9

# Relocalising Economic Relationships

Such a vision offers greater community and personal satisfaction: a world where conviviality replaces consumption, where local identity replaces global trade, and where community spirit replaces brand loyalty.
Lord Beaumont of Whitley, speaking in the House of Lords

For a couple of decades the proponents of globalisation have been winning the ideological battle, in spite of strong and growing opposition and proposals for more humane ways of organising international economic relationships, as outlined in the previous chapter. During this time the few green economists calling for local food and energy security, or protection of local economies and communities, have seemed like voices in the wilderness. Yet, partly as a result of the immanence of climate change and increasing oil prices, putting all our eggs in the globalisation basket has begun to seem rather a risky strategy. Put this together with the recognition that globalisation means vastly more carbon-intensive transport of people and goods, and localisation begins to be an increasingly popular strategy.

## [a]Localisation to Replace Globalisation

In his ‘global manifesto’ for localisation Colin Hines defines globalisation as follows:

**Globalization** n. 1. the process by which governments sign away the rights of their citizens in favour of speculative investors and transnational corporations. 2. The erosion of wages, social welfare standards and environmental regulations for the sake of international trade. 3. the imposition world-wide of a consumer monoculture. Widely but falsely believed to be irreversible—See also financial meltdown, casino economy, Third World debt and race to the bottom (16th century: from colonialism, via development).

This is, as Hines himself concedes, a blunt and indeed a savage critique. He sees globalisation not as a positive move but rather as an economic de-localisation or dismantling of local economies on a global basis.

Woodin and Lucas refer to globalisation as ‘the economics of insecurity’, making a strong case that it was a politically motivated project justified on the basis of economic efficiency but in reality operating for the benefit of transnational corporations or TNCs:

There is plenty of evidence to show that the beneficiaries of this massive expansion in international trade are the transnational corporations (TNCs) that control it. For example, 51 of the top 100 economies in the world are TNCs. Just 500 TNCs control 70 per cent of international trade and a mere 1 per cent of TNCs conrol half of the world’s foreign direct investment. And whilst the global economy typically grows at 2 to 3 per cent every year, large corporations have an 8-10 per cent growth rate.

As well as political concerns about the shifting of economic power from governments to corporations, there is the obvious concern that the increasing amount of transport of goods and—increasingly—people too, has severe environmental consequences. In addition there are anxieties about the failure of security of supply of our most basic necessities such as food and energy. These will be discussed further in later sections, but the problem was graphically illustrated in 2006 when Christmas for UK consumers was imported on the world's largest container vessel's maiden voyage from China. If anything had happened to the 'quarter of a mile long, 200ft-high (61 metre) behemoth', then Christmas might have had to be cancelled (Vidal, 2006).

The situation is particularly serious in the case of economies which are dependent on imports of food. Figure 9.1 shows the decline in the UK's self-sufficiency in terms of food, feed and drink since 1960.

—Insert Figure 9.1. Trade gap in agricultural products near here—

The UK's dependence on food imports makes us particularly vulnerable to rising energy prices. We currently rely on imports to provide almost one third of the food consumed in the UK, and have one of the lowest self-sufficiency ratios in the EU8. Although the UK has been a net importer of food for a long time, imports are currently growing at a significant rate. DEFRA figures show that imports in tonnes increased by 38% from 1988 to 2002. For some types of food, the increase has been even more dramatic. Imports of fruit have doubled, for example, while imports of vegetables have tripled. Half of all vegetables and 95% of all fruit consumed in the UK now come from overseas.

The problem for the proponents of localisation is that the rules of the economic game are stacked against them. Although globalisation has resulted in a single economy for sales, there is no global rate of wages, or internationally agreed standards of employment or of environmental protection. In such a world it is inevitable that there will be what critics of globalisation refer to as a 'race to the bottom', where all production will shift to countries which have the lowest environmental and employment standards. The impossibility of competition between workers in Western economies, protected by minimum wage legislation, and those in the poorer nations is clear from Figure 9.2. Increasingly this has led to a situation where everything is made in China. While writing this book I discovered that a cousin of mine who works as a thatcher in Devon, UK actually imports the thatch he uses for 'sustainable' roofing from China.

—Figure 9.2. Comparison of wage rates in a selection of countries, based on purchasing power parities, 2005 near here—

Green critics of globalisation are very keen to make clear that their objection is not based on narrow xenophobia. Hines draws a distinction between globalisation and internationalism, which can be thought of as 'the flow of ideas, technologies, information, culture, money and goods with the end goal of protecting and rebuilding local economics worldwide. Its emphasis is not on competition for the cheapest but on cooperation for the best'. As Jeremy Seabrook writes, 'It is time to rescue what true internationalists have always worked for from the clutches of a rapacious, expansive, colonising globalisation', a task in which he is joined by Doreen Massey. The following opinion from J. M. Keynes is frequently and favourably quoted by greens:

I sympathize with those who would minimize, rather than with those who would maximize, economic entanglement among nations. Ideas, knowledge, science, hospitality, travel—these are the things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible and, above all, let finance be primarily national.

I hope it is clear throughout this book that a green approach to economics does not distinguish between one prescription for wealthy Western countries and another for those countries that are still 'developing'. As equality is one of the fundamental principles of green economics, so it is a clear commitment that if the system we are designing does not work for all then it does not work at all. In fact, the commitment to 'learning from the South' spelled out in Chapter 1 indicates that, in many ways, from a green perspective some people in the countries of the South have a more sustainable approach to using the Earth's resources than the self-styled 'developed' economies of the West.

**[a]Political Protection for Local Economies**

Amongst green economists there is a consensus that, in James Robertson's words, 'A revival of more self-reliant local economies must be a key feature of the 21st-century world economy'. However, there is less agreement on the sorts of policies needed to revive those economies. This section looks at some policies that have been suggested. Other greens despair of political solutions and look for homegrown actions that lie within the power of communities: their activities are documented in the next section.

Hines's 2000 'manifesto' includes policies designed to localize production and dismantle TNCs, speficially a 'site-here-to-sell-here' policy. This is a classic example of the protection of a locality's industry for strategic reasons—to ensure security of supply of the essentials of life—as well as in order to protect the environment and provide meaningful employment and social cohesion in the post-industrial communities of Western countries. According to Hines, 'Market access would be dependent on compliance with this policy, ensuring that whatever a country or a geographical grouping of countries could produce themselves they did'. This is similar to France's stated policy of 'economic patriotism', which was demonstrated by former Prime Minister de Villepin's decision to defend iconic French company Danone against takeover by the US Pepsico corporation in July 2005. Here the emphasis is apparently on strategic interests, although repositories of French national pride (such as Taittinger champagne) are the real focus. In April 2008, French agriculture minister Michel Barnier blamed 'too much liberalism, too much trust in the free market' for world hunger. He said: 'we must not leave the vital issue of feeding people to the mercy of market laws and international speculation.' The Minneapolis-based Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) has called for green taxes to incorporate the full costs of long-distance transport and trade, while the UK Green Party proposes import and export tariffs to reduce and regulate international trade. Various policies discussed in other chapters would also have the effect of supporting local economies, for example any form of taxation that increases the price of transporting goods long distances (see Chapter 10).

Woodin and Lucas go further in their support for local economies by suggesting an end to all subsidies to agricultural exports and the introduction of a food security clause into the World Trade Organisation treaty to protect self-sufficiency in poorer countries. The severe need for this in some of the world's poorest countries is becoming clear as the international price of staple grains increases rapidly and countries face political turmoil if they are powerless to either underwrite prices or support domestic production. The Green Group in the European parliament has called for strong measures to support local food economies including the ending of dumping of subsidized EU production and greater local self-reliance in food production and 'Rewriting the EU Treaty and the rules of the World Trade Organisation. This is necessary to ensure that food security and maximum self sufficiency, with its inherent reduction in fossil fuel use, replaces the present emphasis on more open markets and international competitiveness. At the same time, poorer countries which currently depend on their exports to EU markets, must be supported in order to enable them to develop stronger national and regional markets closer to home.'

It becomes clear that green economists have a much more hands-on view of how the local economy should be managed than the *laissez-faire* pro-market economists who presently dominate national and international decision-making. This extends to support for specific sectors which are vital in a sustainable economy and to complete bans on others. As an example, the ILSR has proposed the abolition of waste exports and others are calling for a moratorium on trade in biofuels. The Scottish Greens have introduced an Organic Targets Bill to provide income support for farmers who are converting from conventional to organic production, as well as support for renewable energy producers. A report by World Wildlife Fund found that there was the potential to create 50,000 jobs in Scotland's green economy.

— Insert Photo 9.1. Stroud Farmers' Market near here—

At the heart of green policy for the local economy is a focus on the small locally-based businesses which create most jobs. The UK Green Party has a policy of banding corporation tax, so that the larger the business the higher the rate of tax it pays on profits. This would benefit small businesses financially but also encourage the break-up of the larger corporations—the exact opposite of what is happening now with increasing consolidation. It would also increase competition and improve market efficiency. The Party supports the establishment of democratically accountable community banks, which could provide capital for local businesses, as well as local and community currencies.

Pro-localisation campaigners in the UK have successfully written and had passed into national legislation a bill to promote sustainable communities. As indicated in Box 9.1, it invites local authorities to draw up a 'sustainable community strategy' which must take account of many of the negative consequences of globalisation, including increased transport of goods and the threat to local employment.

**Box 9.1.** *Provisions of the UK's Sustainable Communities Act (2007)*

Matters to which local authorities 'must have regard' when drawing up their sustainable community strategy.

(a) the provision of local services
(b) the extent to which the volume and value of goods and services that are sold or procured by public bodies are produced within 30 miles of the boundary of the public body
(c) the rate of increase in the growth and marketing of organic forms of food production and the local food economy
(d) measures to promote reasonable access by all local people to a supply of food that is adequate in terms of both amount and nutritional value,
(e) the number of local jobs
(f) measures to conserve energy and increase the quantity of energy supplies which are produced from sustainable sources within a 30 mile radius of the region in which they are consumed
(g) measures taken to reduce the level of road traffic including, but not restricted to, local public transport provision, measures to promote walking and cycling and measures to decrease the amount of product miles
(h) the increase in social inclusion, including an increase in involvement in local democracy
(i) measures to increase mutual aid and other community projects
(j) measures designed to decrease emissions of greenhouse gases

(k) measures designed to increase community health and well being
(l) planning policies which would assist with the purposes of this Act including new arrangements for the provision of affordable housing
(m) measures to increase the use of local waste materials for the benefit of the community.

## [a]Self-Reliant Local Economies on the Ground

For many greens, waiting for government policies to support local economies is not an option: they believe that we need secure access to our basic resources and are working to develop local systems of production and distribution. Fred Curtis describes such a system of interrelated but independent local economies as 'eco-localism' and argues that it includes: 'local currency systems, food co-ops, micro-enterprise, farmers' markets, permaculture, community supported agriculture (CSA) farms, car sharing schemes, barter systems, co-housing and eco-villages, mutual aid, home-based production, community corporations and banks, and localist business alliances'.

According to Richard Douthwaite, the four basic steps towards greater local self-reliance are:

- Setting up an independent currency system so that the economy can still function no matter what happens in the global financial system;
- The establishment of an independent banking system, such as a credit union, again to protect the local economy from international financial pressures;
- The production of enough energy to meet the needs of the local economy;
- Meeting people's need for food and clothing from within the local economy.

It is interesting that Douthwaite begins with the economic structure before moving on to energy, food and clothing, which might appear more fundamental. The explanation is that without control of the infrastructure of the economy any attempts to address more basic needs will be distorted by the pressure from the globalised economy. An obvious example is the fact that local craftspeople cannot produce goods more cheaply than those that are made in China and imported across the globe.

—Insert Figure 9.3. NEF's image of the 'leaky bucket' local economy near here—

London's New Economics Foundation asks people to imagine their local economy as a bucket (see Figure 9.3). In the era of globalisation most money that comes into any local economy will flow straight out again because it can always receive a greater rate of return from being invested in the global money markets. The local economy is like a bucket with holes in it. Regeneration policy is focused on attracting inward investment with little thought given to ensuring that local people benefit from that investment. It is not so much the amount of money that comes into a local economy that matters but what happens to it once it enters that economy. If you can plug the leaks you can ensure a better quality of life without endlessly having to find new sources of money. NEF also refer to this as 'increasing the local multiplier', which means an increase in the number of times money is spent within your local economy before it moves outside it. For example, if somebody is paid Working Families Tax Credit and they spend it on a weekend break in Majorca which they buy through a chain of travel agents, the money is immediately lost. If instead they went to a local hotel where they paid for a massage and an expensive meal with local ingredients they are increasing the links in the chain: a local healer, a restaurant owner, a chef, a local dairy, a farmer, a supplier of local vegetables, and so on. Increasing the size of the local multiplier is one tool for underpinning flourishing local economies.

The campaign for localisation has made most headway in the area of food—unsurprising given that this is our most basic need. The objective is not for self-sufficiency but for self-reliance:

A system of farming that was truly designed to feed people and to go on doing so for the indefinite future, would be founded primarily on mixed farms and local production. In general, each country . . . would contrive to be self-reliant in food. Self-reliant does not mean self-sufficient. . . Self-reliance does mean, however, that each country would produce its own basic foods, and be able to get by in a crisis.

**Box 9.2.** *Essential Features of a Sustainable Territory*

- It has a stable population
- It provides the basic necessities of life for its population from renewable resources under its control and expects to be able to continue to do so without over-using or degrading those resources for at least a thousand years
- It is therefore able to trade with the outside world out choice rather than necessity
- It is able to protect its renewable resources and its population both militarily and economically
- Its collection of economic protection weapons includes an independent currency and banking system
- It has no debts to lenders outside and there are no net flows of capital across its borders
- It does not depend on continual economic growth to stave off collapse. Its economy grows very slowly if at all

*Source:* Adapted from Douthwaite, R. (1996), *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economics for Security in an Uncertain World* (Totnes: Green Books).

The most vibrant expression of the determination to relocalise our economic system is the Transition Towns movement, which began in the UK in 2006. The Transition Town groups are born of people's awareness of government and market failure to tackle the problem of climate change. While negative and critical views are not encouraged within the transition culture, confidence in 'politicians' and traditional politics is fairly limited with a consequent sense that the priority is to 'do it yourself'. This DIY approach includes the reactivation of local economic production and distribution: many Transition Towns have focused on food as a first step here, as in the example of Transition Town Llandeilo's Afallon Teilo group, which is working to encourage the growing and eating of more local varieties of apple. Totnes has created its own community currency as a similar gesture in favour of a more localized economy. The movement has grown outwards from its origin in Totnes, Devon in 2006 and now embaces 70 or so communities worldwide.

The concept of resilience is central to the ideology of the movement. Rob Hopkins (the primer mover in publicising the concept) takes a definition from the ecologist Brian Walker: 'Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change, so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedback.' As well as reducing the use of fossil fuels, Transition

Towns aim to build stronger, more coherent and more 'resilient' communities, meaning communities that can absorb shocks and respond to them with positive change, rather than fragmenting. The message of Transition is not a new one; what is new, is the style and presentation—often more like a revivalist meeting than a political campaign. In contrast to the 'lean economy' or the 'freedom to be frugal' , Transition offers 'a positive vision'. As Hopkins writes,

I like to use the analogy of inviting a reluctant friend to join you on holiday. If you can passionately and poetically paint a mental picture of the beach, the pool, and the candle-lit taverna by the sea, they will be more likely to come. Environmentalists have often been guilty of presenting people with a mental image of the world's least desirable holiday destination—some seedy bed-and-breakfast near Torquay, with nylon sheets, cold tea and soggy toast—and expecting them to get excited about the prospect of NOT going there. The logic and the psychology are all wrong.

[!box]

**Box 9.3.** *The Thames Gateway Development as an Example of a Non-Self-Reliant Community*

Although there are many examples of misguided planning decisions which do not take account of the climatic and topographical changes likely to be caused by climate change, the Thames Gateway in the UK has to be one of the most glaring. The Thames Gateway is the biggest development project in Western Europe and a flagship regeneration project of the UK's Department of Communities and Local Government. It is claimed to be 'a world-class model of sustainable development', a claim largely based on the inclusion in the plans of some parks and green spaces. The area now designated as the Thames Gateway (the communities it includes have no particular cultural, administrative or transport links) stretches from Canary Wharf in London to Southend in Essex and Sittingbourne in Kent. The area, which is home to 1.45 million people, has suffered the result of industrial restructuring but is to be home to the 2012 Olympics—hence the need for refurbishment. Under plans for the regeneration 160,000 new homes will be built and 180,000 jobs created by 2016. The Environment Agency reported to the government that half of the area proposed for development is within the floodplain of the Thames. A report from independent consultants W. S. Atkins also concluded that a significant proportion of the area designated for development is in the floodplain and that the risk of flooding is increasing. Most of the proposed development sites are on the riverside. Atkins estimated the annual cost of maintaining infrastructure in such a flood-prone setting as £47m. with an estimate of £4bn. - £5bn. In the case of a catastrophic flooding event. The site has been chosen because it is close to London and because it suits business interests. It does not fit within either the local environment or make much sense to the existing local communities.

*Source*: www.thamesgateway.gov.uk; www.communities.gov.uk; Darch, G. (2006), 'The impacts of climate change on London's transport systems' CIWEM Met Branch Conference, 22 Feb.

[!box ends]

The localisation message is not limited to the countries of the West or the more developed countries. In many ways its message is more important for the 'less developed' economies which have not yet become so bereft of subsistence skills or so dependent on fossil fuels: 'the principle of more self-reliant local development, and many practical applications of that principle, are equally valid for people in rich and poor countries alike. To turn any economy which creates local dependency into one that enables self-reliant local development to become the norm, calls for similar changes in psycho-social outlook, economic and financial organization, and political and social power structures.' As Box 9.4 makes clear, some countries which have travelled a long distance along the path towards a complex, capitalist economy have had traumatic experiences that are persuading them that a different path might suit them better.

[!box]

**Box 9.4.** *A Sufficiency Economy in Thailand*

Thailand has developed an alternative model for measuring progress made by its country and her people, as reported in the latest report from the UN on the country which is titled *Sufficiency Economy and Human Development*. Rather than using money as a yardstick, or measuring economic activity in terms of GDP, the report focuses on various aspects of a Human Achievement Index. The report owes much to the thinking of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej:

The important message of the theory was the King's conclusions about how to achieve real development with real benefits for ordinary people. Progress had to be achieved in stages. Before moving to another stage, there first had to be a firm foundation of self-reliance or else there was a strong chance of failure and loss of independence. The driving force for development had to come from within, based on accumulation of knowledge. In summary: *Self-reliance. Moderation. Resilience. Inner dynamic. Knowledge.*

In agriculture the message is one of self-reliance based around the model of the family farm. This is in stark contrast to the export-led growth model encouraged for smaller economies by international development agencies. The report also prioritises diversity and security, using a networking and mutual support model to encourage these. The example cited is that of Serm Udomna who took out a loan of 5,000 baht in 1979 to become a cassava farmer. By 1986 his debt had increased to 30,000 baht and he decided to switch to replacing the cash crop he was growing with rice, vegetables and fruit, using a permaculture-style forest-garden approach. He now has more than 260 kinds of trees growing in his 'agro-forest' and has paid back most of his debts.

As a tactic for moving towards sustainability the report proposes 'moderately working with nature' and within this framework using the following principles:

- seek solutions offered by nature
- seek solutions in traditional practice
- consider the impact on other parts of the eco-system
- favour solutions which are self-sustaining
- favour solutions which are economical

This solution from the South has much in common with the response to the environmental crisis suggested by the Transition Towns movement in the UK.

*Source*: UNDP (2007), *Sufficiency Economy and Human Development: Thailand Human Development Report 2007* (Bangkok: UNDP).

[!box ends]

## [a] The Next Step: The Bioregional Economy

Beyond localisation, the concept now developing amongst green economists is that of a bioregional economy—an economy which is embedded within its environment. The crisis we face is essentially an ecological crisis: if we fail to recognize our place within the complex system of interrelationships that life on earth represents, then the future of humankind as a species is under threat. Bioregionalism represents a culture of living that acknowledges ecological limits (Kirkpatrick Sale's take on what this might mean as principles for building an economy is presented in Box 9.5). From an economic perspective, bioregions are natural social units determined by ecology rather than economics, and that can be largely self-sufficient in terms of basic resources such as water, food, products and services. The concept of 'bioregionalism' itself assists in interpreting economics in a broadly geographical way, in contrast to the post-globalisation economics which revolves around price (usually the price of labour) and downplays the role of geography altogether. Climate change re-emphasises the importance of transport-related $CO_2$ emissions and therefore an economic response to climate change requires the re-embedding of space within our understanding of the economy. This new economic paradigm requires us to live consciously and carefully within our ecological niche: 'Bioregionalism recognizes, nurtures, sustains and celebrates our local connections with: land; plants and animals; rivers, lakes and oceans; air; families, friends and neighbors; community; native traditions; and traditional systems of production and trade'.

Bioregional economics is therefore about reconnecting with our local environment and having deeper relationships with the suppliers of our resources, as a substitute for the thin nature of such economic relations within the globalised capitalist economy:

Your bioregion is effectively your backyard. It is the part of the planet you are responsible for. Bioregionalism means living a rooted life, being aware of where your resources come from and where your wastes go. It is the opposite of a life lived in the limited knowledge that food comes from Tesco, leaving everything to the global corporations who are only too willing to take on this responsibility in return for their profits. Unlike political boundaries, bioregional boundaries are flexible, but should be guided by the principle of subsidiarity in the case of any individual resource or service. Within the bioregional approach beginning with the local is a principle that trumps principles such as price or choice.

In a sense there is nothing new about this sort of thinking. Schumacher saw fuel and food as two basic necessities for survival. All communities should strive to be self-sufficient in these as far as possible—otherwise they would become economically and politically vulnerable and Petr Kropotkin, William Morris and Robert Owen, all called for the return to small, self-sufficient, land-based communities—largely for social rather than environmental reasons. What is different about bioregionalism is that it is being used as a tool to challenge globalisation: a way of fleshing out the ideas of localisation into a fully fledged economic alternative.

**Box 9.5.** *Kirkpatrick Sale's Essential Elements to Guide a Bioregional Economy*

1. All production of goods or services would be based primarily on a reverence for life. All systems have limits and they must be learned and adhered to in every

economic act, and overuse of a resource or species, or their depletion and exhaustion, would be seen as a criminal act of violence, and overproduction of a resource or a species, such as the human, would be seen as a criminal act of avarice and greed, not to mention stupidity.

2. The primary unit of production would be the self-sufficient community, within a self-regarding bioregion, which would strive to produce all its needs, shunning long-distance trade except for non-essential objects of beauty, and essential political and economic decisions would be taken democratically at that level, mindful of the health of the entire bioregion.
3. Consumption would be limited, for it is not a rightful end in itself but merely a means to human well-being, for which only a little is necessary to satisfy vital human needs: the goal of economic life is not the multiplication of wants but the satisfaction of basic needs.
4. Everything produced and the means of its production would embody the four cardinal principles of smaller, simpler, cheaper, safer—that is to say, technology on a human scale, comprehensible, affordable for all, and non-violent.
5. The only jobs would be those that enhance the worker, contribute to the immediate community, and produce nothing but needed goods—and that means goods, not bads.
6. All people who wish to do so would work, for the purpose of work is not to produce things to satisfy wants but rather primarily to nourish and develop the individual soul, aiming at fulfilling the highest nature of the human character, including identification with community and the satisfaction of its needs.
7. All economic decisions would be made in accordance with the Buddhist principle: 'Cease to do evil; try to do good', and the definition of good would be that which preserves and enhances the integrity, stability, diversity, continuity, and beauty of living species and systems; that which does the contrary is evil.

*Source:* Sale, K. (2006*b*), 'Economics of Scale vs. the Scale of Economics: Towards Basic Principles of a Bioregional Economy', *Vermont Commons*, Feb.

—Insert Photo 9.a. Buy Nothing Day near here—

Elsewhere I have described the bioregional economy as requiring a 'Robinson Crusoe economics'. By this I mean that we need to adopt the perspective of a person washed up on a desert island seeking to meet his or her needs. This is the opposite of what we do in the global economy, where we start out with our desires and then seek to meet them using resources from anywhere on the globe, processed by people in countries with the lowest levels of wages. The inclination would be to begin with what is closest to hand and to improvise solutions to needs using ingenuity and innovation. These talents are not called for in the globalised capitalist economy but will become increasingly vital as oil supplies dwindle and climate change undermines the communication routes we presently rely on. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt it will mean 'Doing what you can, with what you have, where you are'.

These theoretical statements are all very well but might leave us asking, 'But what would it feel like to live in a bioregional economy?' Because the history of the UK since Medieval times has been a process of continual dislocation of people from their land such an economic life feels distant and can be hard to imagine. We can be sure, however, that we will have a closer relationship with our locality, as more of our resources will be drawn from our very local environment. This will also increase our responsibility for our environment, which will come to be our backyard in a positive sense—the piece of the planet we are accountable for and which we protect because it is the source of our well-being. Within a bioregional economy those who share a local environment will need to build closer relationships—these will be genuine, economic relationships, where we rely on each other's skills. This will help to restore community: an economic life where workers are skilled, autonomous and genuinely productive may also offers solutions to many of our social ills. Finally, the bioregional economy will not require the wearing of hair-shirts, locally produced or otherwise; sociality and conviviality are likely to replace the purchase of energy-intensive goods. We will rely on each other and our personal interactions to provide a sense of well-being and joy, rather than the purchases we make in out-of-town shopping centres.

—Insert Photo 9.2. Cuban 'camel' urban public transport in Havana—

Again we may be able to learn some lessons 'from the South' in moving towards a low-carbon, locally based bioregional economy. In this case an example which has provided much inspiration is that of Cuba, which had to respond rapidly to the end of imports of cheap oil from the Soviet Union following its break-up in 1990. There were a number of make-do-and-mend strategies in the transport sector. The famous remnants of 1950s US cars had long been patched and repaired, but without oil to run them people had to resort to other means of transport. A huge quantity of bicycles were imported from China and large semi-trailers pulled by agricultural vehicles have created a new type of vehicle, nicknamed 'the camel', which can transport 300 passengers. Cuba's main success has been in the growing of vegetables within an urban context. Before 1990 the vast majority of Cuba's basic diet of rice and beans was imported—but without foreign exchange this became impossible. Instead, Cubans created *huertos*—a form of urban vegetable garden, which took over urban spaces such as car parks (which were no longer needed!). Larger market gardens, known as *organiponicos* , took over other urban sites, and vegetable growers became some of the best-paid workers. The change in diet has been dramatic, as has the increase in domestic production: Havana now produces 50% of its food within the city and 85-90 per cent of Cuba's vegetables are grown domestically.

**[a] Conclusion**

This chapter has presented proposals from green economists to replace the globalised capitalist system with a network of self-reliant local economies. As made clear in the previous chapter, this will not mean the end of trade, but it will mean that preference is given to local production for goods that can be produced locally. Figure 9.4 gives an indication of how the restructured sustainable economy might look. This will mean a shift in the focus of our economic life: we will need many more people skilled in practical crafts and especially in agriculture. There is no question that within such an economy we will need to become different kinds of people: that we will achieve our satisfactions in life in new ways, and that we will be called upon to be more creative and ingenious than we presently are. Some aspects of the transition will cause hardship, but others will be more deeply fulfilling than our lives within a capitalist work-and-consumption system can ever be.

—Insert Figure 9.4. Margaret Legum's Design for Building Prosperity Globally near here—

Climate change means that some shift along these lines if inevitable: for a green economist this is an exciting and welcome challenge. There are social, as well as environmental benefits, to an economy organised more locally. As Douthwaite argues, such a development is the response to the environmental crisis that is most likely to achieve sustainability:

There is therefore a close link between restoring local economic self-reliance and achieving sustainability. Theoretically it might be possible to develop a world-wide industrial culture that enables all humanity to live sustainably within the limits of the world, but the scale and the complexity of the task are immense. An easier, more feasible alternative is to create a system that would encourage a greater diversity of diet, clothing, building materials, and life-styles. This would take the pressure off over-used resources just as it does in the natural world where each species has it own ecological niche and avoids competing directly with others.