Future stories for a new economy

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We all think about the future. We anticipate, we plan, we dream.
We are all born storytellers. Stories are how we make sense of the world.
Stories about the past (history) can draw on evidence to convince us
Stories about the future are conjecture. They rely entirely on the quality of the story to convince us.
The techno utopia - Wakanda
The story of Separation

We are separate from each other and nature

We live in a mechanical world that is ours to exploit

Competition, free markets and growth in GDP will deliver well-being
The dystopia – *Blade Runner 2049*
THE GREAT ACCELERATION

SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

EARTH SYSTEM TRENDS
Sustenance and discipline – Transition Towns
Transformation – Regenerating nature and ourselves

Ecological economics

Degrowth

Circular economy

Steady state economy

Wellbeing economy

Collaborative economy

Buen vivir

Post-development

Gross national happiness

Circular economy
Image: Richard Register, Eco City Builders
Collaborative economy
- citizen governance and prosumer networks

Circular economy in the welfare state
- the government rules, supported by industry

Local self-sufficiency
- household production in locally governed communities

Automation for quality of life
- robots produce while citizens enjoy leisure time
**Empathy Economy**

A reformed tech ecosystem

Self-regulation by creators and users of tech results in a more harmonious labour market, with greatest jobs growth in hi-touch sectors.

**Big Tech Economy**

A world of mass automation

Game-changing technological advances lead to mass automation and an abundance of cheap goods and services.

**Precision Economy**

Hyper surveillance

A future in which proliferation of sensors and big data analysis cranks up the level of surveillance and gig work.

**Exodus Economy**

Economic crash and an exodus from urban areas

Economic slowdown ushers in another prolonged period of austerity, leading people to seek out alternative ways of living.
MANY PRESSING CHALLENGES

REQUIRE TRANSFORMATION, RATHER THAN INCREMENTAL CHANGE & TRADE OFFS...
Deep causes

1. Capacity
2. Evaluation
3. Financing
4. Governance
5. Innovation
6. Narrative
You may tell a tale that takes up residence in someone’s soul, becomes their blood and self and purpose. That tale will move them and drive them and who knows what they might do because of it, because of your words.

~ Erin Morgenstern
Transforming narratives

• Dominant deep narratives (e.g. neo-liberalism) contribute to the sustainability challenges we face.

• We need to find new memes, stories and narratives to counter neo-liberalism and support the transformations we seek.
The story of Interbeing

We are a community of living beings on a living Earth

Cooperation and collaboration is needed to provide a safe and just future

We are nature and should work to regenerate the Earth
Some tentative principles

• The story of a transformed future needs to grow and interweave from the grassroots, not be imposed by an elite – it must be crowd sourced but somehow steer clear of the dangers of populism
• The story must accommodate diversity but have enough common ground for most people to get on board
• The story must respect planetary limits, provide social justice for all, and regenerate what has been lost
• One promising approach is to identify ‘memes’ that can be incorporated into stories of the future
Storytellers construct stories from ‘memes’

- **Memes**: foundational cultural artifacts that shape belief systems, attitudes, ideologies, and the like, including phrases, words, images, symbols, or other types of artifacts that resonate with people (Blackmore 2000)

- Some particular important kinds of memes for stories include:
  - **Metaphors**: understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)
  - **Frames**: Mental structures that order our ideas; and communicative tools that evoke these structures and shape our perceptions and interpretations over time (Holmes et al 2011)
  - **Tropes**: a commonly-seen theme or element of a story that becomes recognisable through repeated use, e.g. the hero’s journey
  - **Archetypes**: a type of trope (usually a character) that represents something universal about the human condition, e.g. a hero, villain, trickster, scapegoat or mentor
Deep narrative

A system of related communications that represents a central idea or belief

Pervasive, intractable narratives, e.g. neoliberalism

Narratives / discourses / worldviews

Communicative forms

Memes

- Stories
- Arguments
- Art
- Information
- Rhetoric
- Visions

- Tropes
- Archetypes
- Metaphors
- Frames
Dignity: Everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety and happiness

Nature: A restored and safe natural world for all life

Connection: A sense of belonging and institutions that serve the common good

Fairness: Justice in all its dimensions at the heart of economic systems, and the gap between the richest and poorest greatly reduced

Participation: Citizens are actively engaged in their communities and locally rooted economies
A simple visioning process

1. Take participants through a guided visualization exercise to imagine they are in the future, say 2040.
2. Ask them to draw what they saw / felt during the exercise.
3. Pair up with someone else to talk about their visions and identify common memes.
4. Roll up into groups of four to share and find common ground.
5. Depending on group size, repeat or open up into a discussion about what memes have emerged.
Healthy nature / regeneration

Connectedness – to place and each other

Sufficiency

Creativity

Hope and purpose

Respect
New Stories for a Sustainable Future
(planetcentric.net/blog/new-stories)
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