Civic Intelligence (1)

Our physical, social and knowledge worlds are changing rapidly. Intelligence, more than anything else, describes the capacity to influence and to adapt to a changing environment. Civic Intelligence describes how well groups of people address civic ends through civic means. Civic intelligence raises the critical question: Is society smart enough to meet the challenges it faces?

Organizations with civic missions have the responsibility to keep their principles intact while interacting effectively with other organizations, both aligned with and opposed to, their own beliefs and objectives. Civic intelligence requires learning and teaching. It also requires meta-cognition; analyzing patterns of thinking in order to improve them.

Effective and principled civic intelligence is necessary to help humankind deal collectively with its collective challenges. People need to develop theories, models and tools of civic intelligence that can help integrate thought and action more effectively. And, of course, this work is an expression of civic intelligence.

Written by Douglas Schuler; photograph by Stewart Dutfi

The Commons (2)

One of the biggest problems we face is the unchecked growth of market values. Resources that morally or legally belong to everyone are increasingly coming under the control of markets. This results in the privatization and commodification — or “enclosure” — of the commons. The commons gives us a language for talking about resources that should not be treated as market commodities alone, and social relationships that should not be mediated by cash, legal contracts and the profit motive. The commons allows us to talk about the need for open, non-proprertized realms in nature, our culture, and local communities. From the perspective of the commons, for example, the human genome, agricultural seeds and groundwater should belong to everyone, and not be owned by corporations. In a local context, the public library, community garden, farmer’s market and land trust are familiar, highly effective types of commons. There are also countless Internet-enabled commons such as Wikipedia, free and open source software and open-access academic journals. The emerging commons sector won’t replace corporations or markets, but it can complement and temper them. It can also provide benefits corporations can’t supply: healthy ecosystems, economic security, stronger communities and a participatory culture.

Written by David Bollier

The Good Life (3)

People who hope for a better world feel the need for a shared vision of the "good life" that is flexible enough for innumerable individual circumstances but comprehensive enough to unite people in optimistic, deliberate, progressive social change. This shared vision of The Good Life should promote and sustain conviviality and solidarity among people, as well as feelings of individual effectiveness, self-worth and purpose. A shared vision of The Good Life is always adapting; it encompasses suffering, loss and conflict as well as pleasures, reverence and common goals of improvement. An emergent framework for the modern "good life" is based on some form of humanism, particularly pragmatic or civic humanism, with room for a spiritual dimension that does not seek domination. Finally, the environmental crises of the planet require a broad vision of a "good life" that can harmonize human aspirations with natural limits. All this needs to be an ongoing and open-ended "conversation," best suited to small geographic groups that can craft and then live an identity that reflects their vision of a "good life."

Written by Gary Chapman

Social Dominance Attenuation (4)

Social dominance is at the center of many — if not most — of humankind's most shameful enterprises. It is embodied in ideology, economics, policy, education, the media, social perception and interactions, culture, and, even, our technological artifacts. In general the less-dominant group will have fewer opportunities for advancement, have poorer health and shorter life-spans, smaller incomes, higher likelihood of being incarcerated, and live under more violent conditions than people do in more-dominant groups. Understanding how social dominance is cultivated and maintained provide important clues as to how it can be countered. Serious, ongoing and engaged commitment to social non-dominance is key to reducing the problems of social dominance. Approaches to attenuating social dominance will require widespread, multi-sectoral actions that include integrated legislative, economic, and educational efforts among dominant and non-dominant groups. There are grounds for hope. Countries such as Sweden have more-or-less eliminated social dominance based on gender. Studies relating to health care in Japan, New Zealand, Denmark and Sweden, also show that proper health care can be reached for all of a nation's citizens even if some social inequality still exists.

Written by Douglas Schuler