

## EVOLVING VIEWPOINT

While the majority of societies are based on cooperation, over the past few hundred years 'Western civilisation' has prioritised competition over cooperation. This is especially evident in their financial and economic systems. While a 'renaissance person' could have a wide grasp of many disciplines, since the 1800s there has been a scientific tradition of 'reductionism' which has led to a splintering and separation of many disciplines. In the 1960s and 1970s a more inclusive and holistic way of looking at life and the world around us began to emerge. Permaculture was at the forefront of this 'movement', advocating the integration of many disciplines into the design process. The following is from Mollison (1988) *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*, pp.1-2.

Information and humanity, science and understanding, are in transition. Long ago, we began by wondering mainly about what is most distant; astronomy and astrology were our ancient pre-occupations. We progressed, millenia by millenia, to enumerating the wonders of earth. First by naming things, then by categorising them, and more recently by deciding how they function and what work they do within and without themselves. This analysis has resulted in the development of different sciences, disciplines and technologies; a welter of names and the sundering of parts; a proliferation of specialists; and a consequent inability to foresee results or to design integrated systems.

The present great shift in emphasis is on how the parts interact, how they work together with each other, how dissonance or harmony in life systems or society is achieved. Life is cooperative rather than competitive, and life forms of very different qualities may interact beneficially with one another and with their physical environment. Even "the bacteria... live by collaboration, accommodation, exchange, and barter" (Lewis Thomas, 1974).

**Cooperation, not competition, is the very basis of existing life systems and of future survival.**

## 15. Principle of Cooperation



For a community garden or community market garden to succeed takes the cooperation of the whole community. Waste food and other available organic inputs need to be collected and processed. This need to be applied as fertiliser on a range of crops with other organic inputs such as mineral rock dust where needed. At the garden you need people harvesting the food, collecting seeds from the largest fruits and vegetables, mixing up potting mix from worm compost and sand etc., planting and watering the seeds, and planting seedlings in the garden. The garden also needs to be irrigated and mulched regularly and checked for pests and diseases. The produce needs to be packed and delivered to either a store or direct to the end user. In these processes, from seed to plate, we rely on cooperation within the group managing the garden area and between the group and the community. The entire process also relies on the cooperation of billions of organisms and bacteria, necessary for the recycling of organic matter back into soil and plant nutrients. Soil bacteria and fungi (mycorrhiza) work together to feed minerals to the plants, and in return the plants feed sugars to the fungi. Both nature and human societies rely on cooperation for their correct functioning. When competition dominates in the garden one weed species can overwhelm and suppress the natural diversity. When competition dominates in society one 'cultural viewpoint' can overwhelm and suppress the myriad of subcultures that give societies their diversity and stability. In a diverse society where these subcultures are allowed to flourish alongside the main 'crop' there is a niche for everyone, leading to a rich and resilient culture.

HOLMGREN

COMPETITION

### Benefits of Competition

Competition in nature helps test the vigour and fitness of individual organisms, or a species, for particular conditions. Predation, where it removes the weaker individuals, also contributes to "survival of the fittest". For example, direct seeding to produce dense stands of plants (be it radishes or oak trees) encourages the fastest-growing and most vigorous individuals to prevail. We can help that process along by thinning, as the more vigorous individuals become obvious. By doing so, we are acting as selective predators. Australian graziers who let mis-mothered lambs die may be seen by some as callous or lazy, but they are also allowing a positive selection pressure for adequate mothering in their flocks. (See Principle 8: *Integrate Rather than Segregate*, Principle 10: *Use and Value Diversity* and Principle 12: *Use and Respond to Change* for more elaborate ways we can make use of competition and predation.)

In human systems, we understand that comfort and excessive protection from challenges and competition can lead to self-satisfied, lazy and eventually dysfunctional behaviour. We can see this in the raising of children, the evolution of organisations and the history of civilisations.

See GUILDS under PRINCIPLE OF STABILITY,

COMMUNITY MARKET GARDEN

DARWIN

SELF RELIANCE

The term 'survival of the fittest' was first used by an American economist, Herbert Spencer, in 1864. Darwin did later use the term, but a more accurate description of his theory of natural selection is "survival of the best fit". He did not intend it to mean that the most competitive species or organism 'wins'. His theory of natural selection is that those organisms survive that are "better designed for an immediate, local environment."

During the 1960s/1970s there was an emphasis on **self-sufficiency** amongst some sub-cultures. This entailed growing and producing as much of your needs as possible. In contrast Permaculture stresses '**self-reliance**'. We are all part of a society and it is through cooperative behaviour within that society that we can become self-reliant. Rather than demanding of the land you are on to produce all your needs, see what your land wants to produce in excess and swap or sell that to others.

PRINCIPLES  
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