


ISEC: A Brief History

We've been involved with cultural, economic and ecological issues for three decades now, and felt that it was an appropriate time for a brief "retrospective". What follows is far from comprehensive, but hopefully gives an idea of the breadth of our work.

1975

ISEC's Director, Helena Norberg-Hodge, visits Ladakh for the first time as part of an anthropological film team. The area has just been opened up to the outside world.

1978

ISEC's forerunner, The Ladakh Project, is founded. We introduce the first Trombe wall passive solar space heating system to Ladakh, showing that it is possible to achieve dramatic improvements in living standards without having to become dependent on fossil fuels. Over the following years, we develop and demonstrate a range of other simple but effective technologies, from ram pumps to micro hydroelectric plants to solar greenhouses. We are told that this is the largest appropriate technology project in the world.

1982

We run our first "reality tour", bringing potential Ladakhi leaders to the West to see something of the "underside" of life in the modern world and to introduce them to projects aimed at restoring community and the environment. This program has continued ever since.

We launch an ongoing program of support for Ladakh's traditional doctors, or amchis: helping to establish rural centers and sponsoring the education of students at the Institute for Tibetan Medicine in Dharamsala.

1983

Some of Ladakh's most prominent citizens join us to form the Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG). Within a few years, the organization is employing more than a hundred full-time staff.

Helena spends a semester as Regents' Lecturer in the Energy and Resources Group at the University of California, Berkeley.

1984

The Centre for Ecological Development is opened in Leh, Ladakh's capital. The Centre is inaugurated by Indira Gandhi and blessed by His Holiness The Dalai Lama.

ISEC is invited by the Royal Government to work in Bhutan. For five years, we are involved in a wide range of programs, from the establishment of an ecological library to the demonstration of small-scale wind turbines.

During the same period, we run similar projects with the Tibetan communities in Nepal and Dehradun.

Ladakhs Vänner, a support group for ISEC, is founded in Sweden.

1986

We hold Ladakh's first international conference. Members of Parliament, diplomats, economists, writers and academics from around the world come together to discuss Principles for Sustainable Development. The inaugural address is given by Sir Edmund Hillary.

Helena and the Ladakh Ecological Development Group share the Right Livelihood Award, commonly known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize'.

1988

Helena's book, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*, is published in Sweden and Denmark. The book is first published in English in 1991. An award-winning film of the same title is produced by ISEC's Programmes Director, John Page, in 1993. Between them, the book and film have been translated into almost fifty languages, including Navajo, Inuit, Burmese, Nepalese, Thai, Japanese and all the major languages of Western Europe. In South Korea alone, the book has sold 350,000 copies.



1990

ISEC helps to found the Women's Alliance of Ladakh (WAL), whose principal goal is to maintain Ladakh's social, ecological and spiritual values in the face of the new consumer culture. WAL now has more than 8,000 members, and is the most influential non-governmental body in the region.

ISEC is formally incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in the US.

A number of ISEC reports, as well our brochures, are translated into Chinese.

1991

ISEC hosts a conference in Sweden, with the goal of setting up an international economic forum. The meeting brings together Edward Goldsmith, Vandana Shiva, Martin Khor and Doug Tompkins for the first time. A book and video of the conference, entitled *The Future of Progress*, are released the following year.

The Ladakh Project is one of the founding members of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN).

We set up the Roots of Change study program, enabling friends and neighbors to get together to work through a curriculum of readings on issues relating to globalization and localization. Over the following years, several hundred such groups are established,

Helena is scholar-in-residence for one of the first courses at Schumacher College, now the world's foremost academic center for holistic thinking.

LEDeG publishes the first Ladakhi-English dictionary, compiled by Helena and Gyelong Paldan, a Ladakhi scholar. This is the first time the Ladakhi language has ever been written down.

We work with a group of Muslim leaders to establish the Ladakh Environment and Health Organisation.

1992

ISEC co-hosts a conference in San Francisco on the role of science and technology in a changing world. Participants include Godfrey Reggio, Jerry Mander and Fritjof Capra.

We hold another international conference in Ladakh, entitled "Rethinking Progress." Participants include Gary Snyder, Stephanie Mills and Mohammed Idris.

1993

We co-host a follow-up conference on science and technology in Dartington, UK. Speakers include Charlene Spretnak, Sulak Sivaraksa and Satish Kumar.

ISEC Deutschland is established in Germany.

From the Ground Up: Rethinking Industrial Agriculture, by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Peter Goering and John Page, is published by Zed Books. The book warns, in particular, of the dangerous marriage between "free trade" and biotechnology.

1994

A major international conference is held in Mongolia, inspired by ISEC's work in Ladakh. Participants include government officials, academics and representatives of non-governmental organizations from throughout Central Asia. The following year, *Ancient Futures* is translated into Mongolian, and shown on nationwide television.

ISEC is invited into the first Flow Fund Circle, a funding initiative aimed at helping inspirational projects at the grassroots. We support a range of projects around the world, including an indigenous crafts program in Himachal Pradesh, a holistic cancer center in Bristol, UK and La Ortiga, a farmers' cooperative in Seville, Spain.

ISEC sponsors the appointment of a staff member at the Soil Association, the UK's leading organic certification body, to promote the localization of the food economy. We organize a high-profile conference on Community Supported Agriculture in London, the first of its kind in England. Among the speakers is Derek Cooper, the doyen of British food broadcasters. After the conference, he becomes an important voice for local food.

Helena is a co-founder of the International Forum on Globalization (IFG). She remains a board member.

We publish a comic book, *A Journey to New York*. It is translated into a number of languages, and used by schools and activist groups in Europe and Asia.

1995

With Tracy Worcester, ISEC's Associate Director, we start an ongoing program of dinner dialogues and weekend meetings with senior British politicians, journalists, business leaders and environmentalists aimed at raising awareness about the social, economic

and ecological impact of globalization.

ISEC commissions Kate de Selincourt to write *Local Harvest*, which is published in 1997.

1996

ISEC co-publishes *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies in an Unstable World*, by the economist Richard Douthwaite.

The first year of the Farm Project in Ladakh. This life-changing program, which is still very active, gives up to 50 people from around the world the opportunity to live and work on a Ladakhi farm every summer. Over the course of a month, they also take part in seminars and discussion groups on issues related to development and globalization.

1997

A photo exhibition by John Page, entitled "Monoculture," is presented at the Alternatives to Consumerism centre in Bangkok, Thailand.

We play a central role in the setting up of a farmers' market in Bath, the first such market in the UK.

1998

ISEC publishes *Small is Beautiful, Big is Subsidised*, by US Programs Director, Steven Gorelick.

Helena Norberg-Hodge, John Page and Steven Gorelick become the advisory board of *The Ecologist* magazine. Zac Goldsmith, one of ISEC's associate directors, is appointed its editor.

1999

ISEC hosts a groundbreaking conference at the Royal Geographical Society in London, entitled "From Global to Local." The meeting is chaired by the BBC's John Humphrys, and receives widespread media coverage. Participants include David Korten, Vandana Shiva and Peter Matthiessen.

We produce a special 'global-to-local' issue of *The Ecologist*, with contributions from David Korten, David Orr, Wendell Berry and many others.

Our new 30-minute documentary, *Local Futures*, looks at the work ISEC has done over the years, in Ladakh and elsewhere, to promote economic localization.

2000

We hold a conference in London, entitled "Local

Food, Global Prosperity," chaired by the distinguished broadcaster Jonathan Dimbleby. Principal speakers include Wendell Berry and Vandana Shiva.

ISEC initiates a committee of prominent local citizens in Byron Bay, Australia, to explore the setting up of farmers' markets. Within three years, five small towns in the area have regular and thriving markets, and others are being planned.

2002

Publication of *Bringing the Food Economy Home: Local Alternatives to Global Agriculture*, by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Todd Merrifield and Steven Gorelick.

We produce a series of eighteen educational posters on the globalization of food and the benefits to be gained from encouraging production and consumption closer to home.

2003

ISEC wins the prestigious Derek Cooper Award for Investigative Journalism from the UK's Guild of Food Writers for our *Local Food Toolkit*.

We receive a further three years' funding from the Flow Fund Circle, enabling us to support, among many others, a compendium of local medicinal plants in Mexico, a seed-saving project in the Czech Republic, getting-your-hands-dirty environmental education in Ireland, and a community theatre project in Thailand.

2004

Publication of our report, *Ripe for Change: Rethinking California's Food Economy*.

Paradise with Side Effects, a film about our work in Ladakh, is made by a German production company, and broadcast at prime time in Germany, France and Belgium.

We work as consultants to Heifer International on a feasibility study for a local food demonstration center in California.

2005

We begin work on a feature-length documentary film aimed at making a case for the 'economics of happiness' as an alternative to the globalizing consumer culture. In addition to new footage from Ladakh, we have filmed in Japan, China, Europe and the United States. Editing will start in 2007.



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*ISEC is also represented in Germany, France, India and Australia.
Please contact us for details.*

ISEC depends entirely on private donations. Please think of supporting our work.
Your check should be made out to "ISEC", and sent to one of the addresses above.
Thank you.