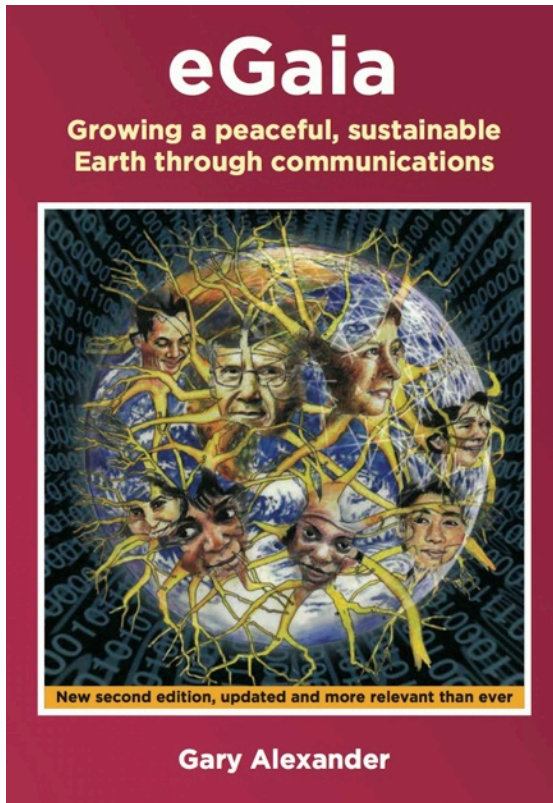


An excerpt from:



New 2nd Edition, Now more relevant  
than ever!

A positive vision is emerging – a community-based, but globally linked and co-ordinated society, a global human family looking after each other and the Earth.

eGaia describes the many starting points around the world, and next big steps where they join and link up. It clarifies, gives background, principles, and a light fictional picture of a sustainable world.

“a manifesto for a new world order, disarmingly presented and written...” Prof. John Monk

“a radical and challenging approach to what Alexander terms our ‘global cancer’: biodiversity and habitat loss, war, climate change, poverty and social disintegration.

..it concentrates on the positive: what kind of society do we really want, and how might we get it?”

Prof. Godfrey Boyle



**Gary Alexander** worked for the Open University for 37 years, was a pioneer in collaborative learning online, has written, worked and dreamt about sustainable communities since the 1970s, helped create Summer Schools, Dance Camps, Fairs, was a Trustee of the Transition Network, and dances tango.

# Chapter 15 The next big step(s)?

*“If humanity were to evolve into a healthy, integrated social super-organism, it would signal the maturation and awakening of the global nervous system.” Peter Russell*

This chapter looks to the future, building upon the starting points in the last chapter. What might be the next big steps that would take the starting points to the next level, where they are no longer quite so marginal and might begin a take-off to becoming mainstream?

**You** I thought you said that wouldn't happen until there is a crash?

**Me** Yes, I think it isn't likely that this vision will become mainstream, meaning, accepted by a large part of the population, before a financial crash. But I do think it could become much less marginal in the lives of people who already share much of the vision, such as those who are active in the starting points. Also there are growing numbers of people who are in severe financial difficulties, for whom the crash is happening now, and they may be receptive to these ideas. What is important is that there are enough examples of the new co-operative vision so that it will take off when there is a crash.

The key change for this moment in time is the joining up of these starting points, so that they are connected with each other, aware of each other's activities and start searching for synergies. In what practical, day to day ways can they help each other?

It doesn't need to be everyone active in these groups who do this, just a few, who come to see how they can begin to work first with similar groups, and then with others that share a similar world view.

**You** This sounds like the metamorphosis of the caterpillar to the butterfly you talked about in the introductory chapter, where the imaginal disks begin to join up.

**Yes** Exactly so. The big idea is that there while there are many ways of working towards this vision, they will all eventually be small parts of a single whole, humanity working to look after itself and the natural world. There is only one co-operative economy, one movement towards mutual understanding and peace, not a lot of little ones in competition with each other. And there are lots of people who see this as the next big step.

Many people are proposing projects and activities with the aim of bringing together many diverse projects and groups. The idea that now is the time for the diverse strands of this loose movement to join is gaining popularity. There are ‘networks of networks’, moves to join the environmental movement with the co-operatives and commons movements and a range of educational projects, among many.

## AN EGAIAN EXCHANGE NETWORK

**Me:** I’m really going to stick my neck out in this section and concentrate on just one approach. This is my favourite idea that I think could really make all the difference to bringing a collaborative world into the mainstream.

**You:** So this is your pet idea.

**Me:** Yes it is. In the first edition of eGaia I called these ‘eGaian community networks’. Having tried hard to set these up since then, I now see how hard it is and how far even from the starting points in the last chapter. This time around I’ll break it up into separate steps that could be started one at a time, or combined to form something a lot more powerful.

It is an attempt to re-invent community, actually to create a new social contract, and to do so in a way that enables people to lead lives that are more sustainable and co-operative. It provides starting points

for an economy based upon trust where the pressures of the commercial marketplace are significantly reduced. It builds on the ideas behind eco-villages but without requiring people to give up their existing homes and livelihoods and move to a new community. It builds on transition towns, using social networks to add much more co-ordination and a major economic dimension.

Essentially, these are starting points to the system of exchange in the *'Taste of an eGaian future'* chapter. It takes people that are sympathetic to the collaborative world view and makes it easy for them to find ways to work together for mutual benefit. It combines new forms of money and gift economy with an organised local exchange.

The success of an exchange will depend upon whether it offers its members immediate, personal benefits, and must be set up with that in mind. Particularly in the early stages, their larger effects on the world will be extremely small and must be secondary.

### **Step 1 Recruitment: Becoming explicit about who is part of this**

Can we simply encourage people to identify publicly with the essence of this vision? We would hope to attract people across many different movements and projects, who might be willing to accept some common vision and would appreciate contact with people who would be willing to help each other in various ways.

Perhaps it can be explicit about being part of a 'global family that looks after people and the Earth' or just 'People Care, Earth Care' or some other metaphor that might be widely accepted?

That means people who don't see themselves as competing with everyone else, who are hoping to live in modest comfort rather than to earn as much money as possible, and who care about the state of the natural world.

This need not be limited to people who are currently active in the the starting points, but also include people who are looking for ways out

of the current system, at least in part, and especially, businesses and organisations who want to be part of it.

It would give all of them a tremendous lift, a sense that they are not struggling on their own, but are part of a rapidly growing global movement.

A major side effect of this would be to establish the idea that there are real, viable alternatives to our social and economic systems, a view that is almost totally absent in the media and political debates.

It probably means identifying a small set of broad principles that characterise it. Then people, organisations, businesses can sign up to them, perhaps on one or more suitable websites. Here's a first try at this:

Joining the 'global family that looks after people and the Earth' means:

- *Relationships*: Agreeing to treat all people with respect, acting with integrity. This includes a commitment to handle any disagreements or conflicts that arise constructively.
- *Environment*: Appreciating the environmental challenges we are facing, attempting to align our personal lives and business dealings with best environmental practice.
- *Money as servant, not as master*: Financial transparency and integrity: Giving priority to the wellbeing of people and the natural world over maximising money. This includes a commitment to paying fair and ethical prices and wages, rather than looking for the lowest price or highest salary. It also requires a transparency over profits, wages and salaries so it is clear that these are neither excessive nor exploitative.

## **Step 2 Informal mutual support and gift exchange**

With these people/organisations/businesses known to each other, perhaps listed on some suitable website (initially existing websites), and with their agreed statement of principles, this recruitment could

be seen as creating a market and a basis for exchanging gifts and favours. People and businesses who are part of it should then see the others in it as people they would wish to preferentially buy from, sell to, employ, or give and receive support from. It is a recruitment to an ethical, environmentally-minded sector within the open market.

As a starting point, most people who declare themselves in this way will find lots of their friends and others in their area who they are already doing favours for, buying and selling from, etc. so this step would initially just be doing more of what they are already doing.

These lists would include the many businesses that are known for their personal service, integrity and for their environmental concern. They would be promoted to like minded people, creating the beginnings of a market that is driven by service, not profit.

Another dimension of this is for similar projects to look for ways to support each other. For example, community farms and permaculture projects could share tools and expertise, provide labour for each other when needed, help each other's organisations when they are struggling.

**You** Let me be clear about this. You aren't saying 'we need to overthrow the old system' you are saying 'invite sympathetic people to grow a new economy within the old'.

**Me** Exactly so.

At this stage, a key part of the communication process would be regular social and cultural events to establish and strengthen relationships.

**You** So this emerging movement might be known for its great parties!

**Me** Yes, exactly. But perhaps they would be parties at which people were also checking out what each others' needs were and how they might help each other: favours, gifts,

buying, selling, hiring each other, ways of helping each other to need less money.

### **Step 3 Creating more formal mutual support mechanisms**

Once there are identified people and businesses in an area who recognise each other as part of the ‘global family’ and who are looking for ways to support each other, there is a context for setting up more organised and formal systems. Here are some of them, as described in the ‘organising principles for a co-operative economy’ in Chapter 13:

**Me** I am not really clear what order to put these, so I have lumped them all under step 3.

#### ***Specialised websites and apps: The ‘Global Family App’***

Imagine that for many of your everyday needs you could easily find a local individual or business or community organisation that you know is part of this explicit ‘global family looking after people and planet’. These are people you can trust, that you know are doing their best for the environment, and that deal with people with respect and integrity. You might use an app on your phone/tablet/laptop to find them, or to make daily transactions easy.

To support the relationship of trust, the app shows you a list of previous transactions by that person, with you and other people, with ratings and reviews of them by other people you know and trust. Even if they are not that local and you don’t know them personally, there is a short chain of friends of friends of friends linking them to you.

As there is a major environmental dimension to this, people making offers would be expected to make some statement of their environmental awareness and performance, and be open to review on this.

If people are preferentially patronising others within the group, then much of the money in use will be recirculating within it.



For people who are open to a gift economy approach, it could have a section for exchange of favours, help given without payment, but within the group where all are giving and receiving. This would be a more formalised system of gift giving than we are used to now for birthdays, Christmas, weddings, etc. with exchanges recorded on the app, and with the possibilities of ratings and reviews.

When an exchange occurs, someone does something for you, or gives you something, this is recorded on both party's profiles and is part of their public record. Thus before you offer a gift or a favour you can look at the receiver's record to get a general idea as to whether they are keeping their giving and receiving roughly in balance or are free-loading.

**You** I'm not so sure I want all the things I do for my friends listed on some public website.

**Me** I agree. I think people would choose to list actions that weren't too personal or private, especially things that they do for the community. So many people now do volunteer work and get no recognition for it.

### ***New forms of 'money' that aren't legal tender***

Another approach which might appeal to some people is to avoid the conventional money system, at least for some transactions, with a complementary currency. As in the *'Taste of an eGaian future'* chapter, this could a strictly local currency, or it could a global complementary currency, (the 'Eco?') deployed by some suitable organisation (perhaps a large social or environmental NGO?). It might be built into the 'Global Family App' for ease of use and to keep overheads low.

The NGO would set up the system for global use, but people could use it locally or more widely, if they were clear by other means (i.e. the chain of friends, or the ratings and reviews) that the users were worthy of trust.

It would probably best be denominated in hours, but would be flexible so that people could charge more or less than one Eco for an hours work, depending upon circumstances. This creates the expectation that everyone's effort is equally worthy of respect, but that there can still be differences, for example, because some work is easy while some is much harder.

This would best be a mutual credit system where money is created and removed through each transaction. It would have credit limits, and fees based upon system costs rather than interest.

These new complementary currencies would be specifically for use by people and organisations who have signed up to the Global Family, to facilitate exchange within it. Thus it would explicitly not be 'legal tender', which has to be accepted by anyone, as is conventional money. Rather, it would be understood to be used only with trusted people and organisations with shared values. Thus it would be backed by the reputations and relationships of its users, and would not need to be convertible into national currency or backed by anything physical.

### ***Organising 'autonomy with coordination' at various scales***

By this stage we have a defined group of people with shared values that are committed to supporting each other and the planet, and the beginnings of mechanisms to help them do that. However, there is still the danger that they will see each other as in competition with each other in a specialised market, even though it may be more ethical. Bringing in the 'autonomy with coordination' principles<sup>1</sup> described in Chapter 13 can help them to function more effectively and synergistically.

We are very used to local exchanges or markets where people put up lists of what they offer and what they want, either as classified ads, or even for free using such systems as [Freecycle](#) or [Freegle](#). Most

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<sup>1</sup> More commonly described as [viable systems](#) principles.

complementary currency systems include them too, but the standard criticisms of early complementary currency systems was that ‘they were great if you wanted a massage but not if you wanted a plumber’. People would often struggle to find skills that they could offer.

That is because the conventional model of a local exchange is that of a market where people are not connected to each other. A collaborative exchange, such as that described in the fictional *Tastes of an eGaian Future* in Chapter 3 has more possibilities.

It could be set up with small groups to co-ordinate different areas, such as food, transport, housing, child care, energy, social events, etc. Each of these co-ordinating groups could actively seek people to supply needs in their area and act as agents to connect people who have needs with those who could supply those needs. Where extra help was needed, they could advertise that need: “Drivers needed for Saturday evening..., More people needed on Mondays at the Community Farm...,” In this way, people looking for ways to serve the community would always be able to find an opportunity. In effect, it would be creating a large number of short, part-time jobs chosen to suit a member’s interests and free time. Signing up for these on-line is much easier than the normal hassles of arranging a part-time job.

Beyond that, the co-ordinating groups could help the people they are working with to function more collaboratively using the ‘autonomy with collaboration’ principles: stability, optimisation, adaptation, policy and identity, as described in chapter 13. So, for example, where people or businesses were offering similar services, the co-ordinating group might help them find ways to provide slightly differing offerings, so they appealed to different customers, and to find ways of working with each other when needed, if they were short staffed or overloaded. The objective would be for each to have a stable and sufficient clientele, not to expand at the expense of each other.

One aspect of this co-ordination that is crucial to making this vision work is an effective method of handling conflicts (part of the 'stability' principle). Conflicts always occur in community groups and are one of the most common reasons they fail. At present, there is often no organised or expected way of handling conflicts in groups. It isn't a normal part of most cultures. And worst, there isn't much pressure on people to find a constructive solution. If both parties to a conflict genuinely seek a way through, it is usually possible to find one. If one or both aren't interested, it is very difficult.

Thus a vital part of building a resilient community exchange is to build in the expectation that conflict will be handled constructively. It needs to be part of the rules for joining, one of the values expected of members. In fact, it is one major reason why some kind of membership commitment is likely to be needed. This would then be supported by an agreed procedure to follow if those concerned weren't able to come to agreement by themselves. A small group of trained conflict handlers would be needed.