Co-operative Economic Strategies for Sustainable, Respectful, Responsible Development: Prosperity, fairly spread, within, and between, Generations

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Sustainable development not only involves raising the wealth and wellbeing of a community, but also ensuring that wellbeing processes sustain over time.

There are five ways in which wealth leaks away from a community. Each needs a sustainable-wealth strategy:

• **Theft from the Commonweal.** The most blatant way in which communities are impoverished is by theft of shared community assets. Normally, fingers of accusation for such anti-social acts are pointed at the poorest members of communities. However, theft by the rich is, by far, the most serious matter: on grand scales, the theft of Africa's resources, the theft of England - by William the 'Conqueror'- are notable examples. However, the theft of the Trustee Savings Bank (the 'TSB' or 'Penny Bank') during Margaret Thatcher's piratisations is one more recent example.

The strategy for dealing with this probably includes the concept of 'active co-operative stewardship by the community', rather than delegated 'representative' ownership by state organisations (directly or by Quangos).

• **The Fat Cattery Issue.** If external workers come into an area and extract high wages, salaries and perks from the work of that area, then immediate resentment and long-term impoverishment follows. Such exploitation can be by non-resident employers, non-resident workers coming into the community and so on.

One strategy for dealing with this is to measure the spread of local incomes and, so, make sure that non-resident workers receive local wages (perhaps supplemented by their travel costs to and from work).

• **The Landowner Issue.** Local people are impoverished when local land-based resources are in the hands of external owners. Such land resources are, both, within the local area (external landlords charging rents for local residential and business accommodation) and, also, external to the locality (external landlords selling food, energy and raw materials into the locality). These factors clearly need multiple strategies if wealth is not to be leached away from the area.

Of the many such strategies for avoiding this pit-fall, one action is the gradual transfer of local land-ownership into the local stewardship of local land trusts, which would then lease local land resources to local co-operative businesses. In their turn, these local co-operatives would then pay local co-operatives' taxation and rent to the local community trusts and/or Community Banks, to make local community work possible and, also, to make grants to more those in need elsewhere.

Local food growing is also worthy of local action: recent developments in 'urban agriculture' in places like Cuba merit investigation, as do local recycling schemes for materials' and energy recovery.

Likewise, local co-operative housing and co-housing strategies retain local housing rents, along with the benefits of local stewardship of the local environment.

• **The External Employer Issue**. Local employment by non-local employers is a prime route to local impoverishment. External investment only lasts as long as local profits are possible, and when these evaporate, the jobs go.

This suggests that local investment by the community, for the whole community's benefit, is the antidote. Local worker- and stakeholder community- co-operatives are clearly the answer (for work in the market-sector and the monopoly-sector respectively). If these co-operatives carry out Annual Co-operative Audits - to show their fidelity to the Seven Co-operative Principles of the International Co-operative Alliance - community wellbeing (through ICA Principle Seven) will be ensured.

• **'The Money-Lender Issue'.** The Jubillee2000 activities have shown the astonishing effect of the debt-plus-interest spiral. These wealth-sapping mechanisms act both upon, and within, communities, creating inequalities in both wealth- and wellbeing.

Local credit-creation through local, public service Community Banks are clearly called for. At the individual level, interest-free credit unions are inclusive structures (interest-based variants are not available to certain ethical and religious groups), while not-for-profit, commercial credit for co-operative businesses (and local public services) can be delivered through the not-for-profit, Community Banks referred to above.

In conclusion:

- Theft from the Commonweal, Income inequality, the payments of Rents, Dividends and Interest are all corrosive of community wellbeing.

(This is because they all lead to financial, and functional, inequalities that are of benefit to no one: rich, poor and middle income alike. Richard Wilkinson's books 'Unhealthy Societies' - Routledge, London 1997 - and ‘Mind the Gap’ - Weidenfield and Nicolson, London 2000) contains the relevant epidemiological and sociological evidence for such analysis.)

- Inclusive, co-operative structures – demonstrably operating according to the Statement of The Co-operative Identity (The International Co-operative Alliance, Manchester 1995) - maximise local wealth creation, and ensure that prosperity is not only sustainably created, but is evenly spread: within and between generations.

Without strategies to ensure 'prosperity, fairly spread', social and environmental poverty will always be with us.

However, the positive news is that, with work to 'build-in' wealth-retention structures, sustainable development becomes truly sustainable:

- a world of locally created, and locally determined, co-operation.

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