

**Second Conference on Economic Degrowth
for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity
March 26-29th 2010, Barcelona**

Working group 15. Cities and degrowth

How will cities look after degrowth? Can we plan for degrowth and how (multifunctional urbanism, etc)?

‘STIRRING’ PAPER

**Cities, De-Growth and The Big Five
Richard Register**

De-paving, small case

This I’ve done a number of times in Berkeley and Oakland, California.

- 1.) Get permission from a land owner who is interested in ecological values to remove some of their paving: a driveway, parking lot or paved over “planter strip” – the area between a sidewalk and curb in many parts of many cities. That owner might be a city government, a housing project, a private individual, maybe yourself.
 - 2.) Rent a masonry saw to cut a straight line defining the edge of the de-paved area.
 - 3.) With heavy hammers and crowbars, tear up the paving. Teenagers especially love this. It can usually be done in ways to produce flat slabs and blocks.
 - 4.) In some cases the pieces of former paving can be stacked up to make benches or walls – concrete can work, asphalt just eventually falls apart. Or else you have to take the debris to a landfill.
 - 5.) Mix in soil amendments: fertilizer, compost, sand, etc. as needed in the particular case.
 - 6.) Plant with food garden, fruit trees, flowers...
1. a.) If you want to make it a social/educational event, invite your friends and associates and send out press releases in advance.

De-paving, large case – for smaller cities

Counter intuitively, in the minds of many, the compact city of larger, taller buildings of highly diverse functions is a much smaller infrastructure than scattered

smaller structures – houses, shopping areas, “back offices,” etc. – spreading out from city centers, united by thousands of acres of paving, pipes, and wires depending on enormous quantities of land, streets, vehicles, energy, time and money. The city of apartments, larger mixed-use buildings, bikes, transit, stairs and elevators is much smaller, ecologically healthier, socially friendlier and more equitable.

- 1.) Create an “ecocity zoning overlay map” by finding the vital centers of any city, usually the downtown as the largest center, major district centers as next down in scale and various neighborhood centers of a range of sizes down to very small.
- 2.) Draw circles around these centers with widths of delineated bands varying more or less proportionally to the size of the center – I’ll show some samples of this. About five to seven of these target-like bands on your map moving out from the centers are sufficient. The farther from the center, the higher the priority for removing development – systematic “de-development.” This is best accomplished in the United States through “willing seller deals.” The closer to the center, the higher the density and functional diversity.
- 3.) In the concentric zones farther from the centers, demolish and recycle the houses and other structures, tear up the paving. Replace with parks, food gardens, orchards, restored creeks and other natural areas, recycling centers, sports fields or any other of many good open space uses.
- 4.) Shift development to the centers in a zoning and codes strategy to provide high levels of functional diversity: residential living, jobs, commerce, education, public administration, public meeting places, all close together – “access by proximity” – and all in ecocity architectural mode depending on the local environment: multi-story solar greenhouses or shade and breeze structures, rooftop and terrace gardens, pedestrian bridges between buildings, and so on.

The goal is the city for people, not cars. The ecocity is the car-free city.

Shrink for Prosperity

Ecocities are necessary but not enough.

In 1989 a book was published called *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth*. Said a friend, “What about the three or four big things that would actually work?”

I’ve come up with Five Big Ones and they all cluster around a concept I call “Shrink for Prosperity,” as in the small and large de-development/de-paving examples above.

- 1.) Reducing our numbers gradually, de-population to reasonable levels.

2.) reshaping our cities and associated technologies and life styles – the area I “specialize” in – and...

3.) shifting our agricultural and diet nexus to something much more light on meat, much more organic and much less land consuming.

4.) Number Four is generosity, which means people paying their taxes. Economic strategy that will actually work: tax the rich. That’s the three-word solution, which means graduated income tax taken seriously. In this process we all need to take responsibility for investing the money in the above three, from family planning to building ecocities to shifting to the diet and agricultural practices indicated. A dimension of Number Four, generosity, is not stealing and above all else, stealing someone else’s life: killing and war.

5.) The Fifth Big One is simply education, but education strongly emphasizing the above Four. We assiduously avoid the Big Four above in education, probably because we have to face up to some very serious change. But if we persist in only minor modifications – changing to better light bulbs, recycling better, putting solar electric panels on suburban rooftops and driving electric cars while continuing the building of the city for cars – we won’t make it.

So now, slogans for true progress: “Roll back sprawl!” “Shrink for prosperity!”