THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES IN CULTURAL CHANGE...

Tackling the current global ecological and social crises urgently requires a cultural transformation away from today’s dominant consumerism and nationalism towards a culture of wellbeing with simpler living and a sense of planetary solidarity and identity.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have a crucial role in helping to bring about such a Great Transition to a sustainable and equitable future (more about the vision of the Great Transition in the annex). Yet, current CSO campaigns often fail to address the cultural dimension of the Great Transition. The shortcomings can be found at two levels:

- The heavy reliance on technical facts and rational arguments fails to address the importance of the non-conscious mind in human behaviour.
- Short-term tactics, i.e. the hope to move the political agenda forward by playing the game of government and business often means that CSOs are communicating the very values and frames of our current culture of self-interest and national interest.

If civil society organisations want to become a positive force in the necessary cultural transformation, they need to learn how to tap into the creative world of mythmaking.

This guide is the result of the discussions at a workshop (November 2012 in Cologne, Germany) where a group of people from different CSOs gathered and guided by globally acclaimed storyteller Jonah Sachs explored how stories can effectively contribute to creating myths that help to bring about the Great Transition. It is based on the proven methodology Jonah Sachs uses to guide campaigns towards great storytelling (see also his book, Winning the Story Wars: Why Those Who Tell and (Live) the Best Stories will Rule the Future).

We hope that this guide will inspire other actors in civil society to start thinking about how they can contribute to the Great Transition through telling (and living) new stories.
HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This Story Strategy Guide is divided into three sections:

I. STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE FRUSTRATED CSO CHANGE AGENT

II. STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

III. APPENDICES

The first section lays out the core elements of a unified Great Transition story strategy that helps to align the efforts of diverse professionals and volunteers working within organizations to create change. It is a first attempt to allow for the dedicated work of thousands to begin adding up to something greater than it can be achieved by individual campaigns. This alignment is a key evolution that must occur for the Great Transition to actually come about.

The second section lays out the core elements of a Great Transition story strategy to welcome a broader swath of the general public into the work that must be done to achieve steps toward the Great Transition. The goal is to take the confused citizen who feels something is wrong and channel his or her energy to where it is needed most — a movement of empowered people working for a just and sustainable future.

The Appendices provide some of the inputs that the working group generated to produce the insights in this guide.
I. OUR STORY STRATEGY
FOCUSED ON THE CSO
CHANGE AGENT

Let’s start with how we talk to those already working for transformative change and help them to align their campaign work with the broader movement.
I. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

BRAND MENTOR
THE CAPTAIN/MAGICIAN

With clear vision and bold belief in change, we wake others to their own empowerment. We can’t help but sprinkle a little fun and imagination in along the way.

BRAND HERO
The frustrated CSO change agent — she got into the field to do some real good in the world and has sacrificed much to try to make it happen. But disturbing thoughts continue to nag at her — is she doing more harm than good?

BRAND GIFT
THE PUZZLE

On the surface of a story, we find characters, conflict and plot. These visible elements are analogous to the communications you’ll produce as a brand. These elements grow from the strategic layers that underlie them. On the layers below, we find the core values that inform the structure and meaning of the story. The “Moral” is the central message or lesson.

Connect with people’s values, and offer a Moral that resonates with them, and you are on your way to branding success. The following pages explain the above elements of The Great Transition’s CSO-facing story strategy in further depth.

MORAL OF THE STORY
If you want to make real change, start working to change the system. Your passion, talents and organization are needed now more than ever.
I. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

OUR BRAND HERO

The Frustrated CSO Change Agent

Our hero is the activist seriously engaged in finding ways to solve global issues like climate change, poverty, human rights etc. She realises, or is starting to realise, that the ways her organisation (or civil society sector) is trying to fix these problems doesn’t seem to work anymore. She realises that while we have won many battles, we are losing the planet. She has the energy to do something about it (she wants to try new ways) but lacks the resources and the support.

Neither we, nor the Great Transition are the heroes of our brand story. Our audiences are. Each communication we write will be an invitation to take action that leads to connection, greater impact and satisfaction. Here are what of our heroes look like.
I. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

MYTH GAPS OPENING FOR OUR HERO

THE BROKEN STORY OF INCREMENTAL CHANGE

This story told our hero that by winning many battles, in the long run we can win the planet (solve the ecological and humanitarian crises).

THE BROKEN STORY OF DEVELOPMENT

This story told our hero that to support (with money, knowledge and expertise) the global south, we must create similar models of society, economy and wealth to those we have in the north.

THE BROKEN STORY OF TECHNOLOGY

This story told our hero that we don’t have to change our lives to solve our environmental problems. Instead, we can simply convince governments, businesses and consumers to embark on a journey of technological innovation. These innovations will allow us to keep living the way we are but make it sustainable.

For a more in-depth look at the myth gaps we identified, please see the annex on page 34

Successful communications campaigns focus on creating empathetic connections with primary audiences. One of the most powerful ways to achieve empathy is to address the anxiety created when old, cherished stories stop making sense and to offer the new stories to take their place. For the CSO Change Agent Hero, we identified the following Myth Gaps, or broken stories, our brand can and should address:
I. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

VALUES

The Great Transition as Captain/Magician is based on three core values that the brand holds and helps audiences to live out. Accompanying each value is a short statement. This is how our brand might approach our hero with a simple declaration of that value.

OPTIMISM

Yes, creating change has been hard. But that’s because, as changemakers, we’ve often focused on the symptoms and worked apart from each other. Paradigm-shifting exponential change is actually possible when we work together at the source of the world’s challenges.

CONNECTIVITY

Change requires us to connect on all levels. We must connect the problems we work on with to their root causes, connect our organizations to each other and connect ourselves to the millions of people around the world who are ready for something different. We have the tools now to do all of this.

INTEGRITY

As difficult as it is to admit, hard work and good intention alone don’t do justice to those we are trying to serve or to the money we spend. Truly walking your path as a changemaker means being unafraid to ask the hard questions, go against the grain and finally reach for lasting change.

Successful brands evolve from a set of core values that drive messaging and activities. These values guide internal choices and external relationships, providing access points for your audiences based on values they share with you.
MORAL OF OUR STORY

If you want to make real change, start working to change the system. Your passion, talents and organisation are needed now more than ever.

This Moral is a simple, clarifying statement that puts our values into action. It is intended to reach out on an emotional level to our frustrated change agent and tell him that despite his reservations about his own effectiveness, she is exactly what’s needed right now. It tells her that change is possible but requires a broader view and connection to a community (only strongly implied in this statement) that is waiting for her to accept the call.

Every communication that is created with the intention of strengthening the story of the Great Transition should work to reinforce this core insight.
BRAND MENTOR: THE CAPTAIN/MAGICIAN

A mentor with a plan (and a playful side)

It is the rare hero who can accept the call to adventure when it is but a whisper in a dream. But when called forth by a bold and decisive leader, heroes seem to appear everywhere. As The Captain, it falls to us to bring out heroic action, and steadfastly guide those who choose to follow.

Our greatest strength comes from the trust we inspire and that is built from a communications style that emphasizes clarity of vision and an ability to make ourselves understood. While we speak on the level of systems change, we favor plain and simple language, relying on calls to emotion as much as intellect. We are idealistic, confident, tireless and brave. While many Captains drift into the self-serious and strident, we have a trace of the playful, transcendent Magician within us. This side of our brand personality recognizes the absolute enormity of what we are trying to achieve and that it will take unpredictable breakthroughs to get there. We are often creative, irreverent and energetic — believing imagination and play can move mountains. We revel in surprising and delighting those around us.

People seek relationships with other people, not faceless organisations. The Great Transition story-based brand must be expressed in the clear voice of a storyteller. Our storytelling voice is that of a mentor, inviting our audiences (the heroes of our story) to take a journey of empowerment.
BRAND GIFT

The Puzzle

The language on the preceding pages emphasizing hope, broader focus and an intention for system change is designed to get our audience’s attention and make them believe that more is possible. But that belief will quickly disappear, to be replaced by cynicism, if we cannot offer a clear vision of how system change can happen and how we as civil society change agents can play a more effective role in it. The Puzzle is our visual metaphor for a clear theory of change that reinforces the idea that each organization and changemaker has a part to play and a place to fit in. The puzzle, however, is not a metaphor for a completed fixed vision. It should be presented, intentionally as partially complete. The Great Transition brand must provide frameworks, systems thinking, parameters and a platform for learning. It will be up to the community from there to complete the picture. Thus the visual of the puzzle stands in for both a drive toward a complete vision and an acceptance that we will not create it on our own.

The brand gift is the wild card element that makes the difficult journey possible for your hero; it is what you give your audience that enables them to succeed. Think of the ruby red slippers given to Dorothy by the good witch, or the magic staff for Moses. The brand gift gives flavor to a brand — serving as a differentiator — and is often its most memorable feature.
SAMPLE VIDEO EXECUTION

Seeds of Change

*Note this is a sample concept to bring the brand insights to life. To create an actual brand video, this concept would be used only as a starting point, not as an actual foundation for a script.*

This video concept begins at the level of Earth from space at night. Slowly points of light begin to pop up in separate places. There is a growing sense that something mysterious and unexpected is happening.

A voiceover narration begins to translate the symbolic imagery we are about to see (described below) into the language of the real world that CSO change agents face.

We cut into our symbolic animated world. Our hero works feverishly to the level of exhaustion in a small office. We see by the paperwork on her desk that she is a development agent. Furiously she pounds away at her computer and shuffles her papers. But as she looks out the window, she sees decay, growing poverty and a tide of expanding challenges. She looks up a bit to see a giant gear is turning outside of his window. She has an insight and she tries to jam a broom handle in it to stop it. The handle snaps. Zoom up to 10,000’ level and we see our hero’s CSO is but a tiny spot surrounded by a giant machine that chugs and churns on, It fills the sky with smoke and spits out the problems she is trying so desperately and ineffectively to address.

Back in our office, our hero collapses, head down on her desk in despair. But beneath all of that paperwork, she sees a glowing light. She digs underneath and pulls it out. It is his puzzle piece, aglow. As we see this symbol, the narrator is speaking about the initial spark of inspiration and desire for change that drove each of us to try to change the world to begin with. The hero takes the glowing piece to his window.
SAMPLE VIDEO EXECUTION (CONT’D)

Seeds of Change

She holds it out as a beacon. Right away, her door suddenly flies open and two other heroes rush in with their pieces. They begin to assemble the puzzle. Several more join.

As they assemble their pieces, the light increases and flies out the window smashing a piece of the system. It flies across the city off into the distance, breaking gears and machinery along the way until it connects with another point of light.

Pull back to outer space and we now see more and more lights appearing and connecting up.

The narrator explains that we each hold a piece of the Great Transition. It is time to connect up our knowledge, passion and resources to focus on the only thing that matters now, changing the systems that make a just and sustainable world impossible.

End with a preview of the platform for collaboration and support that the Great Transition project will offer.
II. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

Now, let’s look at how we talk to those who yearn for a better world but have not yet identified as an agent of change.
II. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

On the surface of a story, we find characters, conflict and plot. These visible elements are analogous to the communications you’ll produce as a brand. These elements grow from the strategic layers that underlie them. On the layers below, we find the core values that inform the structure and meaning of the story. The “Moral” is the central message or lesson.

Connect with people’s values, and offer a Moral that resonates with them, and you are on your way to branding success. The following pages explain the above elements of The Great Transition’s citizen-facing brand in further depth.

BRAND MENTOR
THE MUSE/PIONEER
Our words fortify the inner calling of our heroes, show them that the world is theirs to participate in making and convince them that the future will look very different the present.

BRAND GIFT
A FLOCK OF BUTTERFLIES

BRAND HERO
The disoriented citizen — participation in a set of rules and lifestyles that once seemed natural and logical has led to disappointment and a sense of disconnection from herself. He wants meaning and more than superficial satisfactions.

MORAL OF THE STORY
Have the courage to ask the hard questions and be the change you want to see. A new world is yours to co-create.

On the surface of a story, we find characters, conflict and plot. These visible elements are analogous to the communications you’ll produce as a brand. These elements grow from the strategic layers that underlie them. On the layers below, we find the core values that inform the structure and meaning of the story. The “Moral” is the central message or lesson.

Connect with people’s values, and offer a Moral that resonates with them, and you are on your way to branding success. The following pages explain the above elements of The Great Transition’s citizen-facing brand in further depth.

www.smart-csos.org

THE GREAT TRANSITION STORY STRATEGY GUIDE
II. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

OUR BRAND HERO

The Disoriented Citizen

Our hero is someone not seriously engaged in civil society but who senses that there are some serious gaps emerging in the world he has believed in until not so long ago. The old story was of an economy, that despite its usual cycles, is ultimately on an eternal path of progress and growth. The ever-globalising economy, the technical progress and its wealth creation process –so the old story went– would ultimately benefit everyone. And while environmental problems were clearly acknowledged, there was an assumption that we would –if really needed– develop the technologies to solve them. The global economic crisis where a small global class (investment bankers, investors etc.) is becoming richer and richer while millions of people in the middle class are seriously damaged and more and more people are falling below the poverty line, has contributed to a loss of her belief in that system. Our hero is sensing that this is a crisis that goes beyond just this moment in time. He feels that a world where the primary goal is to create economic growth is creating too many victims. Competition in the marketplace and an ever-accelerating economy is putting increased pressure on workers. He is muddling through a world where nobody seems to have time anymore; social relations are suffering.

Neither we, nor the Great Transition are the heros of our brand story. Our audiences are. Each communication we write will be an invitation to take action that leads to connection, greater impact and satisfaction. Here are what of our heroes look like.
MYTH GAPS OPENING FOR OUR HERO

The Broken Story of Growth

This story told our hero that the economy, that despite its usual cycles, is ultimately on an eternal path of progress and growth.

The Broken Story of the ‘Invisible Hand’

This story told our hero that the magical force of the Invisible Hand makes it possible for a widespread focus on self-interest to create societal wellbeing and spreads wealth across societies.

The Broken Story of Nation State Identity

This story told our hero that it is the natural order for people to primarily consider national self-interest. Once those interests are taken care of, is it appropriate to the wider interest of humanity and the planet.

For a more in-depth look at the myth gaps we identified, please see the annex on page 34.

Successful communications campaigns focus on creating empathetic connections with primary audiences. One of the most powerful ways to achieve empathy is to address the anxiety created when old, cherished stories stop making sense and to offer the new stories to take their place. For the CSO Change Agent Hero, we identified the following Myth Gaps, or broken stories, our brand can and should address:
VALUES

The Great Transition as Muse/Pioneer is based on three core values that the brand holds and helps audiences to live out. Accompanying each value is a short statement. This is how our mentor might approach our hero with a simple declaration of that value.

Trust

The invitation to build a new world is understandably hard to accept — how will you know it’s a credible offer? You deserve a clear framework and the companionship of some of the world’s most trusted organizations on this path and that is what we can offer you.

Courage

Questioning the old way isn’t easy, especially when it’s never clear what’s on the other side. But transformation begins the minute you come to believe in yourself and that your vision for a better world is quietly shared by millions of others.

Imagination

The Great Transition is only in the design phase. Nobody knows what a more just, sustainable future looks like exactly. But as the first signal of human intention, nothing is more crucial than design. A new world needs you not as a foot soldier but as a visionary with your own creativity to contribute.
II. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

MORAL OF OUR STORY

Have the courage to ask the tough questions and be the change you want to see. A new world is yours to co-create.

This Moral is a simple, clarifying statement that puts our values into action. It is intended to reach out on an emotional level to our disoriented citizen and tell her that her misgivings are a doorway to greater purpose, that the courage she needs is inside her already and that building the future is an act of creativity.

Every communication created with the intention of strengthening the story of the Great Transition should work to reinforce this core insight.
II. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

BRAND MENTOR: THE MUSE/PIONEER

A mentor who unlocks creative potential and shows the way

Each life is punctuated by moments of inspired action, when the spirit is lifted from its day-to-day slumber. These moments bring meaning to a life. We draw these moments out in others, inspiring through our example of beauty, creativity and love.

We have a deep faith in those around us and believe humans were born to transcend. Our strategy is to quietly lead by example so our language tends to be one of questioning rather than pontificating. We are humble, imaginative, creative and optimistic. We want nothing more than to see others reach their full potential for self-expression.

Where some Muses might be content to let people take their creativity in any direction they choose, our Pioneer spirit firmly points our heroes toward engagement with the future. Pioneers, after all, are the makers of maps. So as we inspire the creativity of our heroes we also show them the clear path — a simplified version of the frameworks, systems thinking, parameters and a platform for discussion that we develop for CSO audiences. We carry a sense of urgency in our call to co-creation and put emphasis on creativity in service of an even higher goal — justice and social change.

People seek relationships with other people, not faceless organizations. The Great Transition story-based brand must be expressed in the clear voice of a storyteller. Our storytelling voice is that of a mentor, inviting our audiences (the heroes of our story) to take a journey of empowerment.
II. OUR STORY STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

BRAND GIFT

A Flock of Butterflies

The butterfly is our visual symbol for the possibility of fundamental transformation. It is living proof that organisms can become something unimaginable to them before it happens. The image of the flock connotes a deeper meaning, however. Migratory butterflies find ways to make epic migrations as a group, communicating and navigating in an almost magical process. The flock symbolizes the collective action necessary to bring about the transformation we seek. These symbols need not be explained verbally. The right execution of this imagery alone will communicate both the feeling and the message we seek to promote.

The brand gift is the wild card element that makes the difficult journey possible for your hero; it is what you give your audience that enables them to succeed. Think of the ruby red slippers given to Dorothy by the good witch, or the magic staff for Moses. The brand gift gives flavor to a brand — serving as a differentiator — and is often its most memorable feature.
SAMPLE VIDEO EXECUTION

Butterflies

Note this is a sample concept to bring the brand insights to life. To create an actual brand video, this concept would be used only as a starting point, not as an actual foundation for a script.

For this video we would develop a visual language of colored shadows in which to play out the drama. This provides us both realistic shapes and scenes but also a remove from reality so that we can be more visionary and show a credible picture of the future.

The video begins in a colorful environment that has many elements of the world the Great Transition desires to bring about. We see people creating art, a local outdoor market that seems to be thriving, bicyclists, people eating together, children playing, lush nature nearby. A digital billboard displays an up-to-the minute measure of “Gross National Happiness.” A man (our hero) walks through the scene slightly bewildered. A butterfly alights on his shoulder and dances its way through the air as he follows it on a tour of this world. (Actually showing a positive future is never easy, but a collaborative process — working closely with artists who are target audience members — could yield this much needed visualization for the movement.)

The hero now reaches out to touch the butterfly but just before he can, he awakens in the drab, industrial world of today. He gets up, pours a coffee, then trudges to his car. He sits in traffic. On the radio, he hears a dismal report about climate change. He flips the station to a report about unemployment. Flips again to a blaring commercial to buy more. Disgusted he turns the radio off. He drives through a slum and then arrives at her cubicle. He sits down to work but she can’t. He sadly sketches a butterfly.
SAMPLE VIDEO EXECUTION (CONT’D)

Butterflies

Suddenly, he looks up, a butterfly lands on his monitor. It flits away. He chases after it. It flies out a window. He looks out to see it connect with another two butterflies. He runs down several flights of the stairs and out the door. He looks up in amazement as a flock of butterflies migrates overhead.

He taps another guy walking by, head down, on the shoulder. He points up to the butterflies. The guy looks up amazed too. Others join.

The narrator comes in for the first time explaining that another world is actually possible — transformation is the law of nature, not the exception. The world is now waiting for you to add your vision of the future to the vision of millions. End with a call to collaborate on the Great Transition public platform.
III. APPENDIX I — HERO LETTERS

The following letters show the world through the eyes of our story’s heroes — our core audience.
My dear sister!

Thanks a lot for your email, and for asking about my job at AfricaAid. Actually, I have to admit that I’ve been quite frustrated lately. Of course, I still believe that poverty is unacceptable, and that we have a moral obligation to do something about it. This is why I chose to dedicate my professional life to working in the development sector (and a big part of my private life, too, as you know. Things get blurred easily between private and professional in this context...).

But there are more and more discussions and questions, especially also from the South, if the whole aid thing makes sense at all. Recently, our NGO has been criticised that the most capable people from the town, where we have set up a community development project, actually quit their jobs in the local administration, businesses and schools in order to work for us, as we offer better working conditions.

They say that we actually destroy the emerging local structures rather than building them up! And even when our grassroots projects are successful (but how to measure this anyway?), are they not just contributing to stabilise a unsustainable and exploitative system? But on the other hand, can we afford to stop our local service delivery projects (some say we don’t make the local authorities responsible), and leave people suffering, in order to prepare an abstract and unclear “Great Transition” of how the world functions? I am not a revolutionary, I just can’t see people suffering, so the most obvious thing to do is to help, no? But what if this help is in the end more harm than good?

Sorry to bother you with these worries, I know you have big problems, too, with the kids and Joe’s unemployment. Hope you are all more or less fine anyways.

Love,
Lisa xxx
Dear sister,

This morning, I came across this email I sent you 15 years ago, when I was very frustrated about my work at AfricaAid. It’s amazing how dramatically things have changed since then!

Some weeks after I wrote you, I went to a field visit to this community in Tanzania I’ve been writing you about, where AfricaAid was criticised for its community development project. I met this amazing woman, Dambisa, there, and she really opened my eyes about how aid could be done differently, in order to address the root causes of poverty and inequality, not only in Africa, but everywhere. It was in a context where the European governments were drastically cutting social services, and poverty and inequalities were at a constant rise here in Europe. Dambisa, who coordinated the national civil society coalition in Tanzania, initiated a letter to European governments and civil society, that expressed concern about the degradation of the social situation in Europe and their solidarity with the European people. This letter became a huge web buzz, and finally was broadly discussed in European mainstream media. In the civil society sector, it provoked a big debate about of our role and responsibility to address the problem of a failing social and economic system, that puts profit and markets at its centre, and not people and wellbeing.

Two years later, the European Platform of Citizens Movements was created, which united for the first time NGOs and movements from all sectors, and became a powerful political player. The cancellation of all public debt in Europe in 2015 was certainly possible only through their joint and constant public pressure. AfricaAid merged at this time with another NGO, focussing on social questions in Europe, and became PeoplePower, with the mission to support and link people’s emancipation struggles in Africa and Europe.
“LISA”

The Healed World (cont’d)

Damisa initiated the creation of an African Citizens Platform, and finally the global movement of “Citizens without borders” was created. I feel that the emergence of these trans-sectoral, transnational and deeply rights and values based networks really catalysed the global great transition to a wellbeing and people centred global economy, that we can see materialise more and more today.

Dambisa told me 15 years ago: People are more powerful than profits, if we unite and reconnect to what really matters. This means of course renouncing to certain things – my life insurance collapsed after the debt cancelation in 2015 – but I found again what really matters. Wellbeing doesn’t need a life insurance!

Love,
Lisa xxx
"SOPHIE"

The Broken World

Sophie is 35yrs old, married and two children of 3 and 5 yrs. She works as an HR-manager for a Multinational Corporation.

Dear Mum,

You brought me up in this world with a view that ultimately all would be all right, the market economy and its dynamics would always solve everything, technology & innovation would help, people across the world would eventually unite and that we could have it all. But I feel so sad, as I see people who do not have it all. I buy off my guilt by donating to all kinds of good causes, but not sure I see where that is landing. I see few people who have benefited from the economics, the market dynamics, but many, actually most, that have not. I realise that it is easy for me to say this, me having a happy family and all. We can have it all, have access to education, good health care and beyond the basics. We go on holiday’s couple of times a year, can eat what we want, and have what we desire. But where is that getting us? What world are we leaving for our children? Everything is getting scarcer and we need to share more. We need to get out of this tred mill of having it all, the latest black dress, the coolest car or even the ‘latest boobs’. What is this idea that ‘one can buy it all’? Happiness cannot be bought, can it? Who will take care of the world? With so many more people on this planet, how are we going to share it all and live together?

I know you don’t have the answers to all the above. But I felt like writing you. You are my mother after all and always came up with all the answers to my questions. These questions and issues are larger than large, though, I do understand, but I would love to know how you feel about this. Do you or Dad struggle with these kinds of thoughts? You and Dad gave me everything; you gave me education and enabled me to grow. In particular, you brought me up in such a way that I want to ask the questions that I put to you, as you nourished the responsible citizen in me. However, this responsible citizen Sophie now feels she needs to do more than provide for herself and her family.

Please let me have your thoughts,

With love,

Sophie
III. HERO LETTERS

“SOPHIE”

The Healed World

15 years later Sophie writes another letter:

Dear Mum,

I was going through some old boxes and came across the letter that I wrote you fifteen years ago. Gosh, that does feel like a really long time. So much has happened since. The world has moved on in a way that I had not imagined possible.

Today I look around me, in my local town and I see people living together, really together. People are sharing things, co-creating things. Everyone has access to the basics and a bit more. The bit more is clearly different for different people, after all, we are all not the same. But at least there is equity. The whole thing about the have’s and have not’s has disappeared. Who would have thought of that at the time, fifteen years ago?

And this is not just in my local town; everywhere around the world we see this phenomenon. Different places at different stages, but still, we are getting there. We all live in our own communities, but are connected together through our wonderful virtual networks. We celebrate our different approaches, beliefs; appreciate not having to be the same. My son would call this rather ‘awesome’.

The fact we cracked climate change in terms of global warming, emissions and all is pretty amazing. We live on a warmer planet, for sure, but have actually cut down on emissions and got to green energy. Thank Heaven we did it.

I have to admit, every day I salute Vlinder who I met on 26th February 2013 and who shared the ‘Story of Great’ with me. He has put it together with a couple of inspired, amazing people, all working in different sectors, but who found each other in the belief that we could actually create a different world. They had put this awesome clip together on YouTube that was telling this story: of a different world where people live together with a different economic model, where they share and where growing means growing in terms of knowledge, imagination and creation, not growth as economic growth. In that world people were celebrating the arts and were no longer slaves to consumption. I remember Vlinder telling me about all this and I stated I was listening to utopia. You will recall, Mum, that I was rather disillusioned in those days. I think what got me to want to follow Vlinder and his people were that I saw no other way anyway. I was so disillusioned that I thought I might as well go for utopia. What made it real was their invitation to join; there were no pre-conceived ways of creating the change. Everyone was invited in, to co-create that different world. No blueprint, but a platform and cool, clear guidelines from which to go.
“SOPHIE”

The Healed World (cont’d)

It was hard in the beginning, I remember, as we were doing things against the odds. However, as pioneers, as that was what we were, we were connecting with other pioneers around the world. So what felt small was in fact bigger as you knew that others around the world were making similar endeavours. So in fact, the movement started to grow and from small-scale projects, medium ones were established and tipping points emerged. We got what Vlinder had called at the time ‘The Great Transition’.

I know you won’t be reading this, as you passed away two years ago. However, I still wanted to write this letter to sort of ‘close the loop’ with you after that letter fifteen years ago. You and Dad reacted so powerfully to my questions and stimulated me to follow Vlinder rather than you calling him ‘the odd one out’. Your support meant a lot to me and I am sure that this world would not be where it is today if not for the support of so many great parents, great grand parents who want to leave the right legacy, not only for their children, but also for future generations.

I so remember the beautiful way we celebrated your life and when it was time for you to go, it was all right. We were all in Peace. And at least you had seen the glimpse of The Great Transition.

With love,
Sophie
III. HERO LETTERS

“FILIZ”

The Broken World

Istanbul, November 2nd, 2012

Dear Çınar,

I am so crazy, damn crazy. I just did it. I put in my resignation and I am free as of 1st of December. I know it’s a stupid time to quit. The job market in December is dead and truly I have no clue where I am going. People can’t find jobs and here I opened one for them. Why, because I just had it, imagine covering up and actually fuelling a company that is destroying our society and our environment. This corporate social responsibility department I used to work at is doing these petty projects, and spending 10 times more on PR then they put in to the projects themselves. Lately I was told to work with this agency called 1984. They are basically using the thing that is supposed to bring freedom to us “the internet” - to fake word of mouth. They recruit people to tweet and post their stuff as if it is their own, and the more viral they get the more money they pay them. I can’t become another tool in even taking away peoples trust in everything, even their own friends?

Anyway so I did it, I said “enough is enough”, of course I have some cushion, I won’t be homeless tomorrow, but it’ll last 3 months than I might have to move in with my parents. What am I to do, I have no clue. Maybe I’ll volunteer in some CSO and hope that they value my talent and take me on. At least it’s a better existence, but if they don’t will I go back to the dark-side, I guess I can’t live with my parents forever. If you know a way out please help me, I guess I am asking the wrong question to the wrong guy. I can’t believe you didn’t loose your job at the bank, after all your hedge funds you manage all completely failed. Any way so you did finally buy your Jaguar XJ, can you actually drive it in London traffic or go to your summer-house in the country side?

I guess I will never possess anything or never have security in my life now. I am so scared... will you look after me for a while at least. I know we are split-up now but for the sake of the old days. I don’t know, maybe if you help me built one of those social enterprises you could clean your dirty consciousness. This could be your corporate social responsibility pet project. Not that I want to be your pet anymore... the way you took me to parties. Oh god, I better stop.

Call me when you stop by in Istanbul. Still stupidly in love with you...

Filiz
“FILIZ”

The Healed World

Fifteen years later...Istanbul, April 3rd, 2028

Dear Çınar,

I was so angry with you. 15 years ago, I wrote you a letter asking for help, asking you to not let go off me. But I never heard back. I was so angry with you, but over the years I learnt to forgive you, I learnt to let go off my past, my anger, my frustration, my disillusionment and to open a new page, as I am doing now again 15 years later, to make peace with you and peace with myself.

I was so insecure. I plunged myself into the unknown knowing not where to go or what to do. I searched for jobs in CSOs, I started volunteering but they always choose someone else over me. My savings were finally exhausted. I moved in with my parents, and jobless I started to read books in the large department bookstores. There, I didn’t need to buy them, but I could just pick them up and read them there. I got really hooked up with science-fiction because they were drawing new alternative futures where our planet might end-up. Some futures were dismal, others more hopeful. Experimenting in fantasy and fiction, of all the possibilities that were there...

One day I lifted my head from the big leather couch I was lost in. There was I woman sitting across me with a big smile on her face. She had a big shining broche of a butterfly. She was reading a book on social movements. She said I saw you yesterday here as well, you seem to be doing the same as me? What? I asked. You freeload on these books don’t you? I smiled and I said yes! Her name was Mona and she was looking for people reading books for free. Because she was trying to built a communal library and needed people to work with her.

We started getting into this abandoned warehouse where we started paint and finish and built a library of donated books. One day she asked me “Do you know how many we are and what we strive for?”, I asked back “Who are we?” Precisely she said “Who are you?” She gave me her butterfly broche and said why don’t you find out, your job here is finished.
“FILIZ”

The Healed World (cont’d)

I started my journey from there and volunteered in many different social projects and asked them all “who are you? What do you strive for?” I received a thousand different answers but for every answer, I gave a butterfly. Today 15 years later these butterflies took a flight in all different directions. But today people tend to themselves for their societies and for the planet we live in. Today the exploitation of people and those fragile beings on the planet we share is so much less... We’re getting there for people to take flight.

Today, I thank you for not having taken me out my misery or having called me for I needed first to become a bookworm to then become a butterfly.

With compassion,

Filiz
IV. APPENDIX II — MYTH GAPS & VISION

In depth explorations of the stories no longer working for our heroes and new stories rising to replace them. We also include a brief digest of the vision of the Great Transition.
FOR THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

The Failing Story of Economic Growth

What is the “myth” that is no longer working?

Our economy, despite its usual cycles, is on an eternal path of progress and growth. The ever-globalising economy, the technical progress and its wealth creation process will ultimately benefit everyone.

How did it once offer explanation, meaning and ritual?

This myth went a long way to explaining the morality of an unequal society. As long as there was continued growth, everyone could look forward to a better future even if some controlled so much more than others. We all worked within the system believing there would be increasing amounts to go around if we continued to apply our best efforts. As long as ecological damage coming from our growing economic activities could be dealt with through technological fixes and local regulation, the existing planetary boundaries were not visible.

What factors have caused this myth to lose resonance?

The current global economic crisis where a small global class (investment bankers, investors etc.) seems to become ever richer and millions of people in the middle class are damaged, has contributed to a loss of belief and trust in the political, financial and economic system. There is a growing sense that this crisis won’t go away like previous ones. Research suggests that living standards of the bottom half might be in steady decline over the coming decade in a number of European countries. Whereas previous generations assumed their children would be better off than they were, the reverse is starting to become the case. The growth-dependent system as such is at stake (e.g. approx. 80% of Germans and Austrians wish to have a different economic system according to a recent survey by the Bertelsmann Foundation).

There is a growing group of people in developed countries who question the treadmill of working harder and more to be able to consume more. They search for a more profound and meaningful way of life beyond consumption (an interesting example of this the majority vote by Munich’s citizens against the expansion of Munich airport, thereby accepting limits to more air travel).

Infinite growth cannot happen in a finite planet. There is a growing sense and understanding that the limited resources of the planet soon will have to be shared by 9 billion people and that the material throughput of our current consumer class will have to be drastically reduced. It is increasingly perceived that such a scenario is not compatible with systems that are dependent on economic growth.
FOR THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

The Failing Story of Economic Growth (cont’d)

What story and ritual has begun to replace it?

Story:
We can build an economic system that provides sufficient material wellbeing to be equitably shared by 9 billion people while leaving sufficient resources for future generations. A happier and better society will emerge from a refocus from material and economic wealth to spiritual and social wealth.

Ritual:
Downshifting – people working less and adapting to simpler life style

De-growth movement – practicing and promoting a whole range of alternative economic models outside the growth economy and shifting to simpler living – a section of these (the vanishing middle class, especially in countries like Spain and Greece) is forced into reduced living standards and to step out of the consumer economy.

Transition town movement – shifting towards more local and less energy intensive economic practices outside the mainstream economy (e.g. local agriculture networks)

Sharing economy – (or collaborative consumption or peer to peer marketplace) has been clearly on the rise in the last two years especially facilitated by the internet. It’s principle is to make better use of existing assets and share living space (Airbnb) or cars (car sharing) or household stuff (ecomodo.com).
FOR THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

The Failing Story of The Invisible Hand

What is the “myth” that is no longer working?

“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest...” (Adam Smith, Wealth of the Nations)

Humans are genetically prepared to create the maximum wealth if we are allowed to operate under conditions of competition. The ‘invisible hand’ of the market makes it possible that the focus on self-interest creates wider societal wellbeing and spreads wealth across societies. Individual rights and freedom are essential goods to make the market work and they require maximum protection (by the state).

How did it once offer explanation, meaning and ritual?

Developed at a time when mostly direct personal relationships characterised the market, this story explained how markets could indeed serve the greater good of societal wellbeing and equitable material wealth (in his theory this was a result of self-interest playing together with the other important human condition of ‘sympathy’ as he explained in Smith’s second famous work ‘The Theory of Moral Sentiments’).

This story continued to hold resonance over the last 200 years as the market expanded fuelled by unprecedented technological development and economic wealth.

In a time where resources were abundant and the planet much less crowded (1 billion in 1800), the protection and promotion of individual rights and freedom helped release large portions of the world population from oppression.

What factors have caused this myth to lose resonance?

After a few decades of neoliberal economic politics, markets have now invaded almost every sphere of people’s lives (from market economy to market society) and more and more people have begun to ask themselves where we should put limits on the influence of markets (see e.g. Michael Sandel: What money can’t buy)

The excessive protection of private property rights has created uncontrollable global corporations and financial markets that evade any accountability and fiscal obligations. This phenomenon is being perceived increasingly as undemocratic and a creator of social injustice.

Inequality is a global phenomenon and poverty is now increasingly affecting developed countries e.g. southern European countries – the belief in the invisible hand is vanishing.
The very nature of markets is increasingly understood as a driver of the externalisation of social and environmental costs. Under the laws of competition, it is extremely difficult or impossible to control and avoid extremely dangerous externalisations.

Much of what is interpreted as being essential to individual freedom is in clear conflict with an interpretation of human rights under the new reality of ecological limits. Individual freedom (including the right to consume, to travel, drive big cars etc.) is in reality reducing the freedom of other parts of society and future generations.

Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom’s empirical research has demonstrated that human cooperation, collective action and resource management outside market and state are successful alternatives.

What story and ritual has begun to replace it?

Story:
Cooperation and collaboration are as natural to humans as competition. In an economy that focuses much more on humans’ predisposition and will to collaborate, humans and the planet will thrive. A redefined concept of ‘freedom’ is the right of all humans and future generations to equitably share the resources of our planet.

Ritual:
New collaborative models working outside of conventional markets are emerging everywhere, but especially through the internet (Wikipedia its most prominent example). It includes e.g. crowd sourcing, crowd surfing and, importantly, the creative commons as a way to share knowledge and art as widely as possible and avoid the enclosure of the (creative) commons. The growing Commons movement promotes the idea of the commons as a structural principle for an economy beyond market and state.
FOR THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

The Failing Story of Nation State Identity

What is the “myth” that is no longer working?

Our identity as citizens starts at the level of the nation. Only after we consider national self-interest we should look to the wider interest of humanity and the planet.

How did it once offer explanation, meaning and ritual?

When most social problems could be dealt with on a national level, the nation state was a good level of governance and national pride was useful in creating cohesion in societies. Thus, it made sense for citizens to see themselves involved in building a nation rather than building something more global.

What factors have caused this myth to lose resonance?

The internet is connecting our global community at an unprecedented level. While the economic crisis is leading to an escape into nationalistic patterns as well as to a renewed desire for local belonging on the one hand, there are signs on the other hand of an emerging sense of planetary empathy that makes the story of nation state identity outdated and even counterproductive.

Our world is more interconnected than ever. Corporations don’t know about national borders – the economy and financial systems have globalised to unprecedented levels while no effective governance systems have been created to deal with its crises and externalities. Ecological issues and fair distribution of the world’s resources cannot be dealt with at the national level. National self-interest is blocking the creation of governance models that might solve these problems.

What story and ritual has begun to replace it?

Story:

All that we share: Together as humanity and planetary citizens we have to take care of the earth’s resources and distribute them fairly, leaving a rich planet for future generations. We will create a rich and thriving global community if we share our abundant and our scarce commons.

It enriches our life if we hold multiple levels of identity (local, regional and planetary).
IV. MYTH GAPS & VISION

FOR THE DISORIENTED CITIZEN

The Failing Story of Nation State Identity (cont’d)

Ritual:
The Commons movement is living the new story in practice.

Global empathic reactions in catastrophic situations like the Haiti earthquake in 2010 show that our sense of connectness with people across the world is higher then ever.

Internet campaigns that have gone viral globally like the ‘Kony 2012’ internet video (seen more than 100 million times) demonstrate a global interest in the fate of communities far removed from our own national interest.

FOR THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

The Failing Story of Incremental Change

What is the “myth” that is no longer working?

If we work hard and offer an alternative to the current policy on the national/international level, we will have huge impact on millions of people and possible the whole planet. And by winning many battles, in the long run we will win the planet (solve the ecological crises).

How did it once offer explanation, meaning and ritual?

Explanation: The environmental movement has had many successes in mitigating pollution through local and national legislation and through technical end-of-pipe solutions. Similarly development cooperation has played a role in the economic development of many developing countries and which brought millions of people into the global consumer class. Market mechanisms like labels have had a certain success in mainstreaming environmental and social criteria: MSC, FSC, fairtrade etc. All of this has provided deep meaning and validation to activists who have won these battles.

By focussing on feasible, concrete and measurable policy objectives and providing knowledge and expertise, CSOs/NGOs became respected stakeholders for policy makers and businesses.
FOR THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

The Failing Story of Incremental Change (cont’d)

Ritual: Campaigns have to show clear measurable results. Campaigners have a high sense for opportunities and changes that are winnable.

What factors have caused this myth to lose resonance?

The failures of Copenhagen and Rio: Both summits were built on the hope that today’s dominant institutions were capable of tackling the increasing multiple global crises through a steady reform agenda from within as long as civil society would only push the rational arguments hard enough. But there is now a growing realisation that the current dominant institutions cannot offer the solutions because they are themselves part of the problem and won’t be capable to reform from inside.

More and more people in civil society realise that they themselves are part of the problem by focussing too much on the symptoms rather than on root causes as well as on single issues rather than comprehensive solutions to tackle deeply systemic problems. At Copenhagen and at Rio it was obvious that different civil society sectors were promoting conflicting solutions.

There is a growing sense that CSOs are losing the public’s trust by being perceived as being too tactical and focussed on their organisation’s self-interest (money, jobs etc.) rather than on the greater good they are supposedly pursuing.

The emerging network society is showing and demanding completely new patterns of citizen participation in societal and political change agendas (Arab Spring, Occupy, spontaneous twitter campaigns etc.). Old style campaigns from the broadcast era are losing their touch, such are first generation internet campaigns (clicktivism).

What story and ritual has begun to replace it?

Story:
If civil society concentrates on and lives the values it wants to see in the world, it can be an example for and a leading actor in a cultural transformation towards planetary solidarity, cooperation and simpler living. If civil society across its sectors learns how to unite forces for a deeper transformation of the current political and economic institutions, it can tackle much more effectively the multiple urgent crises it is facing.

Ritual:
New types of system change innovation networks and communities are emerging everywhere. Examples are The Finance Lab (thefinancelab.org), co*lab (colab.info) and the Global Ecovillage Network. They are based on the assumption that complex systemic problems require niches of radical innovation where change agents come together to learn and experiment with the models for the new economy. They are building on the power of collaboration, trust and shared intelligence. They are themselves already embodying the seeds of the new system.
FOR THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

The Failing Story of Development

What is the “myth” that is no longer working?

Driven by our deeper motivation of global justice, we want to help the global south create similar models of society, economy and wealth to those we have in the north. We want to use as many resources as possible from the north (money, knowledge and expertise) to support the south in their development efforts.

How did it once offer explanation, meaning and ritual?

Explanation: We know what is good for the south and we are able to help to bring them on a path of economic development.

Ritual: We receive large amounts of money from donors to administer them according to strict criteria of cost effectiveness and efficiency. We show the measurable impact on the ground like e.g. reduced poverty rates, water access etc.

What factors have caused this myth to lose resonance?

The north - south divide is not valid anymore because a global consumer class has emerged and is creating similar patterns of environmental pressure everywhere in the world.

There is a growing realisation that ecological limits will make it impossible to reach the level of consumption of the current global consumer for 8-9 billion people.

While poverty has been falling globally and child survival rates are rising, inequality and social failure rates are rising in many countries as well (including the global north).

While there are many small interesting experiments to create thriving sustainable and resilient communities, none of them is changing the overall tendency of an increased concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few.

There is a growing sense that many of the current market-based solutions and technological fixes promoted by developmental organisations are not improving the situation but are actually part of the problem as they perpetuate an unsustainable and unequal system.

Developmental NGOs are increasingly under financial pressure in many European countries as public budgets in the sector are being cut severely. These NGOs therefore see an urgent need to reconsider their role and purpose.
IV. MYTH GAPS & VISION

FOR THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

The Failing Story of Development (cont’d)

What story and ritual has begun to replace it?

Story: While historic inequalities and injustices require more economic transfers from rich countries to poorer countries and the support in using the resources in a meaningful way, the main focus in our fight for global justice and sustainability is to collaborate with change agents across the planet to create the foundations and the cultural shift that brings us on a path towards a new economy based on the commons as a structural principle.

Ritual: Forward-looking development agencies are replacing a “north knows best” approach with deeper collaborations with partners from the South. New models are emerging to develop locally appropriate solutions that highlight strengths of local cultures rather than apply northern models to them.

The Failing Story of Efficiency and Technology

What is the “myth” that is no longer working?

We have to convince governments, businesses and consumers to embark on a journey of technological revolution (renewable energy, efficient buildings, efficient vehicles, efficient products) to solve our environmental problems. This will bring about solutions we need without requiring us to change our way of life.

How did it once offer explanation, meaning and ritual?

Explanation: We built a joint sense of purpose in bringing about technological progress and the sci-fi vision of a world dominated by human made technology. The optimism of engineers made us believe that if we can create nuclear energy and travel to the moon, we will be able to solve climate change through technology.

Ritual: We worked hard to create scenarios and reports for how the world could eventually function without emitting any CO2 emissions only by pursuing the right technology deployment and investments. We endorsed the Stern Report in 2006 and promoted the idea that the economic cost of investing in the right technologies would only be 2% of GDP per year whereas the cost of inaction would be so much higher.
IV. MYTH GAPS & VISION

FOR THE CSO CHANGE AGENT

The Failing Story of Efficiency and Technology (cont’d)

What factors have caused this myth to lose resonance?

Governments, businesses and consumers are still not taking commensurate action on climate change. They even seem to have lost momentum and given more priority to creating growth and jobs.

Research is increasingly showing that the deployment of more efficient technologies does not always lead to the desired reduction of energy use but sometimes can even increase the total energy use (Jevons paradox or more generally called the rebound effect). The famous Wuppertal Institute built its reputation on the promotion of a factor-4 or factor-10 energy and resource revolution but is now admitting that it was wrong to promote this idea without taking into account sufficiently the rebound effect.

We are increasingly realising that economic growth is consistently outweighing the positive effects of more efficient technologies and production.

The reality of planetary boundaries seems to be so much more complex and more difficult to deal with than we had previously thought in our days of technology optimism.

As Tim Jackson wrote: “The profit motive stimulates a continual search for novelty and social status locks us into an iron cage of consumerism. Affluence has itself betrayed us.” Technology alone will not be able to deal with these deeper destructive drivers.

The Environmental movement is starting to realise that it has always tried to bring other civil society sectors into their own cause. This has not been an effective strategy as it didn’t lead to strategies that would make sufficient justice to the concerns of other movements like human rights etc.

What story and ritual has begun to replace it?

Story:
While we still need to pursue the opportunities of more efficient and environmentally friendly technologies, we need to focus much more on the root causes of environmental destruction and support a cultural and economic transformation away from today’s consumerism and narrow-minded national economic interest.

Ritual:
Some organisations and networks like new economic foundation, Smart CSOs Lab, Common Cause, the Commons movement etc. are working with others in civil society towards such a deeper transition beyond the technical fix.
THE VISION OF THE GREAT TRANSITION

Tackling Multiple Dimensions through a systemic approach

The Great Transition is a vision created by the Global Scenario Group of how humanity could create a civilization that reflects egalitarian social and ecological values, affirms diversity, and defeats poverty, war, and environmental destruction. The elements of the Great Transition vision are increased human interconnectedness, improved quality of life, and a healthy planet.

Cultural Transformation

The Great Transition will require a cultural transformation away from today’s consumerism and nationalism and towards a culture of wellbeing with simpler living and a sense of planetary identity. This can only happen through a societal project; pure technocratic top down approaches won’t succeed.

Overcoming the Market Paradigm

The Great Transition clearly distances itself from the idea that our current global crises can be solved within the rationale of today’s dominant economic and political institutions. It calls for fundamentally reinventing and redefining what we call progress and how to achieve it. The market rationale and its competitive pressure for economic growth have now invaded most of our spheres of life and have contributed to the current spiritual, ecological and social crisis that cannot be fixed through technical fixes, but require a much more fundamental approach. In the Great Transition markets and the rationale of the ‘homo economicus’ play a far less dominant role than today.
THE VISION OF THE GREAT TRANSITION (CONT’D)

Not Just Localism

The Great Transition clearly acknowledges and demands the development of more localised economic structures that would bring about positive effects on all three types of crises (ecological, social, spiritual), but it also concludes that the sole bottom up approach of developing new economic models in niches, mostly at the local level in itself won’t bring the necessary change. Humanity is too interdependent to be able to solve its problems just through localism and community action. We need a planetary governance system that allows us to tackle our global problems and to manage our global commons together as a planetary community.

A Global Citizen Movement

The Great Transition requires a global citizen movement, overcoming the current fragmentation of movements and rising to the status of a new driving force of fundamental system change and planetary solidarity.

Experiments at All Levels

Nobody knows all the answers for how we can create the new economy and how it will look like. The Great Transition requires a learning approach with experiments at all levels, it requires asking new questions instead of providing old answers.