

# ***WE DO HAVE A CLIMATE & ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY . . AND WE NEED TO TALK***

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Few realise it. But with our dire climate emergency – we now have a '21<sup>st</sup> century tail wind' of staggering scale: **the stark exponential trends** of global resource consumption, fuelling both climate change & ecological degradation of the biosphere.

Meanwhile, there is the gross climate injustice of a UK target for 'Net Zero', pushed to the year 2050; to be attained through fairy tale promises of Carbon Capture & Storage (CCS) technology. The other acronym is CDR: Carbon Dioxide Removal. Let's be honest. **The only real CCS / CDR is ecological** (Soils, peat, saltmarsh, trees, seagrasses, etc.). Wales, with less than 15% tree cover, needs to meet its target of 300M trees well before 2050, and even that would only mean about 23% tree cover, compared to about 32% for countries like Germany, Italy & France with greater population densities. Wales too needs serious progress towards total self-sufficiency in food, compared with a current 19% self-sufficiency in vegetables. No resilience!

We are about 8 years away from locked-in exceedance of 1.5°C, with 'dangerous & irreversible consequences' (IPCC AR6). 8 years within which some radical shift in society, including the wider UK, needs to happen. A radical shift with an informed, thus empowered, population pushing for societal change, not resisting it. Enabled civil society needs to lead the way, not least to give youth hope.

A timely shift will **not** come solely via some benign top-down hierarchy of governance, as at present. There has to be an equally developing dynamic from the bottom up that works in synergy to accelerate change in our collective understanding of our governance system and politics in order to lead to real community action & delivery. That applies right across the UK.

In Wales, that requires the Welsh Government to champion the expectation of active citizenship; to fund and facilitate, through local authorities, widespread civil society engagement across all Welsh communities:

the enabling of 'Stakeholders' to become empowered. The first action above all is, **we need to talk**.

Although this author is an XR supporter, CC citizen assemblies (CAs) are arguably insufficient to resolve strategic complexities. None in the UK have considered or debated 'degrowth' (**See below**). In Gwynedd, five CAs are being attempted, engaging about 200 people, which seems to be costing into six-figures to educate only 0.25% of the Gwynedd adult population. Helpful though that is it still lets off the vast majority of the population. In one town in the Glaslyn catchment, it is five years since the last public community meeting was held albeit one very well attended and which included a talk on climate change. But it is a similar story across large parts of the UK, with local authorities excusing themselves on the back of 13 years of austerity.

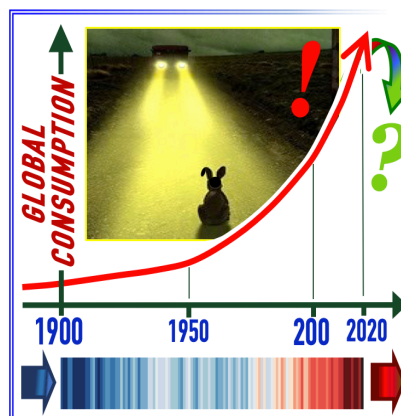
Incidentally, the oft cited 3.5% 'tipping point' figure for populations to mobilise for social change (*From Chenoweth & Stephan*), lacks validity and has been

speciously applied in the context of the need for a complex societal paradigm shift. For that is precisely the challenge in addressing the emergency we have. But it must be grappled with through multi-faceted, consensus-developing, processes within our communities.

The mainstream media (MSM) and governments have betrayed our children in failing to educate the

adults to sufficiently understand the interconnectivities and the depth of the crisis we face and, so, to take the steps needed. Failing to inform: it was so with Iraq, and it was so with Brexit. With climate, more than any issue, people need to know far, far more and need great help envisioning:

**Tomorrow is no longer** (taught to us by) **yesterday**. Gradualist diffusion, towards a little more informed public is not an option. That luxury of opportunity, alive under the 1990s' **Local Agenda 21** processes, we have casually squandered. Now, instead, extensive local



endeavours must be put in train urgently, which is only possible through sheer numbers of people talking and acting in concert. Adults need to decide: do they really need school children and *Fridays for Future* to shame them into taking our predicament seriously.

Graeber & Wengrow's brilliant 2021 opus, *The Dawn of Everything*, showed us many things. Crucially, it argues that even many millennia BC some small cities developed and were organised without any evidence of a definitive ruling hierarchy - instead, all must have been 'community' organised: engagement & consensus.

We are indeed essentially communal beings but fossil fuelled enabled neoliberalism has driven us towards being an individuated & more hedonistic society, with a dysfunctional 'take it or leave it' attitude to democracy. Where the majority - through apathy or complacency - have little clue what's ahead, preferring to be led; with election turn-outs below 40% being common. Altruistic citizenship seems largely mythical against the feasting worm of consumerism & screen virtual reality.

***There is another world but it is this one*** (Éluard).

For mitigating climate' globally, the UK and Wales may have limited scope. Yet, through leadership and its peoples, much more can be done. Wales needs to be climate adapted and resilient for the high risk of disruptions to come; food security is the glaringly obvious one. But the crisis, and thus our vulnerability, is rooted in both the degree and centralisation of our consumption, which we need to confront.

True resilience now means far more: major economic re-localisation; reduced & low-C consumption; regenerative farming; an 'explosion' of silviculture up-skilling; building sector retrofit for efficiency; extending renewables & micro-grids, and where centres for championing arts & crafts can be designed to serve both greater economic self-sufficiency and health & wealth being for our future prosperity.

Across the ecologically degraded landscapes of the UK and Wales, it means genuine Natural Resource Catchment Management with nature-based solutions and an all-out drive for afforestation; with serious debate about land ownership and our preparedness to duly reward farmers for land husbandry. Key to that is communities understanding and relating to their hydrological catchments.

None of that in Wales can be moved forward with sufficient speed *UNLESS* Welsh communities come together. Indeed, dispersed across Wales, there are wonderful hotspots of leading practice but the call now is to everyone: to strive to understand and so to act.

Young peoples' lives need to be filled with some sense of empowerment, of actions happening, of hope; with their communities reaching out to them for inter-generational dialogue because these **future generations are the most important stakeholders**. Their mental well-being by the end of this decade depends upon this.

In December 2015, my 5,000 word report from Paris, bore some hope, coming as it did at the end of a long road. Yet it concluded with a quote from another age, which even then seemed apposite,

*"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there 'is' such a thing as being too late.*

*This is no time for apathy or complacency.*

*This is a time for vigorous and positive action."*

Dr Martin Luther King Jnr.

Siding with Professor Kevin Anderson, we can always do something and make some difference but **the best of what we can all offer our future generations, depends upon what we do over the next 10 years.**

That can *ONLY* come now through genuine mass civil society engagement, not least facilitated by systematic action of local authorities.

We have squandered far too much time already. We are all in charge here, or should be. All of us have the responsibility.

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Richard A Shirres

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*1 In December, 2022, the UNA-Menai responded to the Welsh Government's consultation on Public Engagement on Climate Change, using many of the key arguments expressed here.*

*2 An excellent primer on **degrowth** has recently been published by a New Zealand author, available at:*

[https://www.purposecapital.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/White-Paper\\_Investing-in-Degrowth\\_Dec-2021.pdf](https://www.purposecapital.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/White-Paper_Investing-in-Degrowth_Dec-2021.pdf)