A PacificEdge paper

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PERMACULTURE

A manifesto for a culture of permanence

A PacificEdge paper

WE, HUMANITY, have become the transformers of the Earth in what is an unintentional, global terraforming project that started when our distant ancestors learned how to transform landscapes through the use of fire.

Our transformation of the Earth is a tradition that spans the great gulf of time from those days, through the agricultural revolution, the rise and fall of civilisations, the feudal age, the age of exploration, into the industrial age and on to modern times. Though still subject to nature's laws and with our efforts dwarfed by natures' changes and events, our persistence has made us the shapers of the world.

Everywhere we find the mark of human presence. But our impact has been as inadvertent as it has been evolutionary. It is not the result of planning but of slow accretion and spread. Its extent is revealed from the air where we see the scale of our agriculture dominating landscapes horizon to horizon... it is revealed in the night images from the International Space Station that show huge clusters of brightly illuminated cities and towns covering the terrestrial surface, shining back at the stars that once shone so brightly upon the Earth.

Rather than feel overwhelmed and powerless by the scale of

PERMACULTURE'S journey...

FIRST described in the book, Permaculture One in 1978, permaculture was an idea that captured the imagination of society's innovative edge.

The design system went on from those early adopters to grow in popularity and in the diversity of its applications.

Today, it offers constructive approaches for people working to improve their own lives and those of the communities that surround them.

Anyone can practice permaculture — you can start now, where you are. All it takes is thinking and acting that work towards its ethics of improving the wellbeing of people and natural systems and of doing this by sharing and collaborating.

the human enterprise, we have the capacity to see solutions to our challenges, to grasp our unasked-for role of global terraformer... and learn to do it properly. This we have no choice in doing for we cannot now return to a time when our influence on the Earth was less... we must work with what we have and where we are in human history.

Tired of waiting for government and corporations to set a positive course to a humane, secure future of opportunity and modest prosperity for all, individuals, community-based organisations and some businesses are taking the lead to create that future for themselves.

The disconnect of big organisations

There is today a disconnect, a discontinuity, between the actions of government, institutions and corporations and the ability of many people to secure their simple life needs, and of our needs for a continuing, creative presence on the Earth.

Government is expected to make policy and take initiatives in the interest of all, but this once-respected institution seems to lurch first one way then another as if to demonstrate its confusion and tardiness in taking action towards a better future, a common future of modest prosperity... a common future of true progress.

There is today a pervasive uncertainty about the future, even a fear of it...

All too often government and institutions retreat into the divisive polarisation of ideologies the product of past times, ideologies that are now so tired that their usefulness has expired. They are caught in the gridlock of old and worn ideas. We had great expectations of government but it now seems to do less at a time when we would want it to do more to move societies forward.

Baffled and confused by the dynamics and complexity of global changes they neither comprehend nor control, governments and corporations have faltered as leaders and are increasingly drained of their remaining credibility.

Seeking political leadership we find ineptitude, misinformation and inveigle. We find tired political parties that have sold out their former selves to such an extent that is becomes difficult to distinguish one from another. Short term thinking by short term government is matched by the self-centredness of corporations and international bodies in their disregard for the impact of their actions on our national and social values. The invisible hand of enlightened self interest that would once have improved our societies has become the dead hand of temporary political advantage and corporate control.

There is today a pervasive uncertainty about the future, even a fear of it. Change seems to be moving fast at the international level as well as in our societies, our economies and workplaces, our cities and communities. Old ideas are found to be no longer relevant. There is much churn in the world and it leaves people perplexed and confused.

Beyond waiting

People have grown tired of waiting for political will to materialise and, in places, are developing their own solutions. They do what they can, with what they have and where they are.

To find the genesis of a new vision, we look back to close on four decades ago when two people living in Australia's southernmost capital city combined their own reasoning with the ideas of the best of a restive, innovative generation to coax into existence the vision of a new way by which we could shape how we live so that it would be both productive and humane, open and participatory.

> Combining science and natural systems, curiosity and technics, this would be a regenerative system,..

Their vision applied both synthesis and analysis, planning and action and it took the form of a design system — a design system for human occupation of our towns, cities and rural lands that would sustain us over the decades, over the centuries. Combining science and natural systems, curiosity and technics this would be a regenerative system, one that increases the stock of useful resources wherever possible.

This new idea, this design system, was based on the simply expressed but profound idea of prioritising, at the same time, the wellbeing of both people and the natural systems that

sustain us. It was based upon the realisation that these two things are mutually dependent, that one is unlikely to be achieved without the other, and that achieving them is dependent on sharing knowledge and skills, materials and funds so that all can aspire to having the basic needs of life. Without basic needs being met no further development of person or community is possible.

> **The generosity of the Earth allows us to feed all mankind; we know enough about ecology to keep the Earth a healthy place; there is enough room on the Earth, and there are enough materials, so that everybody can have adequate shelter; we are quite competent enough to produce sufficient supplies of necessities so that no one need live in misery...**
>
> ***...Buckminster Fuller***

It was these things — the mutually dependent values of providing for the needs of people and for the continuity of the environmental services they depend upon, and of doing that through an open system of sharing and mutual assistance, that became the ethical basis of the Permaculture Design System.

Practitioners of permaculture do not distinguish between nature and humanity for they know that people are an expression of nature as much as is a blade of grass and the herbivore that lives off it. Knowing this, we find the power and the insights to act to shape our planet in ways that can sustain us and all of the other life forms we share this world with so that we and they can call it home for millennia to come.

The great innovator, inventor and thinker, Buckminster Fuller, said this: "The generosity of the Earth allows us to feed all mankind; we know enough about ecology to keep the Earth a healthy place; there is enough room on the Earth, and there are enough materials, so that everybody can have adequate shelter; we are quite competent enough to produce sufficient supplies of necessities so that no one need live in misery".

Permaculture practitioners recognise this reality and the fact that, thanks largely to the scientific enterprise, today we have the knowledge to inform us of what we should do about creating societies that would carry us over the generations. Thanks to society's innovators we now have the technologies and the abilities to use that knowledge to good ends. We have the know-how and the tools to create a social structure that offers both life security and a modest prosperity for all.

All that holds us back is a colossal lack of political leadership and political will.

Perhaps we do not have to wait for that.

A way of thinking, a way of acting, a way of being

Permaculture is an open source, intellectual and practical set of technics based on global cooperation, local collaboration and the contribution of ideas, tools, technologies and the other means of creating the future we want. For many of us it has led to new ways of perceiving the world and of acting deliberately and positively in it.

Permaculture is a synthesis of concepts, ideas and practices. Some of these emerge from within it but it is an open system so others flow in from outside where they are brought together into a cohesive system of design.

Permaculture people see themselves as clusters of thinkers and innovators a part of the societies they inhabit, and so may join with others to help government, corporations or lobbies reacquire their civic responsibility to maintain freedom and opportunity when those entities plan or take imprudent and foolish action.

Sometimes, Permaculture takes nature as metaphor and adopts the water logic of author and educator, Edward de Bono, and sets up alternative structures to bypass the roadblocks to true progress and to eventually erode them away in the same way that water in a stream flows around an obstacle and eventually wears it down. In doing this, Permaculture adopts the idea of Buckminster Fuller that if you want to replace something you do that by creating something that is so compellingly better that people will adopt it rather than persist with the old, the tired, the limiting, the ineffective.

In utilising the resources at hand to design and build the systems that support us, Permaculture adopts the **borrow > use > return** philosophy of sustainability educator, Bob Doppelt, to replace the **take > make > waste** approach of business-as-usual.

We in Permaculture are inspired, too, by the idea of anthropologist, Margaret Mead, that a small group of people can create change and is the only thing that ever has. All we need is a good idea, the means to demonstrate its effectiveness and the means to propagate it.

> Permaculture recognises that technology and humanity have co-evolved, that the technologies and tools we create are very much a part of ourselves, that you cannot separate people and technology

Permaculture offers active leadership for communities to self-organise and follow their own evolution. It curates the tools, physical and mental, the use of which creates positive change. In doing this, Permaculture recognises that technology and humanity have co-evolved, that the technologies and tools we create are very much a part... an expression... of ourselves, that you cannot separate people and technology whether that technology is the finely flaked spearhead of the neolithic or the mobile digital device of contemporary times.

Permaculture embraces the use of technologies that improve the human condition and the natural environments we inhabit. We adopt EF Schumacher's idea of appropriate or intermediate technology — that situated between older, less effective technologies and the damaging big tech wielded carelessly by big organisations. We seek technologies that

are economically maintainable and that are effective tools for creating the societies we would build.

Permaculture is the platform on which innovators and social entrepreneurs build new and useful applications...

Permaculture is a many-worlds entity — it is enacted in many ways and takes many forms. Permaculture is a platform consisting of an ethical basis and a variable set of principles designed as a guide to action. Upon that platform people develop different applications of the design system spanning the broad spectrum from regenerative agriculture, urban food systems, resource efficient building design, alternative economic systems, appropriate technology, new forms of land access and community settlement, community development and sustainable urbanism. Permaculture is the platform on which innovators and social entrepreneurs build new and useful things.

The design system is at the same time a way of thinking, a philosophy of life and a way of practical action. It is a way of being here and now rather than a way of becoming at some future time... it is the journey, not the destination... it is something we can live in our own lives. We can start it now, we are free to choose to do so.

Permaculture has no head office — it is a distributed system of activity nodes that form a dynamic network... it is self-creating and self-organising...

Permaculture seeks no utopia. The freedoms it supports are limited only by social and ecological responsibility and by the enlightened self-interest of perpetuating this world as a comfortably habitable place of opportunity.

Permaculture has no head office — it is a distributed system of activity nodes that form a dynamic network in which the nodes create the design system. It is self-creating and self-organising. It has no orthodoxy because it is an adaptive system of design. There is no dogma. There is no right way, just many different ways of enacting its ideas. Permaculture is an open system built by its practitioners. It is applied systems thinking. It is peer-to-peer and peer-to-all. Nobody owns permaculture. It follows the philosophy of continual improvement — permaculture designers are forever tweaking their designs so that they work better.

Permaculture is an open source offensive built on good ideas thoughtfully implemented at the social grassroots

In its own quiet way permaculture is a disruptive technology, a disruptive idea. Why? Because it leads to new ways of thinking and acting... it leads to new insights and to the realisation that we have the power to change things by offering something better. It's people think and talk about new and good things but they don't stop there — they go on to make them. Permaculture seeks to empower individuals in communities rather than corporations and government. It sees the only valid role of economics, social institutions, government and business to be that of creatively curating the planet for the people and the life that populates it.

Permaculture is an open source mobilisation built on good ideas thoughtfully implemented at the social grassroots.

Permaculture is you... me... it's us together

Anyone can practice permaculture — you can start now, where you are. All it takes is thinking and acting that work towards its ethics of improving the wellbeing of people and natural systems and of doing this by sharing and collaborating.

Permaculture works across cultures and ethnicities, belief and social systems. It is voluntary rather than compulsory. It is grassroots and cooperative, adaptable and innovative. It is a grand adventure in good design through which we can all work towards changing the global terraforming project into one that is done properly, and of playing our part in this, the human enterprise.

Join us in this grand adventure in good design.

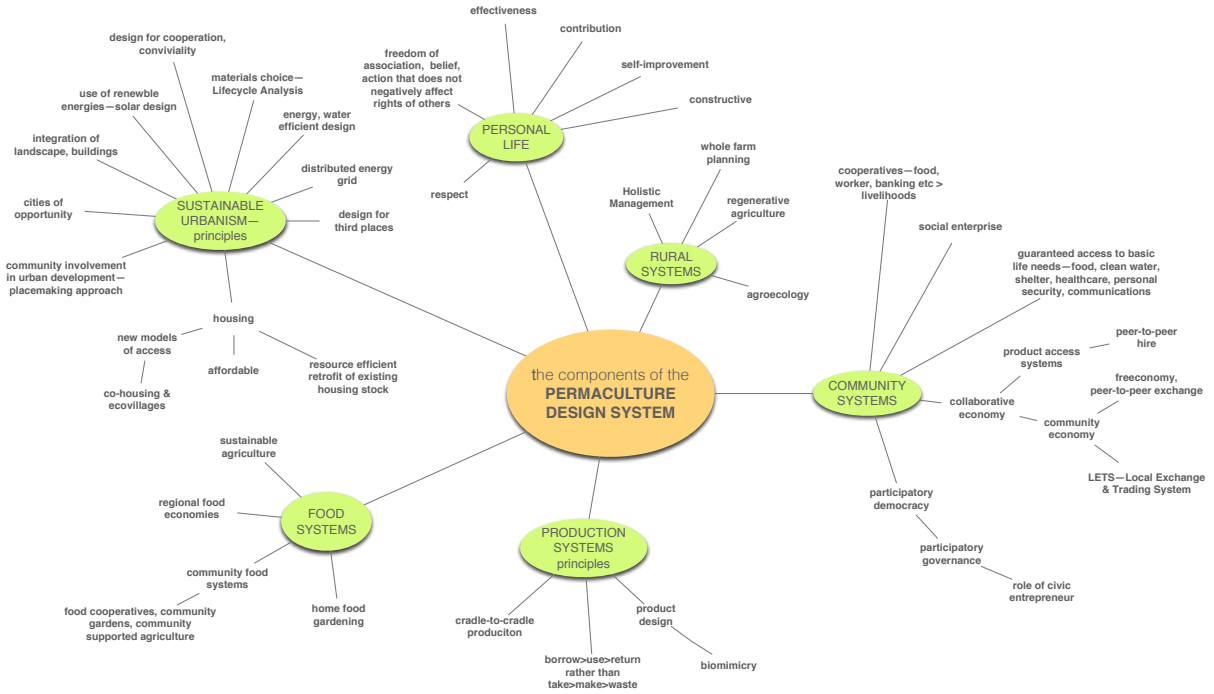
"By permaculture I mean a culture that can be sustained permanently. Not unchanging, that's impossible, we have to stay dynamic, because conditions will change, and we will have to adapt to those new conditions, and continue to try to make things even better — so that I like to think the word permaculture implies also permutation...

"But if you think of yourself as terraforming Earth, and if you think about sustainability, then you can start thinking about permaculture and what permaculture really means. It's not just sustainable agriculture, but a name for a certain type of history... permaculture, which not only includes permanent but also permutation. Permaculture suggests a certain kind of obvious human goal, which is that future generations will have at least as good a place to live as what we have now."

Kim Stanley Robinson,
science fiction author and thinker.
Village Homes, Davis, California.

Conceptual map of the permaculture design system

A set of interacting components producing combined outcomes greater than any of the components by themselves.



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Russ Grayson, Sydney, Autumn 2013