Foreword

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Earth is home to a wonderful array of cultures, societies and ecologies. From the vast ice fields and tundra of the Arctic, to the flood-prone coastal cities of Asia and the vast deserts of sub-Saharan Africa, human beings have survived and thrived for millennia. Yet even the most casual of observers will have noticed that all is not well in the world. A lack of access to universal basic services, persistent levels of inequity, social inequality, systemic corruption, loss of prosperity and a growing awareness of the fragility of human existence in the face of climate change and ecosystem destruction are leading to growing disquiet. Rising Up! and the Extinction Rebellion are the latest manifestations of this. People are looking for answers.

Sustainable Wellbeing Futures: A Research and Action Agenda for Ecological Economics is a ground-breaking book that provides many of them. Written by Robert Costanza and other leading sustainability thinkers and practitioners, it provides a rigorously researched, scientific foundation on which to build our future.

The libraries of academia are filled with thousands of publications that present disciplinary analyses and insights into the causes, impacts and solutions to the challenges of sustainability and wellbeing. From tackling fossil fuel subsidies, creating alternatives to unsustainable consumption and production patterns, improving controls on hazardous waste and pollution, halting the rampant destruction of natural resources, establishing policies that provide basic services and reverse social exclusion to finding alternative metrics to Gross Domestic Product. But the reality is that the sheer volume of publications written for different academic and policy audiences makes it virtually impossible for today's leaders to derive a coherent, credible alternative to the ideology of "growth at all costs" – one that can deliver collective wellbeing.

In *Sustainable Wellbeing Futures*, the reader is taken progressively and logically through a broad, pluralistic, transdisciplinary approach, in which all the major disciplines and theories co-evolve. From positive futures for work and labour, automation and new technologies, ways of measuring wellbeing and health, to the way that money needs to work and the moral and ethical foundations of the institutions we will need, we are presented with different lines of enquiry that infuse the central core of wellbeing. Each chapter brings a depth and richness to our understanding of why we must shift our thinking to a morally just, nature-based world. By the end, the authors have woven a multifaceted tapestry out of strong principles, robust frameworks, convincing implementation examples and exciting ideas for further research.

At its heart, this volume is about ecological economics and its different manifestations, as they have developed over the last three decades. When I first met Bob Costanza in the 1980s, I found his thoughtful and probing approach to ecological economics made a lot of

sense. I have always been deeply interested in human relationships with nature and recognised that the alternative language of ecological economics was a good fit for describing the complex dynamical systems of fisheries, ecosystems and cities that I was researching. These original theories and ideas were given impetus with the founding of the International Society for Ecological Economics in 1988. The next two decades brought us seminal works by Costanza, Herman Daly and many others in related fields such as Buzz Holling on ecosystem dynamics and John Elkington's financial accounting framework known as the *triple bottom line*. But as the years flew by, it seemed that the divisions amongst policy-makers and researchers only served to divide up the field. The academic culture of argument, beautifully articulated in the opening chapter of the book, proved to be a formidable barrier to the transdisciplinarity which ecological economics was calling for.

In 2008, the collapse of several major financial institutions served to underline how “broken” the modern system was. As head of the European Environment Agency, I was asked to comment on the multiple global financial, energy and environmental crises. My view was that they all had their roots in decades of intense natural resource extraction along with poor governance. This had led to the build-up of a massive but largely hidden toxic, ecological debt that was going to be difficult to repay in the face of climate change and unsustainable growth and consumption patterns. It was also a debt that was not being fully accounted for either in financial rescue packages or in plans for “greening our brown” economies.

What I observed was that the crises had a number of common features, and if corrected promptly as part of fiscal reforms could synergise the emergence of more sustainable economies that would enhance wellbeing. The features of greatest concern included misleading market prices that did not properly cover all the costs and risks, hidden market incentives, opaque transactions, inadequate accounting of assets, a lack of precautionary mechanisms to respond to early warning signals, and a perverse social compass that allowed massive inter-generational debts to accumulate. Obscured in the shadows there were other very unsettling findings including an absence of controls to address the destruction of natural resources, a lack of accountability, an unerring belief in models that had little connection to reality, and an excessive hubris in the place of ethics and common sense. The Occupy Movement triggered a public outcry for reparation as well as demands for greater truth and transparency across government and business and a greater focus on social equity.

In the intervening years, a group of committed transdisciplinary transformists, many of whom are authors in this book, have been working on different aspects of ecological economics and its role in defining sustainability and wellbeing. They include political and social scientists, ecologists, economists, earth scientists, physicists, mathematicians, technologists, urban planners, individuals working in public health and business, managing cities, serving politicians and ministers, and entrepreneurs. The sense we all have is that systemic change is long overdue. Our thinking has gone through many iterations: for example, the “Bus Family”, which was born out of a journey in an old omnibus around terrifying mountain passes in Bhutan, discussed the new development paradigm and established the Alliance for Sustainability and Prosperity, to carry on the conversation in other networks. At the same time, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came into being. As the former Chief Scientist in the UN Environment Programme, I was involved in designing the framework for the Sustainable

Development Goals, and experienced at first hand the struggle to build a coherent development agenda given the disparate nature of the targets and indicators and the lack of a common framework and set of principles to bring them all together. Since then, Tim Jackson (2017), Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2010), Ida Kubiszewski and colleagues (2013) and Hunter Lovins and co-authors (2019) have written thought-provoking books, such as *Prosperity without Growth*, *The Spirit Level* and *A Finer Future*, and edited the inspirational and engaging journal *Solutions*. And most recently, WEAll, the *Wellbeing Economy Alliance*, led by Katherine Trebeck, Stuart Wallis and many of the authors of this book, is a collaboration of organisations, alliances, movements and individuals working together to change the economic system to create a wellbeing economy: one that delivers human and ecological wellbeing. Read Chapter 24 – it tells this story in a compelling way!

WHERE NEXT?

The first global political manifestation of a shift towards wellbeing economies becoming mainstream emerged in 2018, with the decision by the leaders of Scotland, Iceland and New Zealand to form the Wellbeing Economies Group. Their goal is to implement economic policies with the objective of delivering the collective wellbeing of their nations, looking at how happy the population is, not just how wealthy it is, creating fair work that is well-paid and based on worthwhile and fulfilling work, and which values a transition to longer-term sustainability. *Sustainable Wellbeing Futures* provides the robust and well-articulated body of knowledge that these national endeavours will need.

The ideas that *Sustainable Wellbeing Futures* brings to life have been borne out of thousands of hours of discussions about the multiple aspects of wellbeing and ecological economics. Shortcomings have been probed and examined and answers found. The importance of this book is that it provides solutions and examples of how we – as individuals, organisations, governments – can work together to turn the tide against the destructive changes in our world. These examples should give us hope and inspiration. We should also take encouragement from the volume itself; it is heartening to see so many leading researchers and thinkers working together to provide a coherent, multidisciplinary voice, stating loud and clear what is happening and how we can deliver our future wellbeing.

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