

for People and Nature—Books

by Jim Tarbell and Ruth Caplan

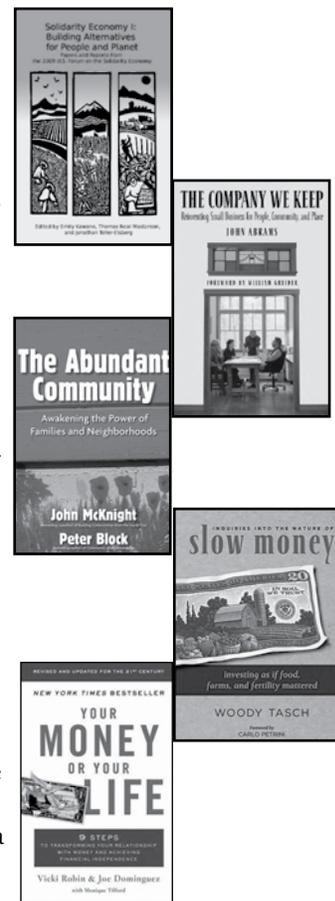
The best overview of the Solidarity Economy is *Solidarity Economy I: Building Alternatives for People and Planet, Papers and Reports from the US Forum on the Solidarity Economy*. Its editors, Emily Kawano et al., have organized the contributions into eight sections including: Finance, Production, Environment, Food, Movement Building, Commons and Wealth. The 356 pages of articles cover a variety of specific topics from organizing the newly foreclosed homeless into Bank Tenant Associations to using eminent domain to establish worker-run factories.

One of the best books on worker-owned businesses is John Abrams' *The Company We Keep: Reinventing Small Business for People, Community and Place*. This gem covers eight principles that coincide with the values of the Solidarity Economy including workplace democracy, balancing multiple bottom lines, committing to the business of place and community entrepreneurialism. He not only relays his experiences from 30 years in a worker-owned business, he also presents a broad overview of wise minds that are working on various aspects relevant to the right livelihood of the Solidarity Economy. He has now expanded on this theme in his most recent book *Companies We Keep: Employee Ownership and the Business of Community and Place*.

Meanwhile, John McKnight and Peter Block have combined their genius in *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* to both critique the perils of corporate-capitalism dominated consumerism and to provide a road map for choosing a satisfied life and creating abundance. They say the neighborhood is “the natural nest for hatching new enterprise” and offer resources from their Asset-Based Community Development Institute.

Of course, the big question is how community benefit economic institutions can find financing in a world run by Wall Street and the short-term bottom line. The answer may be part of “the growing epiphany” coming out of Woody Tasch's mind and laid out in his book *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money*. This book, by a man who has been involved in venture capital and philanthropic foundations most of his life, reconnoiters the world of both fast and slow money. It has also led to the development of the Slow Money Alliance that supports creating financial strategies for localizing food systems and sponsors national gatherings that bring together financial, business and activist gurus to further explore the magic of slowing money down so that it does not wash away our planet and our lives.

Back to the nuts and bolts of our personal lives, *Your Money or Your Life* by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin focuses on the basis for individual decisions related to consumption and hours worked. It provides a methodology to evaluate how much of your income is spent on expenses related to your job and how much on various categories of consumption. Then it shows you how to determine whether these things are worth the time spent away from family, friends and more fulfilling activities in order to afford all this stuff and the hidden costs of your job. This do-it-yourself style book is not overtly value-driven as the premise is that each person must decide for themselves how much they want to work once they've followed the steps laid out for a full evaluation of how they have used their time and money; however, the stories told point to a lower consumption/less work/higher life satisfaction paradigm. For those who believe they can't get off the treadmill, the book's methodology allows for a fresh look and a fresh start; and then, maybe a move to a more satisfying life in the Solidarity Economy.



Plenitude

reviewed by Ruth Caplan

“In the ashes of the corporate meltdown, let's reconstruct locally.” Economist Juliet Schor in her new book *Plenitude, the new economics of true wealth* goes far beyond just a call to action by laying the foundation for how, both locally and systemically, a new economics can be set in motion.

Building on her critique in *The Overworked American* (1992), Schor lays out the premise that our unemployment crisis will not be solved without going to a shorter work week. This provides the space/time for many people “to engage in low-impact, self-providing activities that reduce their dependence on the market. These include growing food, generating energy, building housing, and making small-scale manufactured goods, such as apparel and household items.” From tinkering in the garage to building a straw-bale home, leisure-time activities can and are being leveraged into new small businesses.

Her second premise is that small-scale enterprises, with their low capital requirements and ease of replicability, will be more economically efficient in the evolving global economy where sharing of information and networking is facilitated by the computer age. She elaborates this in discussing the economics of knowledge, saying we must “move away from proprietary systems of information and technology toward open-source mechanisms of knowledge transfer.”

These fundamentals in turn build the social capital and networking which allow new local economies to grow. And as people gain more satisfaction from their social networks, the drive to consume diminishes, an essential feedback loop in creating a new economics that will sustain the earth.

While not mentioning the Solidarity Economy, Schor is very much in sync with this movement; and as she travels the country on a book/speaking tour, her thinking is being enriched by the local dialogues which take place. See her talk at Seattle Town Hall <http://vimeo.com/12034640> and her blog at www.julietschor.org/blog/

PLENITUDE

the new economics of true wealth