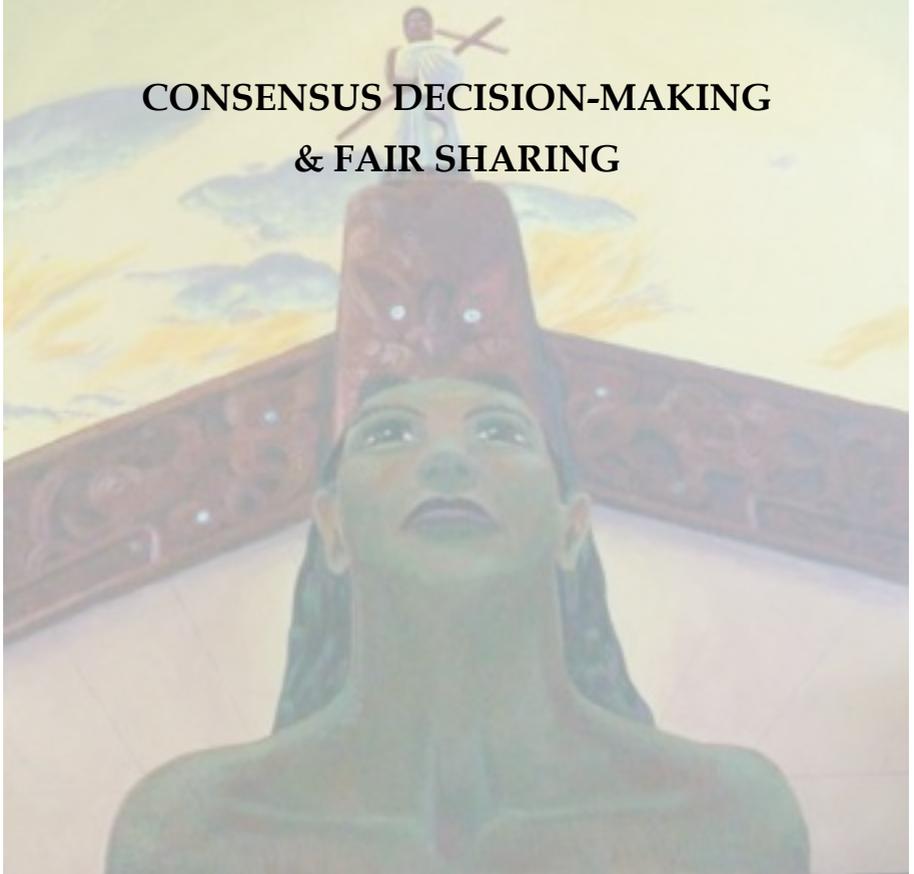


COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

**CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING
& FAIR SHARING**



A VISION OF OUR POTENTIAL

GARY WILLIAMS

Water & Soil engineer - Biodynamic farmer - Permaculture activist - Natural philosopher

Gary and his partner Emily live on a small farm where there is a wide diversity of farming and forestry activities, from home gardens and orchards to staple crops, animal grazing, firewood and plantation forests, and wilderness. Their stewardship of this land is guided by the principles of permaculture and the practices and methods of organic and biodynamic agriculture. They have a bio-filtered swimming pool and an eco-building farm stay for short-term rental.

Gary is a teacher of permaculture and provides advise and design assistance to people and communities seeking a more resilient and sustaining way of living, which reflects the nature of their place.

Gary works from home as a professional engineer in the field of water and soil resources. His academic qualifications are: Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Science (Physics) and Master of Commerce.

Author and publisher of:

“Community Democracy – A Study in Alternative Economics”
1977, 145 pages.

“Patterns of Exchange – A Study in Human Understanding” 1988,
401 pages.

“Out of the Helix – Essays on Cultural Transformation” 2006,
275 pages.

This pamphlet is the third of three, and describes a governance system that is socially equitable and mimics natural systems.

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Democracy means people power, or rule by the people for the people. But which of the people rule and for whose benefit?

In the large centralised nation states of our present world, where there is a form of democratic governance, it is one of a few people representing large electorates, who are easily influenced by lobbyists for the rich and socially powerful.

Where the social aims of these large states revolve around material consumption and comfort, and economic activity is controlled by private enterprises for ownership profits, politics becomes subservient to economics and the power of money and wealth or capital.

Social aims and economic activities are, though, defined and directed by laws, standards and regulations that are decided through governance structures and political processes.

Power can be taken by force of arms, intellectual prowess or emotional manipulation, but fundamentally it has to be given, however begrudgingly — orders have to be accepted. It does involve an imbalance, but the needs of all parties do have to be considered in some way to sustain the arrangement.

The tools of power may be superior weapons and extensive surveillance systems, but social power is a matter of belief and imagination. It depends on stories of origins and purpose, and ultimately words can be more powerful than guns.

This basis in imagination allows both great extremes of power and sudden radical alteration.

Can a participatory democracy, based around collaboration and cooperation for the common good, have a governance system that is socially resilient and allows large complex societies to be dynamically stable?

The present crisis of political economy can provide the opportunities, provided we have formed the seeds, to sprout vigorously in the social clearings.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

THE NATURE OF POWER

To have power is to be able to do something or influence something or someone. Its derivation is from the verb 'to be able'. In its social sense, power is derived from relationships and the control that can be exercised over exchanges or transactions that take place between people or groups of people. It is generally understood as implying an imbalance, where someone has power over others, because they have been given authority or they have superior strength or skill. It can be exercised directly by threat or deed, and indirectly through sanctions or conventions that are accepted by the parties involved, willingly or unwillingly, and either through explicit or implicit agreement.

Power can be taken, physically by strength of arms, or by intellectual prowess and emotional control or manipulation. But there has to be some level of acceptance by those who are controlled or manipulated. At its most basic level power is given. Influence and leadership is given by the people who agree to accept what is said or ordered, while leadership can be imposed on someone, as their social duty or responsibility to the group.

Power is achieved by many different means, and can be exercised in different ways. It arises from differences, and the organisation of people into separable groups with different backgrounds, capabilities and skills. The more complex and diversified the social group or society, the greater the power that can be exercised, and the more differentiated the power structures and the inter-play of different types of power and control.

The development of power relationships is as much a derivative of cooperation as of competition. The understanding of power and the sharing of power is learnt through the give and take of life and the negotiating of inter-personal or social arrangements.

Life is full of unbalanced relationships, which we have to negotiate our way around, and all the parties to a relationship have to change or alter their behaviour to accommodate the respective needs or desires of the differing participants.

At the start of life a relationship, and bonding, develops between the baby and its mother, as they both work out the breast-feeding relationship. Children and parents, who have very different understandings, perspectives, needs and skills have to develop child-parenting relationships. There is an on-going give and take that is responsive to the different needs of child and parent. Founded on a basic unconditional acceptance of each other, a cooperation develops to satisfy competing needs in a way that respects the differences and different personal characteristics and social roles of the parents and children.

Acceptance into a group allows negotiations and cooperative agreements, whether to work together or to compete among themselves, as in children's games. Child play is a training ground and forerunner of the myriad of social relationships of our lives and how we deal with differences and come to common agreements.

Any large and complex society must have accepted conventions of manners and appropriate behaviour; formal structures of authority and decision-making; a legal framework within which family, social and economic activities take place; and rules and regulations with respective enforcement procedures and agencies. Underlying these arrangements and requirements are the beliefs and values that define and give coherence to a social group or society, and provide a cultural identity. Power is often assumed because of social norms and the designated positions people have, and derived from cultural beliefs and world-views.

Societies, like eco-systems, benefit from diversity and exchanges based on differences — of resources, capabilities and skills, knowledge and technologies. The different capabilities and

wherewithal of the participants allows beneficial exchanges, but also gives rise to power and the ability to extract unequal shares.

For predator and prey there is a very different outcome from the exchange, for individuals at least, but for the predator-prey relationship to be sustained there must be constraints on the predation. The dynamics of these exchanges has to balance the protection mechanisms of prey survival with the capture abilities of the predators. In a well functioning eco-system there is an inter-dependence between predator and prey, with predation maintaining the food supplies of both.

In grassland eco-systems with large grazing animals, the predation of the grazing animals by carnivores prevents over-grazing and ensures the cyclical regeneration of the grasses. Large migrating predatory fish in the oceans prevent the over-population of areas by other fish, and hence allow more diversified and productive eco-systems. The inter-play of protective and capture mechanisms gives rise to diversified eco-systems that increase the overall productivity and biomass of the system, and its internal resilience and ability to cope with external shocks or disruptions.

The power of certain species, to satisfy their needs and expand their populations, is more apparent than real, and it is constrained by the interactions and dependences of the larger systems they are part of. There are feedback loops that govern behaviour and control excesses.

In social relations, power is also constrained by capabilities and dependencies, but its basis in imagination and beliefs allows more extreme concentrations of power and excessive exercise of the advantages of power. The feedback loops are more abstract and dependent on knowledge about implications and understanding of consequences.

THE DYNAMICS OF POWER

The increasing size of human groups has made the dynamics of power more complex, and increased both the need for cooperation within the group and competition between groups. In the larger societies of civilisation, technological advances have much increased the capacity and sophistication of these societies, and hence the means of control. Privileged elites have developed that can maintain their social position, and extract a relatively large surplus for their exclusive use and enjoyment.

Technology has given rise to more powerful weapons, better communication systems and greater organisational capacity. This has allowed more centralised control by fewer people. The physical power from weaponry can be monopolised. Access to and the use of knowledge can be controlled by professional classes. And social conventions and belief systems can be defined and maintained by a cultural elite.

There are, thus, power bases in social influence and political institutions, in commercial enterprises or skills, and in knowledge and cultural belief systems. In simple tribal groups the social or political power may be dispersed and changeable within the group or have some structure and hierarchy, but there could also be other specialised power bases in craft skills and healing knowledge, and through story telling and the rights to perform ceremonies and control belief systems.

In more complex settled societies, which sustained themselves within given, and territorially defined areas, the power bases would become more formal and well-defined, as political, commercial or economic, and cultural or religious power. Political power is exercised through governance institutions and having the authority to make decisions for and on behalf of others. This sets the rules of behaviour and determines rights and responsibilities. Economic power is derived from the rules around commercial activities and the provision of goods and services. Ownership, which defines access rights to resources

and services, is critical to economic power, and its differentiation from political power. Control of the means of exchange, or the money supply, is also fundamental to economic power.

Cultural power is more dependent on ideas and abstractions of the mind, and persuading others to a particular point of view. It depends on an ability to express ideas in convincing ways, or using artistic skills that give form and expression to thoughts and feelings. It is held by the opinion-makers and the story tellers, whose words can be more powerful than the gun, because it is about who we are and the purpose of our lives. The stories that explain our origins and social aims are especially powerful.

These different forms of power interact in multiple and complex ways. They have different methods and they are maintained, lost or extended in different ways. They may be countervailing and provide a dynamic balance that maintains a relatively stable social system, or one form may dominate and extend its power and influence into the other power domains, at least for a period of time.

Changing power structures and the relative strength or importance of different power bases is, thus, a very complex and highly unpredictable process. Underlying this social power is, though, a basic acceptance of the way of life the society promotes and maintains, at least by an effective majority of the population.

Changing the story and emphasising different values and purposes for life can, therefore, be the most effective way of changing power relationships and the exercise of power. If authority is not accepted, it disappears. A power vacuum can then form, and what arises in its place depends on the alternatives available and how persuasively they are promoted or instituted. A well formulated and understood option, which can be well described and explained would have a clear advantage in filling this vacuum.

POWER STRUCTURES

The action place of life is always the present, and understanding present conditions is the first prerequisite for bringing about change. Then you need a vision and the means to achieve it, but also an understanding of the dynamics of system changes.

Civilisations and power structures form, grow, mature and then collapse or die. They have a natural life, like all of life on Earth. This can be seen in terms of military and political changes, changing commercial activities and the economic use of resources, or through changes in cultural awareness and perspective. The time span of this birth to death process, though, depends on a complex interplay of these different sources of power, their social integration, and the depth and durability of acceptance by all sectors of society.

Unfortunately, humans are very quick to use violence or the threat of violence to resolve differences of opinion and proposed direction, or potential conflicts over natural resources and the use of economic or social services. The use of overt force is an only too common way of changing power structures and the people in control. We do, though, even more quickly try to manipulate and control others through words and emotional blackmail. Social elites will use selective information or mis-information to control the thoughts and feelings of people and the cultural mindset of their society.

The background to most power structures and changes in the power relationships is organised force.

From a pattern perspective, the spiral of social life with its shifts in power and control, can be understood as similar to the growth and destruction of forests, in the succession that occurs from burnt, eroded or otherwise destroyed forest back to mature climax forest. There is the clear-felling of military invasion and pillage, which completely destroys existing social relations and power structures. In this case, there is a one-off plundering of

what existed, with little thought for the future, and with raw power relations of conquest and expropriation. Occupation and colonisation is less crude, but involves repressive control through military and politico-legislative means, with slavery or an oppressed section of people undertaking much of the economic and social work. There is, though, an elite who are intending to stay and retain their advantages, and thus they have to give some consideration to the needs of the working masses.

A feudal arrangement involves chiefs and overlords, but there are longer term obligations and acceptance of social duties for the common good, with a shared cultural view about life. There can be strict hierarchies in the power relations and a rigidity of social roles and expectations, but there is sufficient sharing to generally retain overall acceptance, if begrudgingly – and with periodic revolts that have to be forcibly repressed.

Larger and more technologically advanced societies, with wider trading networks, have a greater inter-dependence and connectivity, and require a more cooperatively based acceptance of the social modus operandi. The social and economic institutions are more complex with more formal arrangements and legal requirements. Specialisation provides some division of power and potential checks and balances, depending on the social cohesion of the population. The organisational and resourcing demands of these societies does, though, engender a social conformity internally and a competitive approach externally.

State suppression and intolerance can become endemic, while there is an increased likelihood of large-scale and destructive warfare. The complexity and diversity of power relations and influence does, at the same time, generate the potential for more inclusiveness and respect for differences and a live-and-let-live attitude.

A higher level of cooperation can then give rise to a more participatory democracy based on consensus decision-making

and the networking of relationships that provides feedback loops and social resilience. This is, then, the more complex and mature society that can have a much greater social diversity and productivity, as well as engendering a greater social health and resilience. The governance forms of this type of democracy is the focus of this essay.

At any stage there is the potential for regression or collapse back to a more simplistic and exploitative arrangement, as well as the development of more diversified and socially productive arrangements. This degeneration can come about from internal dislocations and social disruptions, from an over-exploitation of the natural environment and support base of the society, the running down and exhaustion of the energy basis of the society and its way of living, or a complete civilisation collapse from an overwhelming combination of adverse impacts and losses.

There is an increasing potential for social decay and collapse as human societies become larger and more complex. They become ever more fragile with size, due to our generally poor managerial capabilities, the ease with which power corrupts and selfishness and greed take over, and our poor levels of communication and empathy with large and diverse populations.

Each stage has, though, its particular power relations and social structures, and the tendencies or trends of change derive from its position in this spiral of social life. In this social cycling and recycling, wherever any society is conditions the opportunities for change and the constraints. And there is an overall dynamic that repeats, but like a spiral and unlike a circle, not exactly, and not without accumulated developments and longer term or larger system changes.

The present position is, therefore, the starting point for further change, and different societies will be in different places and have different change potentials. The participatory democracy that is proposed here involves a major transformative change, but from a society that has democratic traditions and trends. It is not a

vision for all societies or all of humanity, rather a step up in participation and power sharing from a given democratic basis, to provide the governance arrangements for a healthier and more resilient way of living in a large and technologically sophisticated society.

What is critical to any real change in the power relations and governance structures of the present 'western democracies', is an understanding of the predominance of economic power, and especially the overriding power of finance and private ownership. The globalisation of the world economy and the power of money has given rise to extreme concentrations of wealth and hence power, and the development of extremely large transnational corporations. These corporations are profit driven, where a managerial elite directs activities to maximise financial returns to uninvolved shareholders. There is then very little consideration for the welfare of people or the planet. At the same time, political institutions have been developed around large nation states and centralised governance. This makes them the political partners of the economic conglomerates.

This social context provides both the potential and the challenge.

TRANSFORMATION

The rapid development of physical and technological power, based on extensive and readily available energy sources, and of social specialisation and organisational capacity, has enabled humans to transform whole landscapes and environments everywhere on the Earth. There has been an extraordinary growth phase, with rapidly compounding growth in the human population and in its production/consumption levels.

The natural dynamic of such growth is one of stepwise increases and development, where a well-functioning system integration gives rise to progressive changes that build on each other. This growth phase is expansionary and exploitative of resources, to

convert as much as possible to fuel the growth. It is all about taking, not giving.

The decay and breakdown side of the cycle of birth, growth, maturity and death, follows a different dynamic. It is much faster and much more transforming. This destructive degeneration provides, however, the opportunities for new life and in some circumstances opens the way for something radically different. The seeds of a different way of living, which develop within the structures and activities of the old ways, but are currently stifled and blocked by the prevailing social conditions, can then sprout and flourish.

Death allows re-birth with a different nature, and the extreme imbalances of our present lifestyles require a destructive re-balancing, but at the same time provide the opportunities for transformative re-building. The realisation of this transformative potential depends on the seeds present and the impetus for radical change and re-ordering when the opportunities arise.

There are other alternatives: of collapse back to war lords; feudal-like hierarchies with dominating elites; and a strict control over social relations based on rigidly held cultural or religious beliefs.

The most salient areas of social change for this transformation is governance or decision-making and the means for providing the requirements of life, most fundamentally economic goods and services. What I am putting forward is a natural governance alongside a natural economics. Social governance processes and structures that mimic the regulation and responsiveness of natural eco-systems, just as a natural economics is based on the productive processes of eco-systems.

Governance sets the framework for social and economic activities, and the sharing of what economic activities provide. Underlying both governance and economics is the cultural view of life and our world, which defines values and determines priorities. Fundamental to any re-direction and shift to a more

inclusive and connected way of living, which is integrated into the wider world we inhabit and its natural processes, is a cultural transformation, a profound re-orienting of our worldview.

The character of this more fundamental transformation is beyond this essay, which is focused on the form and functioning of a natural governance.

The values that underly this governance are, though, understood to be based on respect for all life, a sensitive awareness and responsiveness that engenders a sense of responsibility, and an understanding of our roles and obligations in this life. The aims of social living are around support and nourishment at all levels, to allow healthy, productive and creative living for all social groups and individuals. This society then reflects at a larger level the individual integration of our bodily eco-system, where all the individual cells are nourished, and all roles are supported in appropriate ways and with respect for their differences and recognition of their essential complementarity.

The present centrally controlled economy with its extremely large commercial entities and ferocious exploitation has to be localised and re-directed towards cooperative enterprise and common shared ownership. Similarly, the centralised state, with its reliance on fear and suppression to order and control social activities and behaviour, has to be decentralised to local communities and re-directed towards consensus decision-making and active citizen participation.

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The word democracy comes from Greek, and essentially means people power, or rule by the people. Democracy has, though, a long history and there have been many variations in the way people power has been exercised. The people who have a say can also vary, and in ancient Greece it was only 'free men' who

could participate, and bonded men or slaves were excluded, as were women.

The most common form of democracy in the world today is **representative democracy**, where representatives are elected by large numbers of people, in defined electorate areas, and these representatives then exercise the power and make the decisions. There can be a number of levels of authority, from community boards and local district councils, to regional, provincial, state and federal authorities. In general, there is a hierarchy of authority, with the powers, responsibilities and revenue sources of the different levels determined from the top down.

It is a form of democracy that has developed in nation states with strong central governments that have been able to exercise authority through sophisticated technologies, of communication and information collection, and of powerful weapons and the means of surveillance and control.

There may be different voting procedures and different arrangements for the exercise of executive (or operational) and legislative (law making) functions. These differences are, however, relatively trivial, and only marginally affect the principle features of centralisation of power at the top, and its concentration in the hands of a few people.

The focus on economic outputs and continuous economic growth, and the power of money and finance in the present globalised world, has substantially altered political power and how and for whom it is exercised. Instead of being the higher or sovereign power, it had become largely subservient to economic priorities and the requirements of commerce and business.

The representatives of the central state authority, being few in number and representing very large populations, have very limited capacity and very weak relationships with the people they are meant to represent. They are prey to lobbyists, who are paid to provide selective information and influence by whatever

means works to the advantage of their payers. Money buys influence, and this extends to what are meant to be public services, but which have become government services. Instead of providing independent advice to a succession of governments, public employees now work to provide what the government of the day demands.

Representative democracy has been taken over by the power of money, while its cultural focus is on material consumption, private ownership and individual rights. It is, anyway, structurally prone to co-option by established elites and well organised professionals.

Centralised democracy is based on a hierarchy of voting from the lowest level up to the top central authority. There is a democratic voting for local representatives at the lowest community level of governance, and then these political representatives vote for the next level of local government, and local government politicians elect the regional or provincial level, and these politicians elect the central state authority. In this system of democracy there is a direct accountability. The relatively small number of voters at each level (for each representative) means they have a better understanding of the relevant issues and the people who are making the decisions, with easier feedback of information and hence decision-making transparency.

There is no need for separate political parties with polarities of political positions and general public debate of issues and the differences in values and priorities that underlie political decision-making. The debates and resolving of differences take place internally at each level of government. A central democratic system thus tends to have a single political party, as it is really a non-party approach to democracy. The political party is a governance organisation whose role is to educate a political cadre and maintain political and cultural values.

The inherent hierarchy of this approach, and the concentration of power and final authority at the top, makes it prone to

favouritism and family nepotism. To obtain political power one has to become a dedicated member of the political system and play by its rules. Advancement up the system relies on influencing and persuading colleagues, who are the electors for the next level up.

In large technologically complex societies this form of democracy easily gives rise to a highly bureaucratic and centrally controlled state system. Again, the final decision-making being at the highest central level, with little autonomy or political responsiveness at lower community levels, gives rise to a privileged elite. Political power and state control is used directly in this case, rather than indirectly through financial and commercial power and influence-buying.

At a small scale in communities and work places, there are many examples of more cooperative and participatory governance and decision-making. The democratic impulse, of people managing their own affairs collectively, has been very actively applied at a local community level within modern-day nation states. It hasn't just been about the power structures of the central state and its bureaucracies with their different functions and roles.

Challenging top-mandated power and central control, and its replacement with a bottom-up delegation of power and participatory decision-making has also been the common aim of the anarchist movement. Many different arrangements of community-based decision-making have been tried out with varying degrees of success, with workplace (or economic) based cooperatives being the most long lasting.

Managing abuses of power in large societies with powerful technologies that enable a wide reach and scope for influence and control is a major challenge. While there have been attempts, so far there has been no society-wide democratic political system, which has been based on local decision-making and non-violent ways of resolving differences, while managing the complex social decision-making of large technologically sophisticated societies.

A democracy based on the local community as its fundamental unit, a common-good focus with consensus decision-making by all affected participants, and power mandated by local communities and delegated up, requires a profound cultural shift. It can not be imposed by force of arms or by manipulative influence and external threats. It has to arise directly from the people, for their own mutual benefit, through alliance making, and with clear recognition of constraints and limitations and how differences are to be managed. At the same time, it has to be based on an ethic of fairness and mutual respect, and structured in a way that prevents the development of a privileged elite.

THE HUMAN CONDITION

Any social structure, if it is to be effective and last, must take cognisance of our human nature, in its generality, and in its variability and diversity of cultural and individual expression. We may live in large and highly organised societies with very sophisticated and pervasive technologies, which profoundly affect our day-to-day living and its supporting structures, but we remain human beings, evolved from a primate lineage within the wider all-encompassing context of life on planet Earth.

Primates are social species, with a wide range of social structures and dynamics, from the dominant male of gorilla groups to the fluid dynamics and alliances of howler monkeys. Both social power arrangements and territorial definition or rights vary greatly across primate species, and there is an interesting similarity in the diversity of social arrangements of human societies, through cultural rather than biological variations.

There are, though, biological pre-conditions and influences that give rise to our social arrangements, albeit with a flexibility and malleability from our large-brained intelligence, with its ability to modify or re-direct our more basic biological conditioning and influences. We have an in-built tendency to recognise and accept

leadership and command hierarchies, as well as an opposite tendency towards group collaboration and alliance-making for mutual benefit on an equal-share basis. We respect individual rights and equal worth, while also respecting positions of privilege and the rights of elites to have much more than everyone else.

People also differ in what it is they look to for guidance and for cues about how to behave. As a social species, with complex social arrangements, most people take their cues from other people, who, for whatever reason, influence them. They feel most at ease relaxing with a group of friends or family, and are renewed and energised by this person-to-person contact. A minority of people, however, are more oriented towards their surroundings and what is happening around them. They maintain more of an awareness of their environment and respond in accordance with changes in that environment. They seek solace and renewal away from people within an environment they relate to.

This difference is socially important, and has obvious survival and adaptation benefits. Some members of the group have to watch what is happening in the surrounding environs, while most get on with the social relationships that are the essence of group living. There does, though, have to be clear communication between the environment watchers and the social organisers. In a complex technological society, this means between the technical professionals and the political and community leaders or opinion-makers. The decision-making processes have to incorporate the technical awareness and understanding of people with specific training and experience, alongside community prioritising and values assessments.

Individuals are also more suited to particular roles, and there are definite personality types that fit different social and decision-making roles. A recognition of personal strengths and weaknesses, and the different skills needed for particular roles, is

a further requirement for good governance. A social structure that allows, and encourages, the right people to fill the various positions and roles of politics and social decision-making, will be more effective, as well as more harmonious. At the same time, there has to be an understanding of the essential connectedness and interdependence of people in their varying roles, with an equitable distribution of power and rewards, as well as responsibilities.

A PEOPLE'S GOVERNANCE

What could a system of governance look like that was by the people and for the benefit of all people equitably, given our human condition and its variability? A governance where the relationships and structures encourage our collaborative abilities and cooperative attitudes, with an emphasis on the common good, respect for differences and acknowledgement of our dependence on the natural world that supports and nourishes us as one species of life on Earth.

A cultural viewpoint that engenders these values would have to underpin this system of governance, and there is a necessary interdependence of values and worldview with social systems and decision-making processes. However, given an appropriate worldview, what could this organisational structure of priority setting and decision-making look like.

What follows is one possible arrangement, which is put forward as a potential that we can imagine, and then reach for when there are encouraging and enabling circumstances. The local community level can be implemented most easily, and the whole social structure does not have to be implemented all together at once. There would be different possible developmental paths, depending on the circumstances and responses, but a social transformation would be required, and it would be all

encompassing and bring about fundamental changes in the most basic aspects of social living.

It is founded on local communities as the fundamental units of social living, but has levels of governance and more complex arrangements than simply one vote per person. This complexity is based on an ecosystem bio-mimicry applied to our social arrangements. There are 'trophic' levels of dependence and connection, as well as feedback controls and limitations on the exercise of higher powers. The nexus of cooperation and competition is balanced by common ground rules and social structures than ensure a sharing of power.

Local Community

A local community board would govern a local area, and be responsible for the use, management and preservation of their local environment, lands and waterways, as well as for basic services. It would make decisions in a fully participatory way, where finding a consensus on the common good is the primary aim.

As a small social group, with connections of family and friendships, and a shared interest in and responsibility for their commons, there would be a willingness to engage with the trust and goodwill that is needed for consensus decision-making. These groups of extended families and neighbours (whanau) would hold the rights and responsibilities of ownership (manawhenua). All residual powers, not explicitly delegated or allocated to other social authorities, would lie with this local community.

Membership of these local communities would be defined by place and associations with place, and every adult person would have to nominate their community. This would first occur when a person was considered to be an adult, for social decision-making purposes, and each person could be a part of just one community. A person could change their community status at

the time of elections for other authorities, as outlined further below.

It is assumed that these communities are relatively stable, with people having a direct connection to their place and its natural character, and that they provide at least some of their basic needs themselves, as a small community.

Bioregion

Bioregions would be defined by natural and social borders, which give a definite character to the regions, and sufficient size and diversity to provide the necessities of a livelihood that reflects the specific nature of each region. Bioregions would, then, be natural catchment areas that have a recognisable identity, and a social and economic functionality.

The bioregions would be made up of districts that were clusters of local communities. District and Regional authorities would be the principal operational authorities of government. Most of the tax revenue of government would be collected and spent by the bioregion authorities, including the local community boards.

Cities could be part of a district or be a separate territorial authority, depending on their size and relationship with their hinterland. Large metropolitan areas would have to be split up according to social and infrastructure reasons, more than by landscapes and the natural environment. The general governance arrangements would also have to be different, but this large city dwelling is not really appropriate to a natural way of living that is the basis of this community-based governance and its natural economics.

The way this governance arrangement could be applied to large cities that have a high degree of dependence on other places for their sustenance and functionality is, therefore, not specifically considered.

A district would, then, be formed from a cluster of adjacent communities (hapu) that had shared interests, socially or concerning their natural environment. Every local community in a district would select, say, 3 people as their delegates for the District authority. The people on each district authority would determine an agreed method of decision-making, within social guidelines of the values and protocols (kaupapa) of the society.

This would include the principle of seeking consensus on all proposals by clearly determining and respecting differences of opinion, obtaining relevant information and working through options and different ways of achieving acceptable outcomes that are for the greater benefit of the whole district. There would always be a facilitator for all authority meetings, whose job is to guide the process and ensure fair hearing and mutual respect by and for all members. This facilitator would be selected by the authority members, and the role could be shared or rotated among members. On complex issues, technical knowledge and information could be provided by professional people with recognised experience and expertise.

If an important decision could not be made after a number of rounds, then there would be a fall-back voting method, which would have to be pre-determined, as part of the agreed decision-making method.

The Regional authority would be constituted and function in a similar way to the district authorities, with each district authority selecting two delegates from their membership. The next larger level, of the Provincial authority, would, however, also appoint one person for each district, being anyone within the district, to again give three delegates in total for each district.

At this regional level there would be a professional support staff, including technical professionals, and the meeting facilitators would also be independent professionals. An important role of these professionals would be to ensure appropriate information and knowledge is taken into account in the decision-making, and

hence there is a balance between political priority setting and 'external' realities and pertinent facts.

In this bioregion structure, it is the responsibility of the delegates to feedback to their districts and local communities, and ensure a free and clear flow of information between the local communities and their district and regional authorities. These authorities are made up of delegates, who are there to act for and on behalf of their communities of interest.

Consensus decision-making allows any proposal to be put on hold, and further information obtained and options investigated. Local communities can, therefore, at any time, call in their delegates, to actively participate in a decision, and they can change their delegates if they go through their own consensus decision-making about this.

At this level of governance, which is the really effective operational level, there are no elections, and decision-making is through consensus processes, albeit with delegates at the larger scale. Technical expertise and experience is made available, and may be of significance for appointed delegates, but is generally provided by independent professionals. The aim is to ensure a fair sharing of power and decision-making, and a cooperative approach across the bioregion that will maintain the common heritage and resources of the region, within the limits and requirements of its natural ecosystems.

State Province

Beyond natural bioregions, societies become largely a social construct. At this level, then, cultural factors, such as language, ethnicity, religion and social affiliations become more defining. The initial state level could then be provinces, which have sufficient size to provide higher level services, for instance in education, health and infrastructure, without becoming too large and distant socially or for political representation. As state authorities, they would have coordination and guidance

functions, as well as operational functions, such as tertiary education and health facilities, higher courts and law enforcement agencies, and more centralised power, transport and communication services. The definition of provincial boundaries would then depend on both social character and infrastructure networks and service patterns.

At this level of governance there would be a combination of direct election of representatives (by all adults in the province, using regional electorates) and selected delegates from the regional authorities of the bioregions. There would be one house of parliament with two selection methods. There would also have to be provincial ministries of permanently employed public servants to provide independent advice to the political decision-makers, who would change from election to election.

The objective of this level of government is to provide a linkage between the on-the-ground community decision-making and operational functions of the local and bioregion governance, and the legislative and regulatory or standards-setting functions of the central authority of the nation state. There could also be constitutional requirements for certain state-level decisions to be agreed to by all the provincial parliaments.

Nation State

The nation state is an outcome of social development with increasing organisational complexity and technological sophistication. In the governance arrangement being put forward, the coordination and legal or standard-setting functions are retained for an authority that encompasses a defined national entity. However, its authority would be restrained rather than absolute, as a derivative authority in governance terms while having the wider powers of a national authority. The linking of national power with final authority or sovereignty that has arisen through centralisation is then cut or even reversed, with residual (undefined) powers being at the local community or bioregion

level. This is an essential part of the maturing of democracy in nation states.

To retain some separation of powers at this larger level, there would be two houses of parliament, elected in different ways, but with inter-dependent decision-making.

There would then be an executive branch elected in a similar way to the provincial parliaments. There would be direct elections of representatives by all adults using provincial electorates, and selected delegates from the provincial parliaments (by the members of each parliament).

The legislature would be made up of three sub-houses or colleges: one made up equally of men and women; one based on ethnicity or kin affiliation; and one based on cultural or religious beliefs. There would be direct elections for each of these colleges, with every adult voting for each college, based on their own selection within categories that would be defined from national statistics. Electoral enrollment would then require an affirmation of the voter's choice from available sub-divisions. People would vote for people like themselves, but with the separate representative groups having to make decisions through alliances, formed as required issue by issue.

The objective is a legislature that reflects the range of values and diversity of beliefs and customs within the defined nation state. Legislation would, thus, require the agreement of all three colleges of this legislative branch of central government.

Where legislative changes required significant changes in funding or additional funds, then both the executive and legislative houses would have to be in agreement. Similarly, any changes in taxation rates or in regulations that have substantial cost implications, proposed by the executive, would require the agreement of both houses.

What constituted agreement would have to be pre-defined, and any changes to governance institutions and conventions or

constitutions would have to be pre-defined as well, but with a higher standard of agreement. These governance or constitutional changes would be made through agreements at the bioregional or provincial level, and not by the central agencies themselves.

A ministerial cabinet would be formed from members of both houses, with ministries responsible to one house or the other, depending on their functions (policy and legal or regulatory and operational). After each election, the members of both houses would select three national leaders, and these three people would appoint the ministers (from either of the two houses).

The ministries would, as with the state provinces, be independent and responsible only to the parliaments as a whole. They would carry out the policies of governments and ensure regulations and standards are properly promulgated and overseen, but with the expertise and longer-term perspectives of the public servants within the ministries being taken into account. The ministers would be linkage people between the political parliaments and the professional ministries, and not directing or controlling of the ministries. In like manner, the leaders would be spokespeople for the nation, representing the views and aims of the people as a whole. Leadership would involve a careful and thoughtful understanding of issues and concerns, and a facilitating of effective response measures by expressing potential options in ways that people as a whole (across differences) can follow.

Elections would be held using a proportional representation system, where a number of people are elected from a given electorate by a single transferable vote. The electorates would have to be reasonably large for such multi-representative electorates. Candidates are voted for by a straight-forward 1, 2, 3 .. ranking, and they do not have to have any political affiliations or party associations.

Political grouping can take place, through alliances, but this system of proportional representation minimises party politics, political grandstanding, and party competitive behaviour.

FUNCTIONS & FUNDING

A governance structure is related to, and depends on, the social services that are provided collectively and the organisation of economic activities. Customary conventions and legal rights or requirements provide the framework within which social and economic activities take place, and hence relative access to the services and rewards of these activities. The outcomes of economic activities likewise influences government policies and political decision-making.

The community governance model put forward here is directly related to the form and functions of a natural economics, which I have outlined in a companion essay. Here, only the relationship between the different levels of government and the provision of services or infrastructural facilities, will be covered. However, the same principles of interdependence and connectedness of natural ecosystems applies, with a separation of powers but mutual obligations, respect for others and an understanding of the wider context and relationships. Governance as a social arrangement then reflects as a social system the same ordering and informing processes of natural ecosystems and organisms.

The local communities and bioregional authorities would be responsible for their own lands and waters, and for the provision of their basic necessities and social or economic services.

Revenue would be obtained through land rentals and resource taxes, and there would be a direct relationship between services provided and their funding through these use taxes. Local currencies could be issued by the local authorities, backed or redeemable by local tax payments, for economic exchanges within the local area or economy.

Revenue for state authorities would come from resource or extraction taxes of concentrated (and hence unevenly spread) mineral and energy sources, and from the management of larger interconnected resources such as ocean fisheries. The higher level services of the provincial level would also be funded by contributions from the community and bioregions, as a proportional share of rental or resource taxes. Asset taxes could be levied on capital or 'built' assets by provincial authorities, which would have coordinating and regulatory functions as well as providing the more wide ranging or regionally networked services.

The central nation-state government would have executive coordinating and standards setting roles internally, as well as external relations, including customs and immigration. It could exercise custom duties and excise taxes on state boundary exports and imports, and manage and charge for the use of non-physical resources such as electro-magnetic frequencies or air space and sea lanes. Financial services would be regulated at this level, with the national money supply managed and legal tender set by central government authorities. A transaction tax on all financial transactions would provide revenue as well as management control of banking services, discouraging potential financial speculation.

There would be a delegated power to tax incomes, but only for the purpose of income support and redistribution.

The central government would set national standards and protocols, and overall coordination requirements, as well as setting the levels (valuation proportions) of land rentals and resource taxes. This ensures a separation of revenue setting from expenditure powers, and between standards and their operational implementation. Central government decision-making would apply throughout the nation state, but its powers would be delegated to it from the local level.

In this way there is a leadership and governance hierarchy, but there is also a fundamental requirement for alliance building by local and bioregional communities in the defining of powers and power sharing arrangements.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

A participatory democracy requires more than the active involvement of people as citizens in their own affairs and the affairs of others who they interact with. It also requires a sharing of power that is fair and socially sustainable.

The critical levers of power are force of arms and control of information and communication systems. Who controls the police and military, and for whose benefit; and who controls the media of communication and surveillance along with the way knowledge is made socially accepted and passed on. The centralisation of power and control of modern nation states has arisen because of the development of powerful long distance weaponry and sophisticated organisational technologies, as well as from a concentration of power and wealth that has arisen, mostly within a capitalist economic system, where there has been weak political moderation of its inherent exploitation and expansionist aims.

A simplistic economic system has been combined with simple political systems, of representational democracy or autocratic rule. Economic activity is controlled by private enterprises, where ownership is purchased and then used to maximise financial rewards for the owners, while production and consumption is determined by very weakly regulated market forces.

There is little real planning, which is really applying social knowledge and intelligence, and low levels of political influence and engagement by most of the population.

A large complex society (organisationally and technologically) requires complex social and economic systems, which have a wide range of different forms with diverse, but integrated, functions. Participatory democracy has to have a complex form with different levels and governance arrangements. It is not simply some form of group consensus decision-making.

The control and management of the armed forces, police and internal surveillance, how it is done and who is in charge, is a critical matter for any well-functioning democracy. It is not simply a matter of a representative with nominal oversight, rather it must be fully embedded in the whole of the political structure, from locally based policing to a citizen-based national defense force. The same is true of the type of social media available and its openness to all, and of the procedures by which social knowledge is attained, accepted and maintained.

Democracy is not a simple thing, or a minor aspect of people's lives. It requires an active citizenry, involved at all levels, in the acquiring of information, forming of opinions and making decisions. It is not just a matter of form or structure, it also depends on functionality and a lively engagement within the social fabric.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

The nature, type and shares of social services and economic activities is defined by and through governance structures. Politics and economics go together hand-in-hand, and are two sides of the one social coin.

A fundamental change in the present global capitalist system, with its elites of corporate high managers and financial manipulators will require both economic shocks and political will and collaboration by the disenfranchised. It will not happen through some enlightened re-orientation of these elites to undermine their own privileges. Elites are always an arbitrarily

defined group of people who have taken power to themselves by whatever means. There is no natural law that defines some people as a superior group or class and hence more worthy than others – despite the attempts of elites and their underlings to so justify the superior positions.

They will alter conditions, and even forgo advantages for a time, to protect their privileged positions, reducing their rewards from privilege, but not changing the structural arrangements that define the privileges themselves. The basis of privilege only disappears through a withdrawal of acceptance by a sufficient mass of people to fatally undermine the maintenance of the privileges themselves. The fatal weakness is always the potential for collaborative rejection by the excluded masses of people.

Politics and economics support each other, in any sustained social system or society, and any sustainable alternative must have viable and integrated systems of governance and economics. Governance structures, including communication media, maintain the status quo, and a social transformation requires a very different system of governance along with very different arrangements for determining and managing social and economic activities.

The democracy of our present globally integrated nation states is actually a pale shadow of democracy, and constructing alternative decision-making and governance arrangements is as critical as developing alternative ways and means for undertaking our social and economic activities. An equitable, just and fair sharing society does not arise from one that has inherently unfair and inequitable systems of governance and economics. It requires an internal transformation.

The dilemma of radical change is the need for change on all fronts at the same time, and this requires particular transition conditions. It also requires an imaginable possibility, a potential alternative with some ideas about how it would be arranged and

how it would function. Some small-scale testing and trials are also very useful to obtain real experience and learnings.

In this essay I have outlined a potential community-based democratic system of governance, which could provide the decision-making and power sharing basis of an alternative, as a contribution to this imagining. There are, of course, other possibilities and potential alternatives that could achieve the same ends, and this possibility is my contribution to a visioning of a fairer and more socially sustainable way of living on our Earth.

Gary Williams

Spring 2014

Otaki, Aotearoa/New Zealand

www.waterscape.co.nz

Reconnect as communities.

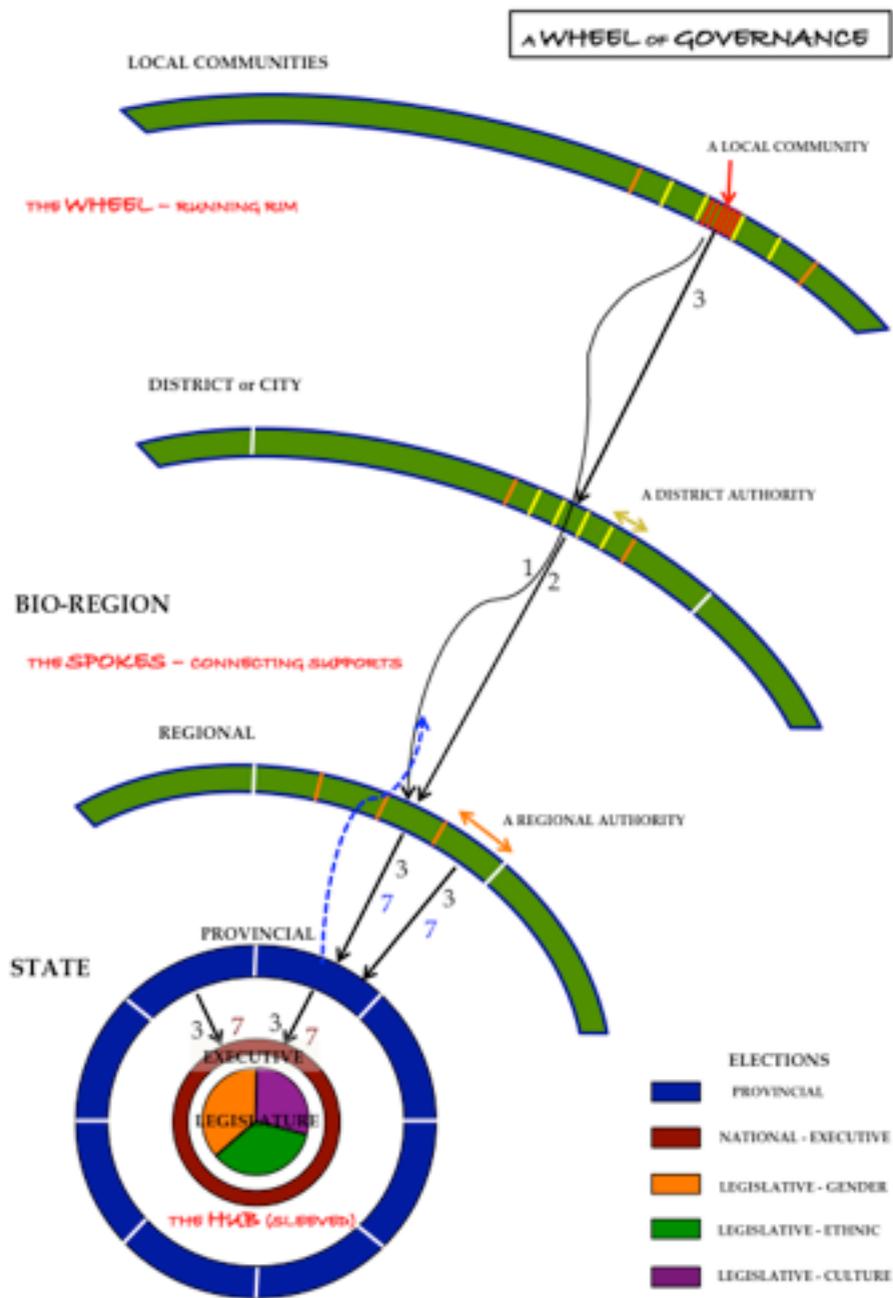
Share mindfully, work together collaboratively.

With thanks to Cooperative free-thinkers.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

A general outline of the proposed governance arrangement, with some indicative numbers for authority members, is given in the table below. The governance structure is also presented as a 'wheel' diagram, where governance rides on the local communities, as the basic unit of society.

GOVERNANCE	STRUCTURE	RESPONSIBILITY	FINANCES
LOCAL COMMUNITY	Community meeting of all adults or nominated delegates	Local lands and waters Local planning, services and facilities	Land rentals
BIO-REGION - DISTRICT/CITY	Local communities select 3 delegates each from their community	District environments District planning, services and facilities	Land rentals & resource taxes Local currency issue
BIO-REGION - REGION	Each District selects 2 delegates from its members; Province appoints 1 from district (any adult in district)	Regional coordination Whole watersheds Region justice, health and education services, and infrastructure	Land rentals & resource taxes Local currency issue
STATE - PROVINCE	Each Region selects 3 delegates from its members; all adults elect 7 representatives from region electorate	Province coordination guidelines & standards Tertiary health and education, justice and infrastructure networks	Delegated funds from the bioregions Concentrated resources taxes Capital asset taxes
STATE - NATION (EXECUTIVE)	Each Province selects 3 delegates from its members; all adults elect 7 representatives from province electorate	National coordination standards & regulations External relations, immigration, customs, justice system, ocean fisheries & resources	Customs & excise taxes Non-physical resources Transaction taxes on finances & issue of legal tender money Income taxes
STATE - NATION (LEGISLATURE)	3 houses of Parliament: Gender, Ethnicity, and Culture. All adults elect representatives in each of the 3 houses	Law making and setting of values Approval of treaties & international standards	Funded by the provinces
CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES – Proposed by National Executive; agreement by all Provinces			
RESIDUAL POWERS – Stay with the local communities and their bio-regional authorities			



THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF CIVILISATION

Structures of power and privilege & hierarchies of control

Laws of ownership & exclusive possession

Larger social groupings

Invasions by outsiders & constant struggle with pests, weeds and diseases

Increased productivity and range of goods and services

Class structure with hired hands, servants and slaves

Professional specialisation and skill development

Exploitation of people and the environment

Greater diversity, more tolerance, creativity stimulated

Control of marriage partners, multiple partners & sex by force and payment

Individual rights & laws protecting private property

Deadlier and more extensive warfare & control of people by fear

All men and women in monogamous pair relationships and families supported

Indifference and lack of concern, with impersonal markets and chains of command

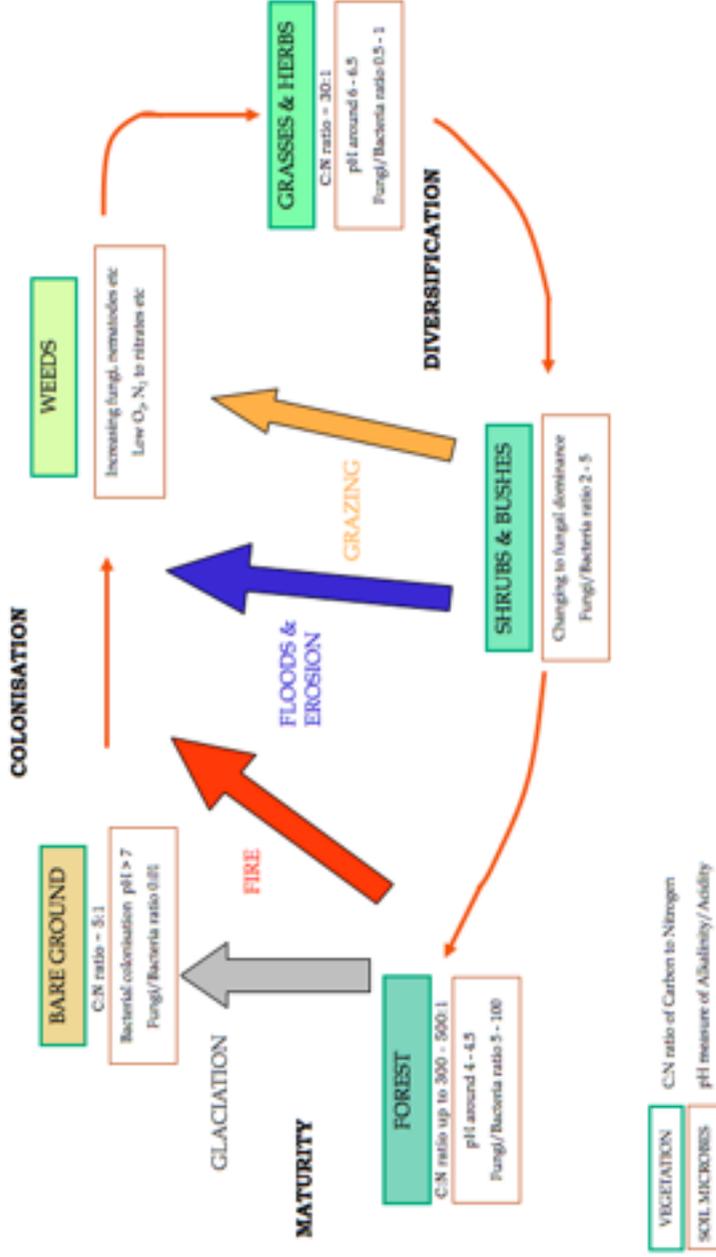
Rules of War - civilians excluded & women and children protected

Control of knowledge

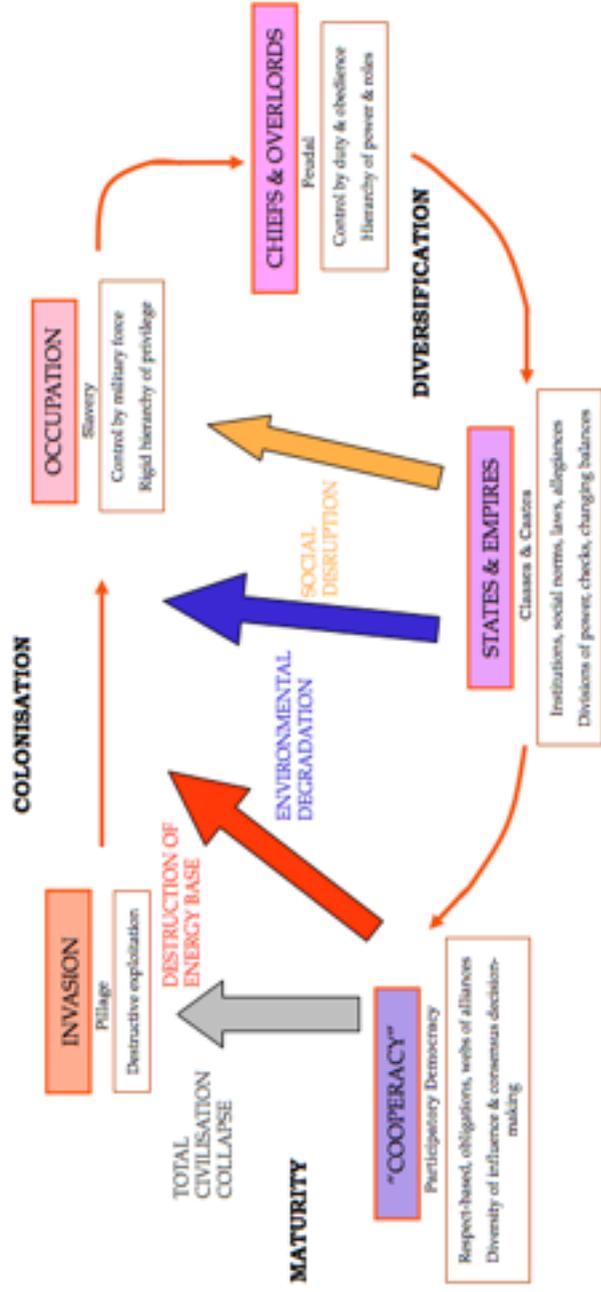
Social and religious rituals and ceremonies

Wider spread of social acceptability and moral concern

FOREST SUCCESSION



SOCIAL POWER





A DEMOCRACY OF

ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION

RESPECT & RESPONSIBILITY

COLLABORATION & COOPERATION

DIVERSITY & CELEBRATION of DIFFERENCES

LIVING with LOVE & GRATITUDE