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The ECONomics of Happiness

by Ann Baird

We chose the name “Eco-Sense” for our life-work project because this name connects our house, our community and our very bodies to the land and the integrated systems of life. A sense of belonging to place is what gives us purpose and value. So often, we humans treat the earth as if it belongs to us; but actually, it’s the other way around. I belong to the earth; my body is literally made up from the same raw materials as this earth. My DNA and cells are made of the same building blocks as all other life ... I am not alone.

The systems of interconnected individuals and species that form the web of life are called the ecosystem. “Eco” comes from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning “house.” Within the ecosystem, resources and energy are always exchanged and traded within relationships between species of the earth. *It’s ALL about relationships.* For an ecosystem to flourish, it does not grow in energy or raw materials (like minerals or water) — it grows in quantity of life or biomass. Building our Eco-Sense home did not yield a net carbon footprint. Yes, some components came at an ecological cost, but the total impact was carbon-neutral. This is because we built on a damaged piece of land, and we have been increasing the biodiversity and the amount of life growing and living here.

In most of our presentations we are asked, “Who was your architect?” We always answer, “Nature.” We simply designed with nature to engage in relationships with other life where energy, water and resources are shared for mutual benefit. We all get what we need, and more.

Ecology is the study of the economics of life. This system of sharing has been successful for hundreds of millions of years. Ecology is a model for a growth economy that is sustainable — in fact, it is better than sustainable because it actually results in the growth of biodiversity and biomass.

Perhaps the answer is that we seek happiness in all the wrong places. The human-created, growth-based financial economy is not a real thing; it’s an agreed-upon, abstract idea that has been around for a relatively short period of time. This modern growth economy fails most people (the 99%) and the planet while repeatedly crashing, leaving a history of human suffering and destroyed ecosystems in its path.

This human economy is based on liquidating life and monetizing human relationships. The problem is that there is not that much left of nature that we can convert into product and not much more of human relationships that we can convert into services. We already pay for almost all the human services that we used to give to each other ... sadly, even sex.

So this raises the question of why modern human civilization does not reject this flawed economic model of monetary growth and instead adopt a proven and successful ecosystem-based model that supports the thriving of all life? Why don’t we judge our success on our health and wellbeing instead of GDP (Gross Domestic Product)? This puzzles me greatly.

It’s ALL about relationships

Perhaps the answer is that we seek happiness in all the wrong places. Our modern society leaves us feeling unfulfilled, alone and judged, with all the marketing messages we consume. But what we really crave is connection to place and each other, connection that includes a safe, comfortable home, a happy, healthy family, and meaningful activities to fill our days.

But what we really crave is connection to place and each other

When we participate in the financial growth economy by consuming disposable goods made of toxic materials that harm the planet, our local community, our bodies and our souls, we perpetuate the myth that such consumer-driven “growth” is essential. This flawed economic system is failing *again*. When will we learn and follow the template for the economic system that nature perfected over hundreds of millions of years? **Damn, we’re an arrogant species.**

Inspirational Links:

An excellent inspirational video called: **the Economics of Happiness.**

Website: <http://www.theeconomicsofhappiness.org/>

This talk by Joanna Macy is extremely inspirational and can be viewed online:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpbjpxkwMM>



Ann and her family walk the talk of sustainable living in their multi-generational home, Eco-Sense. Their motto is: *Less life stuff ... More life style!* The Bairds offer tours of their home and provide consulting and educational services in sustainable building. Find out more at www.eco-sense.ca, or email Ann at ann@eco-sense.ca

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