost of a house, and you will buy the bricks and mortar portion, and you will, at low cost, rent the land from the Common Ground Trust while owning the bricks and mortar that are on top of it. Eventually a bank of land will be built up. So the Common Ground Trust creates effective demand because it ensures that people are able to continue to buy homes much more successfully than before, and it also begins to build up a land bank, which it can then start to use strategically to ensure that housing is used for those

who need it most, rather than just being bought by someone who's already got a house and wants a second one, for example. This potentially leads to all sorts of other subtle effects—such as allowing the Common Ground Trust to set up a rainy-day fund. Then, if someone gets into trouble because of having to pay the mortgage, the Trust can help to tide that person over. If someone can't afford even the cost of the bricks and mortar, it can help to provide an extra bit of assistance in getting onto the housing ladder in the first place. So the Common Ground Trust has potential. It's not perfect; we came up with a few things that could go wrong with it, and perhaps it was the most exploratory of the ideas that we put in the report, but I definitely think it's worth taking further, commissioning more research on it, to see if it could be an important part of the solution. How do you get people to realize that the old way has failed and to accept that a new way might need some tweaking? I think the move from failure to the desire for perfection becomes an issue. People don't even want to walk across the bridge to a new possibility.

Greg: What do you think gets in the way there?

George: One, people are afraid of change. Change *is* scary, but to me it's much scarier carrying on as we are. Even if you were to ignore everything else and just consider the gathering environmental crisis, the collapse of our life support systems: that's what we see happening in real time. To carry on as we are is to carry on over the cliff. That's what real fear is about, as far as I'm concerned. But it's also frightening to see more and more people marginalized

and excluded. That is genuinely frightening, and it's happening right now. When you propose something different and something unfamiliar to people, you're asking them to expend mental effort to get their heads around what you're saying. It doesn't matter what the topic is. And many people don't want to go there because it's a bit like saying you've got to sprint 100 meters; the mental effort is quite similar, actually, in terms of the way the body perceives the physical effort you would have to make in order to do that. And so it's perceived as pain. This person is inflicting pain on me. Regardless of what the message is, the very fact that you're coming up with something that's completely different and completely new requires mental effort, which is perceived as an infliction of pain. Therefore, this person is my enemy and is trying to repress me. So often, that is the sequence I see playing out. When I introduce new ideas, suddenly I get all sorts of wild accusations. Oh my God, am I really a devil worshiper who wants to kill the first born? I don't remember reading that in my report, but that's how people perceive it because we are asking for that mental effort.

That's the first barrier before you even get to the substance of what you're trying to convey. And then you've got the barrier of the "temporarily embarrassed millionaires" situation. We all think we're going to make it. Right? Somewhere in the back of people's minds is the belief that one day they'll win the lottery or they'll be digging in their garden and will find a crock of gold. Something will change, and suddenly they'll go from being a marginalized, excluded person to being a rich person. Then they'll want all the stuff that the millionaires have and will be able to get it. That's the dream, but it's everyone else's dream

as well. Perhaps it's more extreme in the US, where it actually has a name, the American dream, the dream that everyone is going to make it. Everyone is *not* going to make the American dream because it is physically impossible for everyone to make it. That's the fundamental lie at the heart of capitalism, and it is why people buy into capitalism, because they think they *are* going to make it alongside those who have already made it. It's just not going to happen for the great majority of people. Almost the most radical thing we need to change is the belief that we can all acquire private luxury. We cannot, it's simply impossible. I think when people have recognized this and see that the system is not going to deliver for them, then we can start asking the question, What system is going to deliver better?

Jodie: Thank you, George. Greg, do you have another question you wanted to ask?

Greg: Yes, I do. I'm intrigued by the concept of the 15-minute city, which raises some questions for me as an organizer with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, an organization that was able to turn conventional planning on its head by using the community-land-trust model as the centerpiece of its revitalization strategy. But here's the thing: we understood from experience that we could direct housing, that we could plan housing, but the community was involved and could say, "This is the kind of housing we want" or "This is where it's going to be." When we got to the challenge of trying to then put in place an economic development strategy, it obviously wasn't

nearly as easy. We can't dictate what types of commercial or private companies or businesses will come into our community. I have a dear friend who doesn't like the term food desert; she calls it food apartheid because deserts are a natural phenomenon. But this is not a natural phenomenon, it's a conscious effort.

I'm wondering what work anyone has done to try to capture the critical elements of the phrase "to make a 15-minute city work." I'm sure it varies. And maybe the question I'm asking is about the process you would use to determine what the key entities, businesses, institutions are? What's the mix that would define a 15-minute city and make people pretty comfortable because they can navigate it and meet most of their needs? Do you have examples or even just a sense of how that could be done?

George: Well, I think Jodie got it right, because this is a question I should be asking you. There's a fantastic example here in the UK, and I'm sure you know of plenty in the US. In Liverpool, Granby is an area of the city that was totally derelict, with all the houses boarded up. The last time I went there before it was transformed, weeds growing out of the paving came up to your waist. I was told no one cared. Everyone just wrote it off. It became completely neglected. Then local people led by a couple of inspirational women, amazing local people, said, "We're not going to put up with this any longer," and they came up with some really interesting plans, which I would misrepresent if I tried to summarize them here. But you can check them out. Houses in Granby were reoccupied. Basically, people said, "Let's do these houses up so people can live in them

and hardly have to pay.” Gradually they built a thriving community, which attracted businesses. Then the street markets were revitalized, with small businesses coming in. They will come if there is an element of building going on, which I’m sure you have seen in your work. What we find is that when a community is weak and unloved and people have very little voice, then you get the betting shops, you get a few fast-food joints, and you get nothing else. But when love is there and people are able to articulate their needs and actually create the physical environment, that actually says to a trader, “Oh, this is going to be a nice place for me to live, and so I want to put my feet down here,” because traders have souls too. In addition, there’s a community of people who might want what I have to sell. Then at least an opportunity is there which might not have been there before. I know I’m telling you something you know so much better than I do.

Greg: I just wanted some affirmation coming from you. But I will say this: one of the exercises we did at Dudley Street—interestingly enough, thanks to the Schumacher Center, which at that time was the E. F. Schumacher Society—was to explore what potential we had for creating a local currency. Then, after trying to figure out whether a local currency would work, we started saying, “Well, you need an ecosystem of businesses and institutions,” which is not going to work, though, if people can’t use it and sell with it and buy what they need. It really became a catalyst for us to say, “Here is a process or an activity that was fun and non-intimidating.” Subsequently, we talked about the critical elements that needed to be in place. So

yes, there are some examples. And I think that it is an exciting concept. I'm sure that in terms of demographics, you can account for aging populations and how it could still be a 15-minute concept. Thank you for mentioning the Granby revitalization; I hadn't heard of it, so I appreciate your reference to it.

Jodie: Greg, I wonder if you and George could also talk about the Common Ground Trust and the US community land trust. What are the similarities or differences, and what could one learn from the other?

Greg: Well, that's definitely George's bailiwick.

George: I would say that the similarities are stronger over here with the idea of a Community Land Trust. At the moment, we have housing co-ops, we have community housing groups. What we're trying to introduce more and more is the element of community land trust, where a community acquires the land and has rights over that land, and those rights are shared among the members of the community. Interestingly, in Scotland—which is going in a very different direction from England and probably will leave the United Kingdom before long in order to rejoin the European Union in its own right—we've seen significant land reform. One of those reforms is the community right to buy. The government of Scotland has said that if land comes up for sale, the community has the right of first refusal on that land, the right to decide whether or not it wants to buy that land before anyone else can come in and bid.

Now, the weakness of this is that the land is expensive and the communities tend to be poor, so one of the things we call for in our report is a community land fund, to make it much easier for people to buy that land. In fact, we identified some pots of money which already exist and could be used for that purpose. We'd also like to see a much wider right of communities, specifically to buy vacant and derelict land that isn't for sale. That would mean the use of compulsory sales orders. When you live in a community, and every day you walk past some hoardings — temporary board fences around a building site — with an empty space behind them that hasn't been used for 10 or 20 years and is a blight on your community, you make various plans for what you'd like to do with it, but you're powerless. There's nothing you can do. You know it could completely transform your whole neighborhood by turning it into a community garden or a community housing co-op or a playground or a park, whatever it might be, but you can't do anything.

I think when land has been left vacant and derelict for a certain amount of time, the community should have the right to buy it through a compulsory sales order or purchase order, depending on what you want to call it, and set up a community land trust to manage that land. What we're trying to do here is to introduce the notion of a community's right to buy to other nations of the United Kingdom: England, Wales, and Northern Ireland but also to extend this to the concept of, one, providing funding to make it a reality, and two, allowing people to buy land which isn't currently for sale.

Greg: That is perfect because the Dudley Street

Neighborhood Initiative, to use it as an example, was a low-income community that was burned to the ground as arson for profit. It was derelict, vacant, abandoned land. Conditions were so desperate that the residents were able to convince the mayor of Boston to grant the community the power of eminent domain over all abandoned, vacant land. This proved to be successful in terms of new homes built. We had impressive results, but the problem was that in order to realize them we had to use extraordinary means, which was the use of the power of eminent domain: the community's right to buy — not a replicable model. It was a positive example of what happens if you do grant this power and then use the community land trust model — which, by the way, was the vehicle that also allowed the community to avoid one of its worst fears, that the community was going to be gentrified with the result that some people would be displaced. Thus, gentrification and displacement seemed to be a coupled-together phenomenon that couldn't be broken apart, but the community said, "We can do this because we can impose limits. And we can actually lower the value that makes it attractive for speculators to come in and buy." But a conscious decision had to be made, right? There was a value proposition on the part of a poor community because this was their source of wealth. They put the community's wealth and well-being ahead of that of the individual. An owner could have said, "No, I'm going to sell, even if it's to a more affluent buyer." The value proposition was critical, and it worked. I do think that if we can take some of the concepts that have been developed elsewhere and use them as ways of replicating, that's very powerful.

George: Brilliant. That's such a great example, and I would love to read more about that. Thank you.

Greg: You will.

I think a lot about what you've been saying in this sharing of stories. We need examples. When you can give an example, then we don't have fear. It doesn't feel as though we're going to have to lift 5,000 pounds; it actually looks beautiful, and we can walk across that bridge. One of the things that we were working on with Sallie Calhoun, who was also one of last year's Schumacher lecturers, was having people with wealth who have too much land give part of their land to communities. The interesting way was to bring everyone together and say, "What are you going to do with your land?" They answered in the mode of capitalism: "Oh well, I've got to do this and do that, and I have to get a return on my investment." And then we introduced the idea of giving some to the community. We brought up examples of where that had happened. Their response was, "Wow, that sounds way better than having money in the bank. It sounds real and enriching and nourishing." So now someone has given a plantation to Blackfarmers, which brings up the question of what role racism and sexism play in land ownership. What place do we see for reparations in these new forms of common ownership?

George: I'm glad to hear about that. I'm always slightly wary of philanthropy as a sort of substitute for rights, a substitute for justice. It's great to see philanthropy like that in action. But I want rich people to pay their taxes so that we can decide how the money is used. What we often

find is that what philanthropy does is to focus on certain issues which are of interest to the very rich people but which might not be what the community needs. It might not be what the excluded people need. They might be the wrong issues; in fact, very often they *are* the wrong issues.

And why are people so phenomenally rich that they can make these decisions? They can decide what is given and what is not given and how things should develop. Basically, it's because they are not being taxed enough. Given that these are finite resources we're looking at and that this is a finite world with finite resources, we should be taxing people a lot more for the use of those resources. I want more of that money to go to the community, rather than all of it being centralized. Some of it obviously needs to be spent centrally by the state, but we need a lot more of that money going to the community, thus enabling the community to use the money to make its own decisions. I think that's really fundamental. Now I've forgotten the actual question you asked. Sorry.

Jodie: But that was excellent, thank you so much. What role have racism and sexism played in land ownership, and what role do you see reparations playing?

George: I'm so sorry, I got off the track. Regarding this thing we call capitalism, we say, well, it's about buying and selling, isn't it? It's about trading stuff. Actually, when you look at how people got rich, when you look at how nations got rich, it was not through buying and selling stuff, it was not through trading stuff, it was through grabbing stuff, stealing stuff, stealing human beings. Africans

stolen from their land, put on ships and transported to the Caribbean and to the Americas. It was theft. It was also their land stolen. It was their resources stolen. Whether it was the timber or the ivory or the gold or the silver, whatever it was, those resources were stolen. If you look at India, the British stole \$45 trillion from India at today's values. When the British moved in, India was one of the richest nations on earth; when we moved out, we left it as one of the poorest nations on earth because we had looted so much. It was simply theft. Some people say, "Well yes, but we paid for those goods." We did pay for those goods but out of the taxes we imposed on the people of India. The British imposed a tax that Indians had to pay, even very poor Indians, and then the British used a small proportion of that tax to buy some of the goods from the Indians. It's like saying, "I got to pick your pocket, and then I took \$10 out of your wallet, and say, can I buy a watch please?" So you end up with \$90 out of the \$100, plus the watch. None of that was yours before you picked someone's pocket, so it's straightforward theft. Then the British used that money to fund their other colonial adventures, sending gunships to other countries to grab their land and labor and resources. That is the story of colonialism worldwide. It has happened again and again. And that's the basis of the great wealth which nations acquired. It's the basis of what we call capitalism. That's where the money originally came from. And now it's done by similar means, with the IMF and the World Bank saying, "Right, this international debt business means that you've got to open your economy to foreign investors." It sounds neutral and benign, doesn't it? But the reality is that those so-called investors can

move in and grab resources in a way very similar to how it happened in colonial times. And among those resources is land. There's land-grabbing happening all over the place. Basically, the net effect of this is to steal resources from poor brown people and from women. Women, because in many parts of the world it's women who are the main agriculturalists, women who are the foundation of the core economy. So it's stealing women's resources, stealing the resources of people of color, and concentrating them in the hands of wealthy white men. That's fundamentally what has happened over the course of the past 300 or 400 years. By addressing the issue of land, you start opening up every other issue as well. You start opening up the issue of racism, of sexism, of marginalization and exclusion, of distribution. That's why people get so angry and so defensive when you even mention land as a political subject.

Greg: Yes, absolutely. My family — my grandmother, my mother — were part of the Great Migration in this country from Tennessee to Ohio. When I asked why Ohio?, they said it was because there were trains and buses available. They were in Tennessee, and they said, "Where in the North do we go?" They didn't have a car, and we had one relative who had settled in Columbia, Ohio, working for the railroad. So the family followed there. But of course they faced all sorts of discrimination, including disinvestment and redlining, being funneled into particular communities. Then my father, who served in World War II, comes back from the war, and there's something called the GI Bill. Guess what? Not available to everybody. If you were Black, you probably could not benefit from the GI Bill. My grandfa-

ther worked at a bank and my grandmother worked as a housekeeper at Statler Hilton. She was Big Mama. And she got the money, she bought the house. I know this because we had a conversation about it. She never, ever missed a day of work. And because there was a fear that if you fell behind on just one payment, you could lose your home because these mortgages were so extortionate. The last part of the scenario that was played over and over again — you can see it in Detroit, you can see it in Cleveland and other cities — is that the Black communities gradually faced disinvestment. Here's my grandmother coming up from the South, trying to start to build wealth; the first thing to do is buy a home, which is how you start to build your wealth. We still have the house, and my half sister lives there. But I checked the value. The value of her investment, building wealth, is \$19,000 after going through all that blood, sweat, and tears. It repeats itself in Detroit, and you can go to Chicago, where you see the same scenario playing itself out. The Cleveland neighborhood where I grew up suffered the fate of physical deterioration and a drastic devaluation of homes. If there had been a Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative — unable to guarantee anyone's individual wealth but focusing on community wealth — more could have been done to preserve the community and try to ensure that this sort of injustice didn't happen.

Jodie: This has been a great conversation, but I think we need to bring it to a close. Greg, I want to start with you. We've talked about a lot of things. Let's leave this audience with some inspiration. What can we put our fingers on?

Greg: I'm going to say that I am an optimist, despite what's going on in 2020, a year we all want to forget. As for me, optimism stems from knowing that we have options. It doesn't guarantee that those options are going to be exercised. Faced with what we're facing today, if someone were to say that the only toolkit you have is the same old stuff and that's all you've got, then I'd be depressed. But I've seen firsthand—and this was for me an important message—a community that was able to self-govern. By the way, at Dudley Street a form of self-governance was set up. I loved it when George was describing a project, he was careful to say that he wasn't talking about boundaries. He talked about how the community determined the area it wanted to govern. Dudley Street did the same thing. The people who live there do not provide an official census tract or an official kit; they just determined that this was their community. They made a decision about who they were. It is a community that everyone expected to be multicultural: Latino, African-American, white, Cape Verdean, but it could come together and, with the dominant narrative, turn a lot of professional and conventional wisdom on its head and take control. The key was that they were able to get control of the land. That gave them the courage and the ability to change the narrative. I think we all need to do that, and we have the ability to do that. I'm feeling very inspired by all this, and particularly by George's presentation.

George: Thank you so much, Greg. I really enjoyed and appreciated our conversation. What I want to leave people with is this, though: it's a fallacy of every generation that we are stuck where we are, that nothing can be done to change

the system, the system is as it is. People once believed that about the divine right of kings, as author Ursula Le Guin pointed out. They thought it was never going to change because it's written in the stars; it is a divine right, kings achieve their monarchical position from God, nothing can change that. People genuinely believed that this was immutable, unchangeable: the king has total power over your life. People believed it about colonialism as well, saying that conquerors came and colonized this nation, and we'll never overthrow them because they are so much more powerful than we are; they've got the money, they've got the guns, so what can we do? It's just impossible. People believed that. Some people believed it about apartheid; we will never get justice in South Africa because it's simply too difficult when the forces we're up against are so powerful. People believed it about democracy; 150 years ago, democracy was a dirty word in most parts of the world. The idea that everyone should have a vote was seen as a disgraceful and terrible idea. And it seemed impossible. How is everyone going to get the vote when all the forces are arrayed against us? Then suddenly, things change. You get these tipping points. Biologists call it hysteresis; it's a flip from a once stable system to a different stable system. During the course of the previous stable system, it looked impossible, hopeless, you couldn't get anywhere with it. You just can't do anything when all the forces are arrayed against you. Then suddenly—and it can happen with enormous speed—in the course of weeks or months the situation changes, and it flips from one system to another. Our role, our duty, is to be prepared, is to be ready, and we can be ready for years and years. As the years pass,

we think: “Oh, I’ve been ready all this time, and nothing has changed. Nothing has changed.” But then the moment comes, and we step into that moment. We bring with us all the work we’ve been doing during the apparently hopeless times, all the preparations we’ve been making, all the stories we’ve been telling, all the ideas we’ve been forming, all the examples we’ve been living. We say: “This is a new story. Its time has come. Now let’s do it.” And we can do it. We’ve seen this happen again and again throughout history when suddenly that moment arrives and what was impossible before becomes inexorable now. This is a moment of great volatility. These are fissiparous times when things which were previously set in stone suddenly are labile once more. Our duty now is to develop new stories, develop a narrative.

I’m so glad and grateful that Greg brought up this issue of narrative at the beginning, because it’s absolutely crucial. It’s time to develop the brilliant new examples of the kind that Greg himself has been developing, which are so powerful because they are lived examples. That is how life can be improved, by developing the arguments, developing the networks, developing the organizations, developing the mobilization, the agitation to learn, to spread, to teach the ideas, to love each other in doing so—because that’s absolutely fundamental. We’re not going to do this through anger and hatred; we’re going to do it through love, and we’re going to spread that love, but we’re going to spread it by means of ideas and knowledge and wisdom. It’s not just love and it’s not just knowledge; it’s got to be both coming together. So we learn, we organize, we agitate, we develop the ideas, and we hold on to the results. We’re

resilient, we're strong. We don't give up, however many setbacks we have, and suddenly that moment we've been waiting for is ready to come. Given the incredible shift over the past few months, I suspect such a moment is just around the corner.

Thank you.

Jodie: Oh, thank *you*. That is the vision we needed. Thank you, George Monbiot, and thank you, Greg Watson. And thank you to those who have been listening to this 40th Annual Schumacher Lecture and for all the questions that have arisen from it. To learn more about the Schumacher Center for a New Economics, go to centerforneweconomics.org. While you're there, please notice that at the top on the right, there's a donate button. Feel free to be generous and pay forward today so that we can have more free events like this. The mission of the Schumacher Center is to envision a just and regenerative global economy, to apply those concepts locally, and then to share the results for broader replication. We hope you will follow us on Twitter at [Center4newecon](https://twitter.com/Center4newecon) and will make choices with your lives to create conditions conducive for life. Thank you. Bye.

George Monbiot is an author, *Guardian* columnist, and environmental campaigner, renowned for his environmental and political activism.

George co-wrote the concept album *Breaking the Spell of Loneliness* with musician Ewan McLennan and has made a number of viral videos, one of them adapted from his 2013 TED talk, “How Wolves Change Rivers.”

In 1995 he received the United Nations Global 500 Award. He has been viewed on YouTube over 40 million times. “Natural Climate Solutions,” which he co-presented with Greta Thunberg, has been watched over 50 million times.

His best-selling books include *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain* (2000); *Heat: How to Stop the Planet Burning* (2006); *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea, and Human Life* (2013); and *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis* (2017).

Schumacher Center for a New Economics

Annual Lectures by

John Abrams	Jane Jacobs	David W. Orr
Gar Alperovitz	Van Jones	Leah Penniman
Donald L. Anderson	Andrew Kimbrell	Will Raap
Benjamin R. Barber	Leopold Kohr	Kirkpatrick Sale
Dan Barber	David C. Korten	Allan Savory
Peter Barnes	Winona LaDuke	William A. Schambra
Thomas Berry	Anna Lappé	Otto Scharmer
Wendell Berry	Frances Moore Lappé	Juliet B. Schor
Elise M. Boulding	Thomas Linzey	Michael H. Shuman
David R. Brower	Amory B. Lovins	Bren Smith
Christopher H. Budd	Kevin Lyons	Cathrine Sneed
Sallie Calhoun	Oren Lyons	James Gustave Speth
Majora Carter	Jerry Mander	Charlene Spretnak
Marie Cirillo	John McClaughry	Matt Stinchcomb
George D. Davis	Bill McKibben	Robert Swann
David Ehrenfeld	John L. McKnight	John Todd
William Ellis	George McRobie	Nancy Jack Todd
Chellis Glendinning	Deborah Meier	Charles Turner
Neva Goodwin	Stephanie Mills	Jakob von Uexkull
Hunter G. Hannum	Stacy Mitchell	Stewart Wallis
Alanna Hartzok	John Mohawk	Greg Watson
Richard Heinberg	George Monbiot	Ed Whitfield
Hazel Henderson	Sally Fallon Morell	Judy Wicks
Ivan Illich	David Morris	Susan Witt
Dana Lee Jackson	Helena Norberg-Hodge	Caroline Woolard
Wes Jackson		Arthur Zajonc

Pamphlets are \$5 each from the

Schumacher Center for a New Economics

140 Jug End Road, Great Barrington, MA 01230

www.centerforneweconomics.org

The publication list will be sent on request or can be viewed online.

The book *People, Land, and Community*, edited by Hildegard

Hannum and published by the Yale University Press in 1997,

contains many of the Annual E. F. Schumacher Lectures

and is available to purchase from the

Schumacher Center for a New Economics.

“From the point of view of Buddhist economics, therefore, production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life, while dependence on imports from afar and the consequent need to produce for export to unknown and distant peoples is highly uneconomic and justifiable only in exceptional cases and on a small scale.”

– E. F. Schumacher, “Buddhist Economics”

The pursuit of a new economics has broad implications. Our Earth is in crisis; our communities are in crisis. We are all charged with creating solutions. These solutions will of necessity be citizen driven, growing from the rich soil of particular places and requiring a collaboration of individuals, businesses, elected officials, and non-profit organizations. The pursuit will involve social, cultural, and environmental as well as economic transformation. The sign of success will be the renewal of local communities and local economies around the world.

Founded in 1980 the Schumacher Center for a New Economics has a three-part strategy for promoting a new, just, and regenerative economy: first by envisioning an economics based on universal principles of cooperation as well as respect for the Earth and for one another; then applying these concepts in our home region of the Berkshires in western Massachusetts as a testing ground; and finally developing the educational programs to share the results more broadly and encourage replication.



**SCHUMACHER
CENTER**
for a new economics

140 Jug End Road, Great Barrington, MA 01230 USA

www.centerforneweconomics.org