Critical Environmental Politics

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Contents

16 Localism

Karen Litfin

Introduction

'Eat local,' 'buy local,' 'it takes a village . . .' Paradoxically, just as trade, travel, and communication have been globalized, a broad and diverse movement of movements is calling for the relocalization of life. Globalization – or at least a certain disenchantment with it – has evidently spawned the resurgence of the local. Simultaneously, the social alienation engendered by other up-scaling trends like suburbanization and mega-urbanization fuels this resurgence of the local. Localism is therefore an inherently critical approach to environmental politics as well as other dimensions of political, economic, and cultural life.

This resurgence comes from three cross-cutting currents. First, globalization's critics promote relocalization on social, economic, and ecological grounds. A world where we know who grows our food, who produces our goods, and where our waste goes, they argue, will be a more just, convivial, and ecologically resilient world. Second, energy analysts make a more pragmatic argument: given that petroleum production has most likely reached its peak, we have now entered the era of energy decline (International Energy Agency 2010; see also Kütting, this volume). Relocalization, therefore, is not a choice; it is inevitable, and the sooner we embark upon the transition, the more graceful will be our descent. Third, top-down solutions to globalization's calamities have been too little, too late. Forty years of 'green diplomacy' have yielded little more than a host of toothless treaties and a planet on the verge of biospheric collapse (Barnosky et al. 2012; see also Death, this volume). No wonder, then, that so many people favor the near over the far. In contrast to the placeless and faceless global, the local holds out the promise of real relationships with real people and places. From all of these perspectives, localism is a healthy adaptive response to a rapacious and dysfunctional globalism.

Yet, as a purely reactive strategy, localism risks losing its progressive liberating potential. First, if the movement for a just sustainability reverts to the local, it effectively cedes the vast territory of the global to those forces that currently occupy that ground – most obviously multinational corporations and the political institutions serving their agenda. Second, the plain fact is that the lifestyles of the affluent have a global reach. Even if we pedal to the farmers market for our groceries, chances are that our bicycles were manufactured in China and our food grown with imported petroleum (see Brooks and Bryant, this volume). Third, there is something unseemly about the primary beneficiaries of globalization retreating to their local havens just as the planetary system reaches the precipice. Fourth, even in the improbable event that we could revert to the local, so long as transnational transportation exists, climate refugees and other uninvited guests will find their way into our communities (see Methmann and Oels, this volume). Finally, and most intriguingly, governance in the

Anthropocene will likely include a strong global component (see Baker, this volume). While the requisite political and economic institutions are nowhere in sight, this is the challenge before us. The global, therefore, is not so easily supplanted by valorizing the local.

For all its maladies, globalization is an unprecedented human one, I will argue, that may be far from complete if we choose wisely today. With greater integrative synergies, the resurgence of the local can serve as a progressive strategy rather than a mere recoil from the global. Indeed, in some important ways, it already is; my aim here is to amplify these efforts. In this chapter, I first describe the core ideas informing localism as a critical approach to environmental politics, distinguishing between its adaptive and regressive variants. I then trace the work of several key localist thinkers from the 1970s to the 2000s, showing how the case for localism has been strengthened by the twin phenomena of globalization and peak oil. Finally, I return to the question of progressive versus regressive variants. If localism is to actualize its critical potential, then it must move beyond – and not merely against – globalism as presently constituted. Organic globalism represents such a higher order synthesis, one that understands the world as a nested hierarchy of living systems, from the cell to the Earth system, and seeks to harmonize human systems with living systems at every level. We find evidence of such a higher order synthesis in the emergence of global activist networks with a strong localist agenda (see Bond and Price, Saunders, and Olcese, this volume). A plethora of Action Networks – Climate, Rainforest, Pesticide, Basel, etc. – and organizations ranging from the International Consortium of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) to La Via Campesina all point to an incipient organic globalism (see Bond, this volume). By simultaneously reinvigorating the local and democratizing the global, these groups are helping to realize localism's critical potential.

Core ideas

From an environmental vantage point, the rationale for localism is simple: all things being equal, a local economy will have lower energy requirements and therefore be ecologically friendlier (see Whitehead, this volume). Proponents of localism, however, are adamant that the psychological, social, cultural, political, and moral benefits are at least as significant. Localizers frequently deploy the term *human-scale*, implying that large-scale enterprises – multinational corporations, global supply chains, nuclear reactors, and the like – are fundamentally dehumanizing. This was E.F. Schumacher's point when he declared forty years ago that 'small is beautiful' (1973).

In the intervening years, the human and ecological consequences of 'bigness' have become more dire and far-reaching. The second half of the twentieth century saw a phenomenal rise in the speed, volume, and geographic scope of commerce, spurred on by new technologies as well as international trade, finance, and development institutions. A key function – arguably *the* key function – of most governments during this period was to facilitate the movement of goods and capital. Indeed, in the minds of many, the very notion of human progress was associated with bigger, faster, farther, and more. Globalization was fueled by nonrenewable fossil fuels, with petroleum at the helm. This extravaganza of energy consumption generated unprecedented growth in both human numbers and material wealth, but the attendant pollution, capital flight, and social displacement left in their wake devastated communities and ecosystems on every continent. No wonder, then, that the trickle of complaints in the 1980s became, by the turn of the century, a diverse movement for global justice and sustainability. As many as a million initiatives, from organic farms to labour unions to indigenous people's organizations, consti-

tute this far-flung movement of movements (Hawken 2007; see also Bond and Price et al., this volume). Weaving through these movements is a strong thread of localism.

In their recent anthology on localization, Thomas Princen and Raymond DeYoung suggest that the primary concern is 'how to adapt institutions and behaviors to live within the limits of natural systems' (DeYoung and Princen 2012: xvii). They predict a shift from the *centrifugal* forces of globalization to the *centripetal* forces of localization. Whereas the former is associated with concentrated economic and political power, cheap and abundant resources, intensive commercialization, displaced wastes, and abstract modes of communication, the latter is associated with diffuse leadership, sustainable production and consumption, personal proficiency, and community self-reliance.

Ecological concerns are surely at or near the top of the localist agenda, particularly for those who foresee catastrophe and collapse (see Diamond 2005; Homer-Dixon 2006; Tainter 1988). Among localist concerns are climate change, the precipitous loss of biodiversity, and the depletion of freshwater. None, however, receives more attention than the zenith of global petroleum production sometime around 2007. With oil as the lifeblood of the global economy, this fact alone should make localizers of us all.

Key thinkers

For many of today's localizers, small is rendered inevitable by the reality of peak oil. A host of books such as *The Party's Over* (Heinberg 2005), *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight* (Hartmann 2000), and *Out of Gas* (Goodstein 2005) drive the point home. In laying out why 'small is inevitable', Rob Hopkins, a prominent localizer and founder of the Transition Towns movement, focuses on peak oil (Hopkins 2008: 68–78). As the master resource, energy propels every aspect of the economy: building, manufacturing, heating and cooling, and so on. And because the entire global economy – especially mining, transportation, and agriculture – is tied to petroleum, peak oil means *peak everything* (Heinberg 2007).

Aside from the inevitability of energy descent, there are other powerful arguments for localization. Again, the trickle of voices from decades past seems to be swelling into a flood. With growing concerns about climate and peak oil, for instance, Kirkpatrick Sale's bioregional writings from the 1980s enjoyed a revival in the new century (Thayer 2003). While Sale's bioregionalism, emphasizing both the psycho-social and ecological value of place-based identity, resonates well with contemporary localist movements, it lacks the thoroughgoing critique of global capitalism articulated during the same period by Murray Bookchin. In contrast to deep ecologists who tended to downplay social injustice, Bookchin's theory of social ecology roots environmental problems in social problems of domination and hierarchy. Likewise, Bookchin's notions of communalism and sustainable cities presage important elements of Transition Towns and other localist movements. Bookchin's recently reprinted seminal works, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971) and *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), gained new relevance in the context of 'peak everything' and the anti-globalization movement.

Building upon the fact that place-based cultures have been the norm throughout human history, many localizers argue on anthropological grounds that people are more likely to flourish in place-based communities. Others promote local businesses and community ownership on the grounds of economic efficiency and social accountability (Shuman 2000). Still others see localization as a healthy response to the neocolonial model of development associated with globalization (Goldsmith and Mander 1997). And some, suggesting that democracy functions best in a regional context, claim that a powerful wave of decentralization is gaining

momentum in the United States and other large countries (Alperovitz 2004). In their quest to green and humanize contemporary cities, urban planners are lending their voices to the growing choir (see Hamilton 2008 and Hess 2009). Localization is said to simultaneously foster ecological sustainability, social resilience, economic well-being, democratic participation, community values, and psychological health (see Whitehead, this volume). With all of these advantages, and given its inevitability in an energy descent world, one would be hard pressed to register serious objections to localism.

Alongside all of these good reasons, localization might arguably be the only viable game in town. The blunt reality is that the self-perceived mandate of national governments and international institutions was to expedite the flow of goods and capital, and this they have done. We might have hoped that the World Trade Organization (WTO) would make good on its mission of promoting sustainable development or that decades of negotiations would have stabilized our home planet's climate and forestalled the oncoming wave of mass extinctions, but things are as they are (see Okereke and Charlesworth, this volume). The recent Rio+20 Earth Summit is a case in point: lofty declarations and reams of hortatory documents but virtually no meaningful action. One veteran of so-called green diplomacy called the resulting international declaration 'the longest suicide note in history' (McDonald 2012). For many observers at Rio, the only shred of hope was the dynamism of nongovernmental side-events like the People's Sustainability Treaties (see Death, this volume).

It is said that nature abhors a vacuum, and this is no less true in the realm of politics and social action. The policy vacuum left by governments and intergovernmental organizations with respect to sustainability and social justice is giving rise to a host of local initiatives. National governments may have failed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, for instance, but thousands of cities and businesses are taking up the effort. Ironically, subnational climate initiatives are proliferating in the United States, the world's most laggardly country on international climate governance (Hoffman 2011). In the face of a deep disenchantment with the top-down politics of globalization, the case for localization is compelling.

Yet some forms of localization are undesirable. Raymond DeYoung and Thomas Princen (2012) distinguish between positive localization, which they associate with cooperation and healthy communities, and negative localization, which they associate with survivalism and the fragmentation of communities. As Melanie DuPuis and David Goodman (2005) argue in their critique of the local food movement, 'unreflexive localism' can inadvertently foster inequality and hegemonic domination. In *The Crash Course* (2011), for instance, 'peak oil' analyst Chris Martenson prescribes stockpiling food and investing in gold. From a narrow individualistic standpoint, these strategies might be prudent, but they make little sense if we wish to build a just and sustainable world.

Fear is, no doubt, a valid response to the oncoming crises. If it prevails, though, more toxic forms of localization are likely to prevail. A telling anecdote illustrates the point. Soon after I returned from doing field research on the global ecovillage movement, I was speaking about my travels to an acquaintance and her twenty-something son. He began to ask some pointed questions about these communities' food and energy systems and their governance structures. As it turned out, he was a member of a local militia that was preparing for the coming collapse. Like the ecovillages I visited, his group was preparing for local self-reliance – growing and preserving food, building off-grid housing, etc. – but two key differences stood out. First, his group was stockpiling gasoline. Second, the men in his group gathered every Saturday for target practice. In his view, ecovillages were 'hippy communes' that would never survive because they lacked two essential things: strong hierarchy

and guns. This conversation was an indelible reminder that localization comes in many flavors.

The exchange recalled my interview with Jonathan Dawson, president of the Global Ecovillage Network.[1] Jonathan observed that the most dynamic and long-lived ecovillages are the ones that put themselves at the service of the larger community and predicted that they will need to be of even greater service in the future. 'If we have a graceful transition to a new order', he said, 'ecovillages will be excellent training centers. They already are. If the transition is more catastrophic, ecovillages could be models – but only if they're not devoured by hungry hordes. They will need to be perceived by people as helpful to their own survival. So it's critical that they have strong local relationships'. Localization may be inevitable, but our near-term choices will determine whether cooperation and solidarity win out over violence and fragmentation.

DeYoung and Princen have little to say about negative localization, but some of their contributors make a strong case for rehabilitating associated terms that have a negative connotation. Wendell Berry (2001), for instance, champions the localization of food systems, finance, and economic life in general. To those who criticize his proposal as protectionist, he replies, '[T]hat is exactly what it is. It is a protectionism that is just and sound, because it protects local producers and is the best assurance of adequate supplies to local consumers' (2001: 37; quoted in DeYoung and Princen 2012: 333). Yet Berry is careful to distinguish this form of protectionism from isolationism. Rob Hopkins (2012) echoes Berry's rejection of isolationism. Self-reliance, he says, should not be equated with total self-sufficiency. Citing Shuman (2000: 48), Hopkins affirms that the goal of self-reliant communities 'is not to create a Robinson Crusoe economy in which no resources, people or goods enter or leave. A self-reliant community simply should seek to increase control over its own economy as far as is practicable' (Hopkins 2012: 66).

While some form of localization appears to be inevitable in an energy descent world, the mandate to 'go local' leaves many questions unanswered. When does local self-reliance become impracticable? What is the time frame for localizing? To what extent should we leverage resources from global markets today in order to build tomorrow's local economies and polities? If autarky is not the goal, then how do we decide when to buy local and when to buy from afar? Are there other values besides our own convenience and personal loyalties to people and place that should come into play as we go local?

Critical potential

The slogan 'Think globally, act locally' became popular in the 1990s just as globalization was shifting into high gear. The slogan suggests that if we truly care about global problems, we need to set our own house in order. The implication is that local actions, such as recycling, using mass transit, and buying local organic food, will get us out of the planetary mess we are in. Even more: a global perspective *compels* us to act locally. There are, no doubt, two powerful moments of truth to this claim. First, as a response to the destructive legacy of globalization, the slogan communicates a healthy wariness of large-scale action in challenging the core values of consumerist culture: speed and convenience. Second, if we profess a great concern for the human and ecological wreckage wrought by globalization yet persist in externalizing the negative consequences of our consumptive lifestyles, then we might rightly be accused of hypocrisy.

Both of these moments of truth, however, are matched and superseded by their converse. First, there is the incontrovertible fact that the most powerful global institution in the world

today is the multinational corporation, with nation-states and international institutions like the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank operating at its behest. Simply localizing leaves global action – and hence the primary levers of economic and political power – in the hands of these players. As Nicholas Low and Brendan Gleeson (1998) argue in their proposal for a nested hierarchy of cosmopolitan democratic governance, so long as global capitalism persists, there must be a countervailing power on a global scale. In their words,

> The slogan 'think globally, act locally' is no longer appropriate. Local action within an unchanged global order of production and governance rapidly reaches its limits. It is necessary today not only to think about the global consequences of local action, but to act to change the global context of local action: 'Think and act, globally and locally'.
> (Low and Gleeson 1998: 189)

Second, the localist impulse often discloses an underlying nostalgia for purity. While localism's emphasis on community values offers a healthy corrective to the values of speed, efficiency, and convenience associated with globalization, local producers are not necessarily any more deserving or trustworthy than peasants or factory workers overseas. Indeed, the anonymity and lack of accountability associated with globalization have been, for the most part, far more damaging in the Third World than the First. Affluence is highly concentrated, but its shadow ecologies are spread across the globe, which places the image of smart-phone addicts waxing eloquent about local food in an unsettling light. 'Going local' can serve as a kind of purification ritual, one that denies the human and material consequences of one's own lifestyle (Hawkins 2006).

Third, like it or not, billions of people are now highly dependent upon the global economy. A reflexive localist impulse, therefore, could have far-flung negative consequences. Consider a recent book whose title speaks for itself: *The Locavore's Dilemma: In Praise of the 10,000-Mile Diet* (Desrochers and Shimizu 2012). The authors view the local food movement as an elite-driven fad and a potentially dangerous distraction from serious global food issues. While they sidestep thorny issues regarding the environmental impact of industrial agriculture, they make a valid point: efficiencies of production have created a global food system that feeds more people than any other system in the past. This system, no doubt, is deeply flawed, but it should not be dismissed out of hand.

Fourth, given that the affluence of the global North was amassed through access to foreign natural and human resources, a fetishism of the local just as planetary systems are approaching a tipping point is, to say the least, an awkward strategy. If we retreat to our fortresses after wrecking the climate, we hardly have an ethical leg to stand on. To complicate matters, we are approaching 'peak everything' just as the global South is beginning to 'catch up'. The 80 per cent of humanity living in developing countries are unlikely to change their trajectories absent a compelling moral and practical exemplar – nor without assistance from the wealthy countries. Global justice, therefore, becomes a matter of 'geoecological realism' (Athanasiou and Baer 2002: 74). In this context, localization is a viable strategy only if it is pursued under the umbrella of global solidarity. Such a strategy requires not only *thinking* globally but also *acting* globally at an institutional level. A localist retreat in an era of climate refugees, geo-engineering, and species triage is a chimera.

We have entered a new era. Humanity is operating as a geophysical force, yet most of us are utterly unaware of our perilous entry into the Anthropocene (see Dalby, this volume). For the few who have registered this fact, there is a mighty temptation to see human survival

itself as dependent upon relocalization. The threat of human extinction is like a dark cloud hanging over the discourse of localism, one that is rarely acknowledged but one that can also be fairly easily dispelled. A weedy species can inhabit and spread across a wide range of ecosystems, and humans are arguably the weediest species on the planet. While anything is possible, human extinction is probably not in the cards for the foreseeable future. In the event of global catastrophe, precluding a nuclear winter or an asteroid impact, we can expect human cultures to revert to their *modus operandi:* the local.

The local, then, is a given; the question at the dawn of the Anthropocene is whether we can devise a viable way of inhabiting the global. While we are very far from the requisite political and economic institutions, this is the challenge. It is at once a social, economic, political, ecological, and deeply personal challenge.

Conclusion

As we see the world, so shall we act. Today's global order is a concrete expression of an ontology of separation that constructs people as acquisitive individuals and nature as a vast storehouse of resources (see Hobden, and Rudy and White, this volume). Yet, as the story of separation reaches the end of its tether, the unfolding crisis carries within itself the seeds of a new story. Mechanistic globalism is not the end of the story. If *independence* was the byword of the old story, *interdependence* is the byword of the new. If the old metaphors were drawn from Newtonian physics, the new metaphors are rooted in ecology, where symbiosis is the rule. Whatever its political utility in the past, independence was always a biological fiction; current trends are driving that point home. The so-called individual turns out to be inextricably reliant on a vast web of social, ecological, and microbial networks. Organic globalism understands the world as a nested hierarchy of living systems, from the cell to the Earth system, and seeks to harmonize human systems with living systems at every level.

Harmonious integration is more straightforward in local economies. There may be greed and deception in a village, but it is more visible and the community has more power in the equation. If we are to persist as a global species, then, we must devise economies of care and connection that transcend the local, and we must do some serious number crunching. What should we acquire locally and what from afar? If I live in the western United States, for instance, I may need to consider that grass-fed beef from New Zealand might be more ecologically benign than corn-fed beef from California. And then we face an even more radical question: what do we forego (see Wapner, this volume)? Beef, perhaps. Besides rigorous ecological footprint analysis, economies of care and connection will also require relational modes of production and consumption that supplant the current norms of exploitive distancing (see Hinton, this volume). These relational networks are growing, with fair trade being the most obvious, but they account for only a tiny fraction of world markets (Stiglitz and Charlton 2007). For localists who see a role for international trade, governance and production decisions would be guided by the subsidiarity principle (DeYoung and Princen 2012: 333). Localizers and organic globalists could find common cause in mapping out how the subsidiarity principle would be implemented in practice. A key element of this mapping project would be determining the energetic requirements for a global civilization, a possibility that sociologist Stephen Quilley (2011) labels 'low-energy cosmopolitanism'.

First, however, they would have to grapple with the myopic approach of prevailing global institutions. The WTO, for instance, has been a lightning rod for localist sentiments, with many localizers arguing for its elimination. Yet, as the most powerful global political

institution, a democratically restructured WTO would be the most likely candidate for an institutionally grounded organic globalism. Here, proponets of localism and organic globalism would find themselves on common ground, recognizing that the nation-state is neither large enough to inspire a planetary identity nor small enough to nurture the place-based identities that are essential to participatory governance. The nation-state would not necessarily disappear; rather, it would be incorporated into broader cross-cutting networks of supranational, regional, and local forms of governance (see Kuehls, this volume).

Indeed, we can already see evidence of these cross-cutting networks. Consider the International Consortium of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), a bottom-up network that emerged in the wake of failed international climate negotiations. The consortium serves as a forum for cities to not only respond to the international policy vacuum but to share their best practices on a host of other environmental concerns. Much of the environmental movement itself is organized on a network model, spanning geographic and political scales from the local to the global. Global action networks are in place for a range of issues, including rainforests, climate, pesticides, and hazardous waste. The global action network model is cropping up for other issues as well. La Via Campesina, for instance, is a global network of peasants' organizations calling for food sovereignty. Despite the strong localist overtones of its rallying cry, La Via Campesina has a cohesive global vision and a strong presence at international gatherings on food, climate, trade, and financial policy. Many of these local-to-global networks have a presence both at international civil society gatherings like the World Social Forum and at intergovernmental gatherings like Rio+20 (see Death, this volume). These bottom-up networks, aptly dubbed by Joshua Karliner (1997) as 'grassroots globalization', reflect the kind of higher order synergism that can help localism to realize its critical potential.

As valuable as these issue-based networks have been for fostering some semblance of global governance, they remain weak relative to the planetary reach of corporate capitalism. An intriguing initiative that seeks to lay the groundwork for the emergence of global democratic institutions was presented at Rio+20: The Widening Circles campaign (TWC) (2012). While acknowledging that partial and dispersed efforts, including efforts to build local resilience, are needed more than ever, TWC calls for a 'higher order synergy' responsive to the core condition of the twenty-first century: that 'humanity and Earth are now one community of fate'. TWC hopes to catalyse a polycentric global citizens movement comprising semi-autonomous territorial and issue circles linked through representative global circles. Rejecting the false dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up approaches to governance and trade, the campaign proposes a third way that, in essence, rearticulates the subsidiarity principle: 'as global as must be and as local as can be'. In other words, TWC seeks to change the global context of local action by thinking *and* acting globally *and* locally. Whether or not this particular campaign is successful, it can be read as an expression of an incipient organic globalism.

Ultimately, organic globalism is founded on an emerging form of identity: a sense of global citizenship that simultaneously transcends and includes our bounded self, our local and our national identities. While a resurgence of the local is a healthy response to the destructive legacy of mechanical globalism, the planetary phase of civilization calls for a larger sense of global identity and responsibility. In stretching our loyalties, we are simultaneously enlarged. As Robert Nozick says, 'The size of a soul, the magnitude of a person, is measured in part by the extent of what that person can appreciate and love' (1989: 258, quoted in Low and Gleeson 1998: 135). Globalization has given us the material infrastructure for planetary connectivity. The question now, as we cross the threshold into the Anthropocene, is whether we can develop the inner sense of connectivity to live as one species on our one Earth.

Further reading

Long before globalization entered the lexicon, social theorists were offering trenchant localist critiques of mass culture, urbanization, and capitalism. Robert Owen, a nineteenth-century British socialist, believed that worker collectives should form the basis of society. Owen emigrated to the United States, where he founded a socialist community, New Harmony, in Indiana. Across the diverse socialist and religious communitarian experiments in the United States (ranging from Owenites and Fourierites to Moravians and Shakers) is a unifying theme of localism (Kanter 1972). The rise of environmentalism in the 1970s rejuvenated localist thinking. Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* (1973, with a second edition in 2001) made the case for a low-tech, communitarian future. Presaging the discourses of environmental justice and climate equity, Illich's *Energy and Equity* (1974, second edition in 2000) offered a penetrating analysis of the relationship between energy consumption and social alienation. Drawing upon Gandhian ideas of local self-sufficiency and Buddhist ideas of deep interdependence, E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973) contributed to the appropriate technology and participatory development movements. In recent years, arguments for localization are increasingly rooted in a critique of globalization. Two prominent examples are Colin Hines (2000) *Localization: A Global Manifesto* and Walden Bello (2003) *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New Economy.* At the same time, in the face of unfolding realities of climate change and peak oil, a spate of practical books for localizers are available, including Sharon Astyk (2008) *Depletion and Abundance: Life on the New Home Front* and Alexis Rowell (2010) *Communities, Councils and a Low Carbon Future.* Integrating practical know-how and big picture theorizing are Stephen Morris (ed.) (2007), *The New Village Green: Living Light, Living Local, Living Large* and Karen Litfin (2013) *Ecovillages: Lessons for Sustainable Community.*

Useful websites

Community Solutions: http://www.communitysolution.org/
International Consortium for Local Environmental Initiative: http://www.iclei.org/
International Forum on Globalization: http://www.ifg.org/
New Economics Foundation: http://www.neweconomics.org/
PostCarbon Institute: http://www.postcarbon.org/
Resilience: Building a World of Resilient Communities: http://www.resilience.org/
Resurgence Magazine: http://www.resurgence.org/
Schumacher College: Transformative Learning for Sustainable Living: http://www.schumachercollege.org.uk/
Transition Network: http://transitionnetwork.org/

Note

1. 6 October 2007, Findhorn, U.K.

17 Movements

Stephan Price, Clare Saunders and Cristiana Olcese

Introduction

In December 2008, the UK Parliament became the first legislature in the world to turn climate mitigation targets into law. This step followed two-and-a-half years of increasingly intense campaigning for a law on climate change led by a coalition consisting largely of environment and development movement groups, but also including labour, peace, and church groups. After its success in the UK, the campaign for legislation in other European countries was taken on by Friends of the Earth Europe. In 2010 legislation was attempted in the United States (and failed), but was successfully passed in Mexico in 2012. But in 2009 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations in Copenhagen failed to come up with the international framework that would make domestic action on climate change worthwhile globally (the challenges and opportunities posed by environmental summits are explored by Death, this volume); at the same time, messages hacked from email accounts at the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia shook public confidence in climate concerns (see Okereke and Charlesworth, this volume). Combined with the more immediate problem of the economic crisis, these events contributed to a decline in protest and movement activity on climate change and environmental issues more widely. In 2009, just before the Copenhagen summit, London saw one of the largest public demonstrations of concern about climate change, The Wave, with 30,000 to 50,000 marchers. By 2012, in contrast, only 500 people marched through London to protest against the impact of shale gas on local communities and for climate mitigation targets.

   Protests and phases of intense movement activity, like the campaign for climate legislation in the UK, come and go (Melucci 1989; Tarrow 1998). Unfortunately, perceived successes, such as achieving legislation, can contribute to demobilisation (Fillieule 2013). But the politics of climate change, and of environmental issues more widely, do not go away. Instead, UK climate change mitigation is now subject to institutionalised forms of decision-making that emphasise cost efficiency and threaten to produce undesirable consequences. For example, the latest 'dash to gas' may help to replace coal-fired power stations and reduce emissions in the short term, but it will also starve investment from the renewable energy infrastructure that is essential in the long term, as well as create risks for people living near 'fracking' sites.

   Legislation on climate change has placed UK movement actors in a difficult position. They must now seek to promote the issue in a context in which, superficially, the problem is 'solved' by legislation. At the same time they must defend those values that are threatened by the outcomes of least-cost-highest-reward government decisions. But can the campaign for a climate law really be described as a 'movement' action, given that it was, in effect, asking