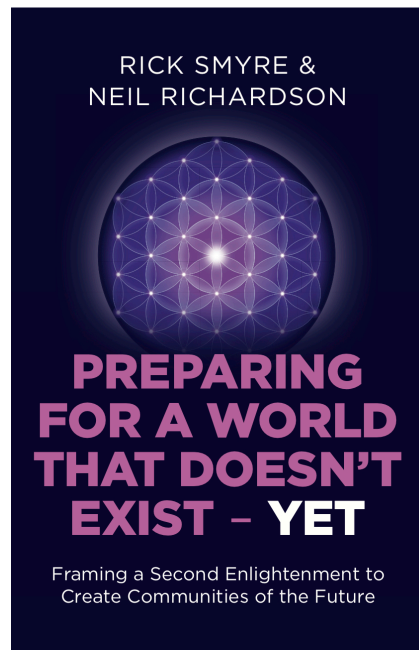


# Preparing for a World that Doesn't Exist – Yet:

Creating a Framework for Communities of the Future  
Rick Smyre & Neil Richardson



**(Book Excerpt)**

## **Foreword**

*Community leaders everywhere are on the front lines of transformational changes and need to become pioneers in creating the communities of future we need.*

Today the United States and the world are in a time of major structural changes – a turning point – with significant imbalances and instability, widespread confusion and conflicts, as well as opportunities and new frontiers. The directions of change and goals are being adopted by the international community, especially sustainable development and climate change goals and targets; nations are working on defining their contributions and strategies; those fearing change are marshalling resistance, some using violence; and greedy, corrupt and criminal groups are taking advantage of the

situation. The great enablers of progress – education, energy, and science – are all in need of large scale change themselves to support pioneering work. Our justice and policing institutions need the capabilities to contain the enduring conflicts, large scale criminality, and deeply entrenched corruption that are huge impediments to the systemic changes we need. In addition, our governance systems were designed for an earlier era and must be modernized and streamlined to support robust governance operational, reform and transformation agendas globally, regionally, nationally and especially locally.

While goal setting is being done at the international and national levels, implementation is almost entirely local. It is communities where real action and change takes place. In the United States we have about 3,000 counties and more 35,000 municipalities. The Federal governments functions are almost entirely military and diplomacy and financial services (moving money around). Social services, education, economic development and environmental management are almost entirely community functions. State governments are in the middle doing their best to coordinate. Thus the front lines of transformation changes are our communities and their leadership.

The Communities of the Future network was created as a robust community of practice to focus on this need for building community transformational leadership capacity. I have had the pleasure of supporting Communities of the Future from its beginning in 1989. Rick Smyre and other community leaders were confronting the impacts of globalization and technological changes on communities that were losing their industries and identity and had to invent a new future for themselves. Over the years, the Communities of the Future network has learned by doing and sharing ideas and practices and accumulating a body of knowledge which is summarized in this valuable book with the contemporary challenge captured in its title: *Preparing for a World That Doesn't Exist-Yet: Framing a Second Enlightenment for the Communities of the Future*.

Today I am pleased to be engaged with Communities of the Future in charting its own future to mobilize its talent and knowledge to support community transformation through this turning point and to create the community governance capabilities we need to navigate the frontiers of the 21st Century and lay the foundation for 22nd Century governance. The transformational concepts and capabilities include Creative Molecular Economy, Transformational Learning/Future Forward College, Mobile Collaborative Governance, Master Capacity Builders, and the rise of a Second Enlightenment.

This book and the network of practitioners supporting its ideas and their implementation are a critical resource for community leaders everywhere. I commend Rick Smyre and Neil Richardson for both compiling the results of the Communities of the Future's work in this book and in mobilizing the network for the next generation of community transformational change.

Ken Hunter  
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## Prologue

We are living on the precipice of a new era in human history. There is a new type of society emerging that Dr. John Cobb calls the Ecological Civilization. It is evolving, becoming more of a reality every day. This book is about how to prepare your community for this very different kind of society and economy. Whereas change historically has come from the top down, we believe that developing new capacities in local communities will transform not only our own daily lives, but the lives of everyone and everything on the planet. The planet is under multiple ecological and economic pressures, making it difficult to thrive and adapt to constant change. The issues of population growth, global warming, economic transformation, and loss of biological diversity are all interrelated for the first time in human history. As a result, traditional ideas and old models have become obsolete.

This book offers a new approach for an emerging society that will be increasingly fast-paced, interconnected, interdependent and complex. As a result, we will need to embrace interdependence, deep collaboration, connected individuality and non-linear thinking and above all ... action in order to build new capacities for transformation that allow our communities to transform – moving from the ideas and methods of an Industrial Age to ideas and methods that will be aligned with a new Ecological Civilization.

Planning for a different kind of society and economy will require us to have an understanding of the past, yet to be defined by a vision focused on the future. Communities and organizations requiring fundamental change will need to approach the present and the future with an open mind. From this new, 21st century mind, we will be able to engage with and adapt to complexity using a lense capable of identifying the “weak signals” of ongoing transformation. We can understand the past, struggle with present issues, and simultaneously build parallel processes that allow new concepts and methods to emerge.

*You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the old model obsolete.* Buckminster Fuller

The science of complexity will emerge as key to the sustainability of a society in constant change because the future vitality of an Ecological Civilization relies on individual identity, culture, and social and economic systems that will be centered on biological principles, and not the traditional principles of physics.

This book is not about incremental change. It is a call to action among diverse people and organizations that will need to learn to collaborate and create capacities for transformation to be able to adapt to challenges that are emerging, but do not exist, yet. Reform does not fundamentally change anything. More often, reform prolongs problems

and issues by masking an impending crisis within the context of a conventional strategic plan and standard performance metrics required in the Industrial Age filter of reality. Methods of reforming as a path to change do not work well as we enter an interconnected and interdependent Ecological Age. *Our society is faced with nothing less than creating something original ... free of old ideas and mistakes of the past.*

Transformation is different from reformation in that it challenges the underlying assumptions of how we think about economic development, education, governance, and leadership. True transformation requires a clear mind: a mind that is observing our world, but not trying to control reality or leaping to quick conclusions. One of the recommendations we make is to be better connected; better connected to emerging innovative ideas, people and processes. Better connected by building deeper relationships within the community or organization we are serving to create an opportunity to stretch ourselves mentally and emotionally, in order to realize fully how aspirations, talent, vision and a total human being are engaged in design and fulfillment of transformational processes.

Transforming a community requires a core group of people who believe that this kind of transformational change is possible. A community can be as small as a group of neighbors aspiring to start a community garden on vacant land, or as big as a city rejuvenating after decades of decline or even an international collaboration of diverse people intent on creating a creative innovation ecosystem. Transforming any community, whatever its size, has repercussions that spread far beyond the initial objective and have far ranging impacts.

In an age where so many things regarding the planet seem to hang in the balance, the more people who become intentional about community transformation the better. As an example, one neighborhood garden can provide more nutritional food for people to lead healthier lives. By changing the way people eat, it can reduce the numbers of people who have diabetes or who are obese. When other neighborhoods follow suit, the initial garden becomes a catalyzing agent, like a tree spreading its seeds far and wide helps shape an ecosystem.

When someone who wants to learn to surf first begins surfing, it seems like a linear process. "If I practice this, I will do that," reflective of the linear approach of cause and effect. This does not turn out to be how it works at all. To be good at a complex activity like surfing requires someone to be highly adaptive. The water is different each day, the wind, the weather, the surfer's body are different every day also, and while there are fundamental skills like standing on a particular spot of the board and knowing how to lean into the wave, that is not what makes a great or even a good surfer. The good and great surfers are adapting to what we call "felt unknowns," including the direction of the tide and wind, the variances of tide currents, and how their body is feeling. Any new surfer can stand upright for a long time without these sensitivities, but can only become good when shifting from a linear "all I need is the skills" approach to a non-linear, adaptive learning style that is responsive to unanticipated surprises. Making radical and transformational change requires engaging the unknown. To engage the unknown at a

deep level, we have to approach issues free of the dependence on prediction and certainty. Otherwise, we are simply recycling what we know and trying to make old ideas and methods more efficient. Being comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity long enough to allow creativity to emerge is a fundamental challenge for community change practitioners who are often bound to an election cycle or a traditional strategic plan.

In the United States, the founders accomplished great things by establishing the first true (if imperfect) democracy since the Ancient Greeks 2500 years ago. Over the two centuries since the United States was founded, it has spawned an amazing amount of innovation and created some of the greatest entrepreneurs in human history. From the end of World War II until the new millennium, the United States has been a core dominant force in nearly every important economic or cultural realm worldwide. In the last 30 years, the world has changed dramatically and will continue to do so. Partly due to globalization and partly due to the spread of technological innovation – especially the Internet – we now exist in a far more connected world than at any other time in human history. As a result, we can learn about things in real time that would have taken the greatest thinkers of antiquity years to find in a library.

In addition, more people are becoming part of a consumer culture of excess that leads to ever increasing amounts of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere with the burning of fossil fuels. We, all of us, have a direct impact on how food is produced, energy is consumed, and national policy is engaged. Each dollar we spend on a consumer good or donated to a community based, non-governmental organization can have an exponential impact. Much like the compound interest of money, our activities are part of catalytic interlocking networks operating in even larger ecosystems, where connections explode like fireworks.

These connections are essential to understanding the creative innovation ecosystems on which this book is built. Arthur Koestler coined the term “holon” in his book *The Ghost in the Machine*, which is among the fundamental building blocks of this book. Every single thing is simultaneously whole and part of some other larger whole. When viewed in this way, everything is part of something else and all of those things make up an ecosystem.

This paragraph is made up of sentences, words and letters. The earth is made up of atoms, molecules, water, air, sand, mountain, continent, and planet ... and on and on it goes. In an Ecological Civilization, it is vital that people think and behave in deep and wide connected contexts, thinking in whole paragraphs, or seeing the Earth as a whole. We call this Holistic Thinking. In the West especially, science rules and events that are not observable are often denigrated as not actually real. We believe there are important things in the universe that are not observable, like love, mind and soul-ideas and attributes that will be key to the vitality and sustainability of an interconnected and interdependent society and economy.

A Master Capacity Builder is an individual who understands the precepts in this book and uses the ideas and methods to design and facilitate effective transformational

processes at the community and organizational levels. An effective Master Capacity Builder must be able to process a wide variety of information and see how things connect while also being open to spontaneous new possibilities as they emerge. Many traditional planning processes are based on an extension of past best practices borrowed from other organizations and communities.

Too often we try to “fix” existing problems with existing and limited resources without concern for how the society and economy are transforming. As a result, there is an increased level of frustration as we try to make increasingly obsolete ideas and methods more efficient. Traditional strategic planning processes rarely work in a time of constant change, and are a big reason why long lasting and effective changes rarely happen. If we are to create a truly sustainable civilization as a result of transforming institutions and cities, we must see connections and tackle challenges with fresh ideas and an open and visionary mind; otherwise we will be doing little more than re-arranging deck chairs on a sinking Titanic.

When people are asked what defines the United States, invariably they will answer: “freedom and democracy.” Freedom emphasizes our individual liberty, and democracy is the system whereby we govern ourselves together. The founders expected citizens to balance serving their own individual interests with serving the country. While our democracy has never been perfect, it has continued to evolve. The last twenty years have seen substantial conflict between conservatives and progressives. Moderates from both parties have found it difficult to stay in office and angry factions influence what Congress and the President can accomplish. Common ground is difficult to find and compromise is seen as a weakness. The influence of special interests and funneling of nearly unlimited amounts of money into campaigns and PACs have changed the face of democracy in the United State and represents a very different reality from what the founders could ever have imagined.

We believe that our democracy and institutions are no longer designed to be able to meet the challenges of an emerging society that will be very different from the past. We live in a time when, as identified by the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report of 2012, we need to “re-conceptualize” all of society’s institutions. We need different processes, concepts and methods created in local communities to help design and facilitate the transformation needed to birth a new type of society and economy that will be vital and sustainable in a time of exponential change. Citizens want to see their aspirations and hopes reflected in government policy at all levels. We believe that future leaders can facilitate broadened citizen engagement processes for community transformation by using the ideas and methods conveyed in this book.

We also believe that with new and creative processes, we can devolve government more effectively, shifting important decisions from Washington to our states and local communities. One of the most profound shifts we are recommending is recognizing the notion that in a time of constant change that leads to more complexity, our democracy needs to evolve beyond the concept of representative democracy that has served us so well for so long. This complexity requires a new approach, what we are calling

Polycentric Democracy. At its core, Polycentric Democracy provides more direct ways for elected officials to access information and creative ideas from residents so that effective decision making processes can be developed and aligned with what a majority of citizens believe will be needed in the future. We call this new approach to decision making Mobile Collaborative Governance. Properly designed and facilitated, Mobile Collaborative Governance will offer opportunities for citizens to be in control of every phase of decision making for key issues in local communities. Such processes will require diverse groups of citizens working together on issues that are substantive and not refracted through the prism of party or ideology. We believe that Polycentric Democracy and Mobile Collaborative Governance will be an integral part of a system of community transformation in which a broad array of citizens can be involved in processes that make significant change occur in local communities. For this change to occur, a major effort will be required to seed knowledge of a different kind of emerging future in local communities. This will require nothing less than “comprehensive community transformation.”

This book will introduce new concepts and methods we believe will be important to re-conceptualizing our economy and society. You will learn about transformational concepts such as Creative Molecular Economy, Transformational Learning/Future Forward College, Polycentric Democracy/Mobile Collaborative Governance, Master Capacity Builders and the rise of a Second Enlightenment. If you accept the premise of this book: that we are in a period of historical transformation requiring a Second Enlightenment, and that all traditional institutions need to be re- conceptualized, then each chapter of this book is a call to action for you to be part of growing number of voices working for true transformation.

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**Read more on the book:**

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