

Gross National Happiness as an Alternative Development Paradigm and its Relevance for Community Living

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“In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now.” The late Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Laureate

My Path from Camphill to Vietnam and Bhutan over the War Zones of our Time

Together with my wife Lisi and our two children, we lived for many years in a Camphill community in Switzerland - Perceval. I consider these years of community practice, sharing our life and work with people living with intellectual disabilities, as some of the most formative experiences on which all my later work and social understanding are built. After Camphill, I worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross and spent time in most of the conflict areas of the beginning of the 21st Century: from Afghanistan to Palestine and from Darfur to Pakistan. These experiences led me to the conclusion that the physical violence that I was witnessing was but the tip of the iceberg and that I had to uncover the underlying root causes that were not addressed in the humanitarian response to these tragic events. It became more and more obvious that systemic or structural violence was the deeper cause of the outer events and that we had to try and understand these systemic problems if solutions were to be found.

This led me to develop a critical view of the current economic and development paradigm and to search for alternatives. On a local community scale, my experience in the Camphill Movement seemed to offer a valid model of a different way to organize work, finances and a social organism. Nevertheless the question remained to find a model that would be applicable on a much larger scale, such as a country. This is how I encountered the Gross National Happiness framework in Bhutan. At the end of 2011, the Prime Minister of Bhutan decided to create a Gross National Happiness Centre as a learning institute and community to teach and experiment GNH in action. They were looking for a Program

Director for the new centre and posted an international recruitment offer. I applied and was selected and this is how I moved to Bhutan at the beginning of 2012. At the same time, since the 1990's, my wife and I had set up an NGO¹ in Vietnam - *Eurasia Foundation*. Here we started our work in the field of special education. During the war many children had been affected by the consequences of Agent Orange² and as a result there was an unusually high percentage of children with disabilities; at the same time, the government lacked the resources and the expertise to offer appropriate support and education to these children and young people. Gradually our work expanded from special education to general education, to embrace ecology, community building and social entrepreneurship. We built many schools and workshops, trained the first generation of teachers in the field of curative education and social therapy and, in 2009, we created the Peaceful Bamboo Family, an intentional working and learning community inspired by the Camphill Movement and the Gross National Happiness Framework in Viet Nam.

The Challenges of our Time and the Need to Transform the Current Development Paradigm

“The crisis of our time isn't just a crisis of a single leader, organization, country, or conflict. The crisis of our time reveals the dying of an old social structure and way of thinking, an old way of institutionalizing and enacting collective social forms.” Otto C. Scharmer

Otto Scharmer has identified three major challenges that we face as a mankind. He calls it the three divides³:

1. The Ecological Divide
2. The Social Divide
3. The Spiritual-cultural Divide

It seems appropriate to add a fourth one that is a consequence of the three previous ones:

¹ NGO: A non-governmental organisation is an organisation that is neither a part of a government nor a conventional for-profit business.

² Agent Orange: One of the herbicides and defoliants used by the US military as part of its herbicidal warfare programme.

³ Scharmer, O. & Kaufer, K. (2013) *Leading from the Emerging Future: from eco-system to eco-system economics*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler..

4. The Leadership dividee

1. The Ecological Divide: the Alienation between Self and Nature

Since the beginning of human history until the late seventies, mankind used far less of the abundant natural resources that Planet Earth so generously provides than was available. But this changed dramatically during the last three decades of the 20th century. Modest UN scenarios suggest that if current population and consumption trends continue then by the 2030s we will need the equivalent of two Earths to support us. And of course, we only have one. Turning resources into waste faster than waste can be turned back into resources puts us in a global ecological overshoot, depleting the very resources on which human life and biodiversity depend⁴. As a consequence, one third of our agricultural land has disappeared over the past 40 years. According to a World Bank report⁵, dramatic climate changes and weather extremes are already affecting millions of people around the world, damaging crops and coastlines and putting water security at risk. There is growing evidence that warming close to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is locked into the Earth's atmospheric system due to past and predicted emissions of greenhouse gases, and climate change impacts such as extreme heat events may now be unavoidable. As the planet warms, climatic conditions, heat and other weather extremes which occur once in hundreds of years and considered highly unusual or unprecedented today would become the 'new climate normal' as we approach 4°C - a frightening world of increased risks and global instability.

These are only some examples to illustrate the unprecedented ecological challenges we are currently facing. The inner dimension of this challenge is the fundamental disconnect between humans and nature. This alienation is a side-effect of the current materialistic worldview that has become predominant over the past centuries: the idea that our planet is but a heap of matter ruled by merely physical and chemical laws. Without reclaiming the spiritual dimension of Nature, mere political agreements will fail to address the fundamental crisis that underlines these issues.

2. The Social Divide: Alienation between Self and Others

⁴ http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/world_footprint/

⁵ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/publication/turn-down-the-heat>

Two and a half billion people on our planet subsist on less than \$2 per day. Although there have been many attempts to lift people out of poverty, this number has not changed much over the past several decades. In addition we see an increasing polarization in society in which the top 1% has a greater collective worth than the entire bottom 90 %. According to Barack Obama, income inequality is the "defining challenge of our times", while Pope Francis states that "inequality is the root of social ills". Human beings have deep-seated psychological responses to inequality and social hierarchy. The tendency to equate outward wealth with inner worth means that inequality colours our social perceptions. It invokes feelings of superiority and inferiority, dominance and subordination – which affect the way we relate to and treat each other. Research shows⁶ that, as well as health and violence, almost all the problems that are more common at the bottom of the social ladder are more common in more unequal societies – including mental illness, drug addiction, obesity, loss of community life, imprisonment, unequal opportunities and poorer wellbeing for children. The effects of inequality are not confined to the poor. A growing body of research shows that inequality damages the social fabric of the whole society. The health and social problems are between twice and 10 times as common in more unequal societies.

Although mankind produces more goods and services than ever before, even when taking into account the current size of the world population, there has been hardly any progress in terms of fairness and equity in the distribution of wealth. Some 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. That's about one in nine people on earth. Poor nutrition causes nearly half (45%) of deaths in children under five (3.1 million children each year). Sixty-six million primary school-age children attend classes across the developing world, hungry⁷.

These figures are a sad expression of the level of alienation between oneself and others and a devastating outcome of our current economic system: our fellow humans being perceived as competitors, rather than sisters and brothers.

⁶Pickett, K. & Wilkinson, R. (2010) *The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone*. London: Penguin.

⁷<https://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats>

Cultivating altruism, compassion and solidarity is not a mere ethical imperative, it is the very condition of the survival of mankind.

3. The Spiritual-cultural Divide: Alienation between Self and Self

Our current economic system is based on an assumption about human nature: the so-called *homo economicus* or economic man. This concept portrays humans as narrowly self-interested agents always trying to maximize their benefit as consumers and their profits as producers. In other words, we have a heartless egoistic being only pursuing material benefits without any consideration for values, ethics or simply human relations based on love and friendship. No wonder that this implicit assumption creates an economic system that manifests as a self-fulfilling prophecy, resulting in a massive institutional failure and collectively creating results that nobody wants. This is not to pretend that these tendencies do not exist but traditional wisdom saw them as the shadow aspect (C. G. Jung), as the ‘double’ (R. Steiner) or, according to Buddhist psychology, as the ‘poisons of the mind’. Moreover, if we internalize and identify with this distorted view of what it means to be human, we disconnect from our highest potential and true nature. This is fuelled by the illusion that material consumption can fulfil our deeper aspiration for meaning, identity or self-actualization. Some of the results of this alienation are obvious in today’s world, from growing suicide rates, to epidemics of depression and stress-related illnesses becoming the major factor of morbidity in the developed countries. Moreover, some of the latest scientific research⁸ clearly demonstrates that the notion of the “Homo Economicus” has no scientific foundation, its is merely an ideological construct. Therefore, promoting in education, from Kindergarten to University a true understanding of what really means to be human is of crucial importance to meet this challenge.

4. The Leadership Divide: Alienation between Self and the Greater Good

On a personal level, the leadership divide manifests as a lack of self-leadership leaving the individual to fall prey to all sorts of manipulations, from marketing to numbing media influence, and substance abuse, from compulsive consumerism to Internet and technology addiction⁹. On the collective level, it manifests as the helplessness of most world leaders who are unable to overcome narrow national

⁸ <http://www.caring-economics.org/>

⁹ <http://virtual-addiction.com/>

interests to live up to the global challenges that we are facing as a mankind; they restrict the horizon of their thinking to the next electoral deadline and not to mid or long term goals.

It appears that the current economic and development model has come to its limits. Change is bound to happen; the only question is whether we - as mankind - can lead the change consciously or if we passively undergo the changes because outer circumstances force us to do so. It also appears that the most vulnerable will be the first victims and this holds true globally: the poorest countries will be the first to bear the brunt of the negative impacts and this is also true within developed countries.

Obviously, people living with intellectual disabilities belong to the most vulnerable segment of society. This is one of the reasons why I believe that rethinking about community living, inclusion and intellectual disability should be done within a larger context of rethinking of the overall development paradigm.

As Einstein once famously observed: *“we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them”*. Gross National Happiness is one of the global frameworks that can help us rethink the overall goals of societal development.

Gross National Happiness: A New Development Paradigm

In 1968 Robert Kennedy pointed out that: *“Even if we act to erase material poverty, there is another great task; it is to confront the poverty of satisfaction - purpose and dignity - that afflicts us all. Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values to the mere accumulation of material things... Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising... It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and nuclear warheads... It counts the television programs that glorify violence to sell toys to our children. Yet, the Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages... It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our compassion... It measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”*

“Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National product”. With this famous declaration made in the 1970s, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the 4th King of Bhutan challenged conventional, narrow and materialistic notions of human progress. He realized and declared that the existing development paradigm – GNP (or GDP) – did not consider the ultimate goal of every human being: happiness.

Old Wisdom for a Modern Age!

Inspired by age-old Buddhist wisdom in the ancient Kingdom of Bhutan, the fourth King concluded that GDP was neither an equitable nor a meaningful measurement for human happiness, nor should it be the primary focus for governance and thus the philosophy of Gross National Happiness was born.

Since that time this pioneering vision of GNH has guided Bhutan’s development and policy formation. Unique among the community of nations, it is a balanced ‘middle path’ in which equitable socio-economic development is integrated with environmental conservation, cultural promotion and good governance.

The Folly of the GDP Obsession!

The folly of an obsession with GDP, as a measure of economic activity which does not distinguish between those activities that increase a nation’s wealth and those that deplete its natural resources or result in poor health or widening social inequalities is so clearly evident. If the forests of Bhutan were logged for profit, GDP would increase; if Bhutanese citizens picked up modern living habits adversely affecting their health, investments in health care systems would be made and GDP would increase. All of these actions could negatively affect the lives of the Bhutanese people yet paradoxically would contribute to an increase in GDP.

Four Pillars and Nine Domains

Four Pillars



The intuitive guiding principle of Gross National Happiness led to a practical conceptualization of the concept. The foundation is made of four pillars:

1. Environmental conservation as an antidote to the ecological divide

Environmental conservation is considered a key contribution to GNH because in addition to providing critical services such as water and energy, the environment is believed to contribute to aesthetic and other stimuli that can be directly healing to people. Bhutan is absorbing three times more CO₂ than it produces and has pledged to remain a carbon sink and to become 100% organic by 2020¹⁰.

2. Fair and sustainable socio-economic development as an antidote to the social divide

GNH economics is a spiritual approach to economics. It examines the functioning of the human mind and aspires to transform ignorance, greed and violence that direct most of the current economic activity. It aims to clarify what is harmful and beneficial in the range of human activities involving production and consumption, and tries to support people in making ethical choices. It strives towards a middle way balancing economic development and human values.

¹⁰<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/03/bhutan-has-most-ambitious-pledge-at-paris-climate-summit>

It holds that truly rational decisions can only be made when we understand the nature and the functioning of the mind. When we understand what constitutes desire and craving as a cause of suffering, we realize that all the wealth in the world cannot satisfy it. We become aware of the importance of contentment and of leading a simple but dignified life.

GNH economics challenges the vision of *homo economicus* that underlies current economic models: from a GNH perspective, attributes such as altruism and compassion are innate qualities of the mind. Economic development is important but it must be fair in terms of distribution and sustainable in order not to deprive future generations of their right to a good life.

3. Preservation and promotion of culture as an antidote to the spiritual-cultural divide

Culture, includes science, arts, and spirituality. All three elements are important and must be equally promoted and developed for a society to thrive. If culture is reduced to its economic dimension and when it is determined by financial indicators only, a society gradually loses its identity and values and individuals are reduced to economic actors: producers and consumers. Bhutan is a good example of a country that has been able to preserve and to further develop its unique Buddhist heritage and values.

4. Good governance as an antidote to the leadership divide

Good governance is considered a pillar for happiness because it determines the conditions in which people thrive. While policies and programmes that are developed in Bhutan are generally in line with the values of GNH, there are also a number of tools and processes employed to ensure the values are indeed embedded in social policy. Bhutan is also a unique example of a peaceful transition from absolute monarchy to democracy initiated by the King himself.

Nine Domains



The four pillars are further elaborated into nine domains, which articulate the different elements of GNH in detail and form the basis of GNH measurement, indices and screening tools.

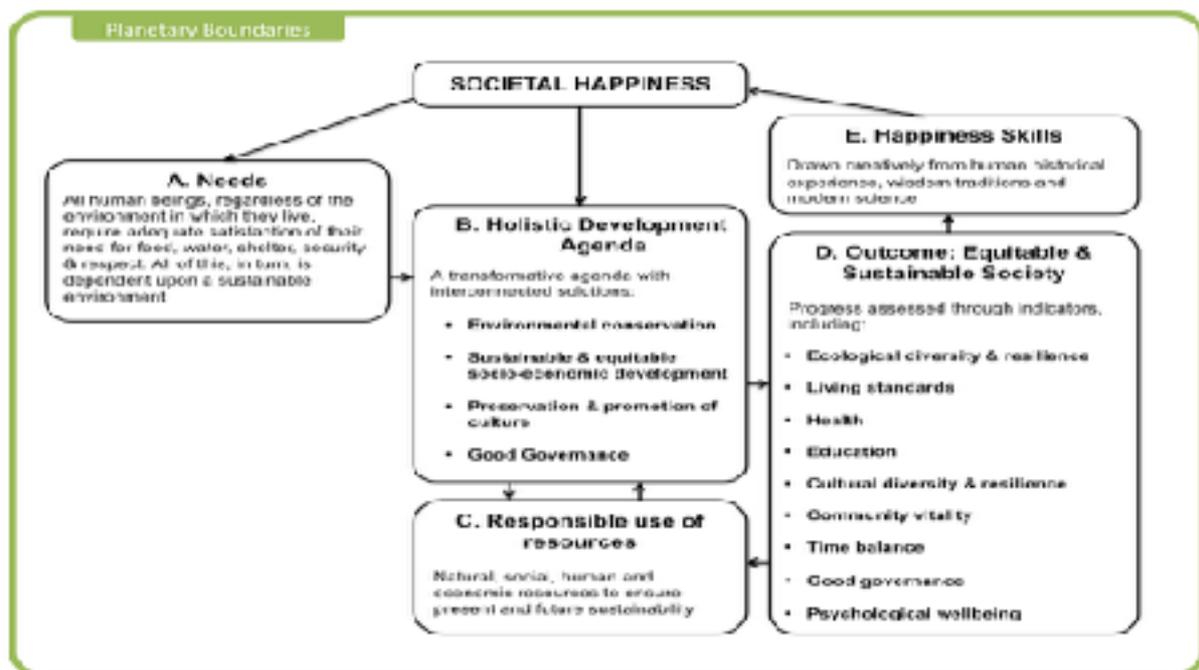
1. Living standards
2. Education
3. Health
4. Environment
5. Community vitality
6. Time-use
7. Psychological well-being
8. Good governance
9. Cultural resilience and promotion

These nine domains, clearly demonstrate that from the perspective of GNH, many inter-related factors are considered to be important in creating the conditions for happiness. Income and material security

are obviously part of these conditions, but many other factors must also be taken into consideration. Similarly, the happiness of human beings is not seen as separate from the wellbeing of other life forms, and ecological diversity and resilience are included in the measure of GNH. The balance between material and non-material development, and the multi-dimensional and interdependent nature of GNH are key features that distinguish GNH from GDP as a measure of a country's progress.

The universal human goal to pursue happiness and the existence of planetary boundaries are the two fundamental premises of GNH. The current economic model, based on the doctrine of limitless growth has resulted in the destructive attempt to use the earth's finite resources to satisfy infinite wants. The envisaged new paradigm differs in essence from the existing one by making sustainability of life on earth the top concern and recalibrating development to ensure that life - of humans, other species and the earth itself - is valued and prioritised.

The GNH Framework



Happiness Skills

The GNH framework seeks to find a balance between the outer and the inner conditions leading to happiness and wellbeing. Seeing happiness as a skill is a relatively new and unusual idea in current western culture, but most traditional wisdom traditions, from ancient Greek Philosophy to Asian spirituality have shared this vision and developed methods to cultivate the inner qualities leading to

happiness. However, there is now a strong convergence between traditional contemplative wisdom and the latest scientific findings - especially in the field of neuroscience¹¹ - that allows a better understanding of the way we can train the mind to enhance inner qualities such as mindfulness, compassion and altruism, and how these abilities have a strong correlation with happiness and wellbeing. In the field of education, there is a growing awareness of the need to complement intellectual and academic skills with Social and Emotional Learning¹² (SEL) and with the training of attention: Mindfulness practices¹³.

Likewise, there is also a strong momentum in cultivating Mindfulness in many fields of social life, including in the British Parliament¹⁴:

The Mindfulness Initiative is an advocacy project, aimed at increasing awareness of how mindfulness can benefit society. The Initiative is working with parliamentarians, media and policy makers to develop recommendations on the role of mindfulness in public policy and the workplace. Scientific research is generating substantial evidence of the benefits of mindfulness to wellbeing.

Likewise, there is an increasing interest in Mindfulness in the business community. Some years ago, it would have been unthinkable to expect the world political and business leaders to sit in meditation in a high level meeting, but this is exactly what is now regularly happening in the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos¹⁵.

These few examples illustrate the fact that the inner dimension of happiness and wellbeing has moved from a marginal interest to a mainstream concern in many fields of society, far beyond specialist concerns of psychologists or spiritual seekers.

¹¹ <https://www.resource-project.org/en/home.html>

¹² www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/

¹³ www.mindfulnessinschools.org/

¹⁴ www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/

¹⁵ <http://www.weforum.org/videos/insights-experiencing-mindful-leadership>

From Economic Growth to Happiness and Wellbeing

Whilst the one sided neo-liberal economic ideology and the focus - and even obsession - with economic growth is still powerful, it is more and more challenged and not only marginally, but also in international arenas such as the UN. On 2nd April, 2012, the Royal Government of Bhutan convened a High-level Meeting on Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm. More than 800 participants including political and government leaders, representatives of governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, media, and business, as well as leading economists, scholars, academics, and spiritual leaders from the world's major faiths participated in the proceedings.¹⁶ One of the outcomes of this meeting was that the 20th of March was proclaimed by the United Nations the International Day of Happiness¹⁷. Many countries, including the UK, Germany and France have developed new sets of indicators to measure the wellbeing of their citizens as a complement to the conventional GDP measurement. Furthermore 20 US States have adopted Genuine Progress Indicators (GPI)¹⁸ as an alternative measurement of their development. Major economists including Joseph Stiglitz (recipient of the 2001 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences and the John Bates Clark Medal) have clearly shown that the current GDP based economic system does not meet the needs of our time¹⁹.

There is a growing tension between the old economic model based on narrow financial metrics and the emerging development paradigm based on happiness and wellbeing and this tension also manifests in the field of social care and especially in the field of intellectual disability.

¹⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=617&menu=35>

¹⁷ <http://research.un.org/en/happiness>

¹⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/sep/23/genuine-progress-indicator-gdp-gpi-vermont-maryland>

¹⁹ Stiglitz, J., Sen, A. & Fitoussi, J-P. (2010) *Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP doesn't add up*. New York: The New Press.

The Gross National Happiness Framework applied in a Camphill Community in Vietnam

When we created the Peaceful Bamboo Family community in Hue, Central Vietnam, our fundamental intention was not focused on caring for young people with intellectual disability, but rather on creating a conducive environment that would allow these young people to unfold their full potential in a way that would enable them to make a positive contribution to society. And these contributions have been manifold.

When we started our community, it was not yet possible for NGOs in Vietnam to buy land and to run a privately owned Centre. Due to the many years of work in the field of special education, the local government had confidence in our Foundation and granted us an exception so that we could create the first private and free centre entirely based on our values and principles inspired by the Camphill Movement and later by the GNH framework.

The Four Pillars of GNH in the Peaceful Bamboo Family

1. Environmental conservation

In Vietnam, as in many developing countries the so-called modernization of agriculture has created a lot of damage to the environment and even to the health of the population due to the misuse of pesticides and fertilizers. Especially among young parents, there is a growing concern of the negative effect of harmful food on the health of their children. Our community started the first biodynamic organic horticulture garden in Vietnam, which became rapidly a pilot project where students of the local agricultural college could come to learn about a different way to take care of the earth and produce healthy food. School classes also come to our garden to learn about ecology, gardening and they work along side people living with disabilities, thus appreciating how people with special needs not only contribute to society, but can even be their teachers in a specific area.

Our own community eats mainly our own organic, locally grown vegetables.

As a community, we are trying to reduce as much as possible our ecological footprint; we have solar panels for warm water and electricity, our own water source and the means to collect rainwater. Our next project is to become a zero waste community and to recycle human waste into compost and biogas.

2. Fair and sustainable

Our aim is to become economically and financially sustainable and to generate enough income to gradually become autonomous. Our community is also a vocational training centre and the young people who have graduated and want to remain in the community are hired as co-workers. Our current focus is to develop social entrepreneurship in partnership with other like-minded companies. We process tropical fruits from our garden into delicious jam, juice and ice cream, we have a bakery and produce several types of cookies, and we sell these products through a partnership with an online health food store from Saigon.

Our lacquer-ware workshop combines traditional techniques with spontaneous creativity allowing the young people to express themselves freely while learning age-old Vietnamese handicrafts. We organize exhibitions and auctions to sell the paintings, and it is very moving to experience how proud the youngsters can be when they realize that people actually appreciate their creations and are willing to

buy them. We also have an incense workshop producing high quality incense made of natural organic medicinal plants according to an ancient recipe.

We have opened a teahouse in our front-yard with a beautiful flower and rock garden; this gives us the opportunity to sell some of the products of the workshops and the garden, including our own organic green tea. Likewise, it is also an opportunity for the youngsters to learn the skills of service industry, and to practice useful abilities such as counting, reading and writing, speaking in an appropriate way with strangers.

All these projects have a dual purpose, creating situations where young people living with an intellectual disability can learn useful skills and train for a job, thus contributing to society, and also generating income for the centre. This year, the centre was able to generate over 50% of its running costs through these activities. But of course such a centre will always need some financial support to be able to develop further and flourish.

3. Preservation and promotion of culture

When we started the Peaceful Bamboo Family, we were inspired by the ideals of the Camphill Movement, but we wanted to create a community that was completely embedded in the Vietnamese context. We did not want to import foreign values and cultural practices in a country that has suffered too much and for too long from destructive foreign influence, whether from French colonialism or American imperialism.

At the same time, we knew from our experience in the Camphill community of Perceval the importance of spiritual and cultural practices to structure the life and cycles of time of a community. So our challenge was to find the essence of the practices that we had experienced in a Western, largely Christian context located in a temperate climate zone, and to recreate comparable forms and rituals born out the Vietnamese, largely Buddhist and Confucian, tropical context. I explicitly mention the climate zone because most religious festivals are related to the season: Christmas near the Winter Solstice, Easter at the Spring Equinox, St John at the Summer Solstice and Michaelmas at the Autumn Equinox.

So we structured our yearly cycle around traditional Vietnamese and Buddhist festivals that are connected to the moon cycle rather than the sun cycle; including ancestor and Earth-spirit worshipping ceremonies which are held on New and Full Moon.

Likewise, we organized the weekly rhythm with a day of Mindfulness and an evening called ‘Sharing from the Heart’ where each member of the community has an opportunity to share how they feel, what makes them happy or worries them and heard in an atmosphere of respect and non-judgemental listening.

We also hold regular seminars and workshops for both co-workers and youngsters in a spirit of lifelong learning for all, and we have created the ‘Eurasia Learning Institute for Happiness and Wellbeing’ (ELI) to share our experience well beyond our limited field. As an example, we have started a training programme for forty university professors from Saigon who want to implement a ‘Mindfulness Based Compassion and Happiness programme’ with their students. We are also working with the Education Department of Hue province and have implemented a mindfulness and compassion educational programme: “A call to Care” in primary schools in Hue.

These are just some of the many examples of the way we have consciously included the spiritual and cultural dimensions in the community life and how it can spread beyond our community.

4. Good governance

Of course our community has a leadership structure that is responsible and accountable, but our effort is to create a participatory leadership-style that includes everyone, long-term co-workers, volunteers, and the residents alike and we regularly hold seminars to redefine and co-create a common vision and mission that is shared by all. When new projects emerge, the whole community is consulted so that they can voice their ideas or doubts. For instance, in the recent past, we have created an inclusive kindergarten, a sector for young teenagers with behavioural challenges and we are designing an ambitious zero waste programme. All these projects were discussed and designed with the entire community at many open meetings. Beyond the Four Pillars, we have also used the nine domains of GNH as an assessment tool to pilot and improve the functioning of our community.

The Social Experiment of Camphill in the Light of the Challenges of our Time

In Vietnam, our centre is considered as being an innovative pilot project and has drawn a lot of attention from the media, civil society and government alike. Many people feel that it offers an alternative social model in a society that, after decades of war followed by a time of intense economic development, is searching for a more balanced development. When I was in Hanoi last year, I gave a public talk and an interview on GNH, and the national daily newspaper of the Communist Party published a detailed and very positive article on GNH, indicating that it could be a way forward for Vietnam. The Peaceful Bamboo Family has become for many a living example that GNH can be implemented in the real world and does not have to remain an abstract ideal.

When describing the various practices implemented in the Peaceful Bamboo Family, I believe that most Camphill communities would agree that it is very similar to their own way of living and functioning, yet there seems to be an opinion in some western countries that the functioning of the Camphill communities needs to be adapted to ‘modernity’. I would argue that the opposite is true: the so called ‘modernity’ based on neo-liberal economic ideology controlling all aspects of society, the regulation of the social field based on this ideology, and the marketization of care, represents a completely obsolete model that has shown its own limits by creating the dire situation we are currently facing as a mankind. The time has come for new development models that address the challenge of our time: from transition towns²⁰ to caring economics²¹, from eco villages²² to sustainable cities²³.

The Camphill Movement has shown over many decades and in many countries that innovative social forms are possible in living practice, and that people living with an intellectual disability can contribute to pioneering such social experiments.

²⁰ <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

²¹ <http://www.caring-economics.org/>

²² <http://gen.ecovillage.org/>

²³ <http://www.sustainablecities.eu/>

