



Donella
Meadows
Institute



2016
ORIENTATION
GUIDE

WHO WE ARE

The Donella Meadows Institute is a small but dynamic education non-profit in Norwich, Vermont. Founded in 1996 by leading environmental thinker Donella (Dana) Meadows, DMI's mission is to conduct research, demonstrations, and education of systems that can move the world toward economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

We currently have a Staff of three people, our Executive Director, Marta Ceroni, our Office Manager, Becky Cook, and our Program Support Manager, Emily Donaldson, for a total of 2 full time equivalents. We also work on a regular basis with interns from Dartmouth as part of our David Peart Fellowship Program and volunteers who help us conduct research and offer programs and events.

On our Board we currently have five Directors: Wayne Barstad (Chair), Jenna Musco (Treasurer), Jay Bragdon (Assistant Treasurer), Erik Esselstyn (Secretary), and Hal Hamilton.



Back (from left): Heather Shand (Volunteer), Marta Ceroni (Executive Director + Frida), Becky Cook (Office Manager);
Front (from left): Katie Williamson (Intern), Emily Donaldson (Program Support)

WHAT WE DO

Through our **Legacy Program**, the Institute provides free and easy access to Donella Meadows' vast wealth of work. Additionally, our Legacy Program aims to develop new resources and programs that translate her ideas to new audiences and make them available to an ever-larger network of students, practitioners, and leaders in sustainability.

Our **Sustainable Economies Program** intends to catalyze a dialog beyond our growth-based economy and towards economies that are more inclusive and regenerative for people and nature. We have elected to focus this work on Vermont as a region already ripe with a deep-seated sense of place, innovative business models, and strong statewide networks. Through public speaking and convening, we highlight visions and solutions for a new economy imparting a "sense of the possible" in Vermont and beyond.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Our assumptions on levers for change are included in the three interlinked theories of change below. The Board and Staff see the development of the theory of change as an evolving process also informed by the needs in the community at large, skills of staff, and fundability of initiatives.

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY OF CHANGE:

DMI implements strategies like the Sustainable Economies Program and Legacy Program

so that

The mindsets of decision makers and the media change

so that

Decision makers implement changes in systems

so that

Systems change

so that

We achieve our mission of bringing economic, social, and environmental systems into closer harmony with the realities of a finite planet and a globally powerful human race.

LEGACY PROGRAM THEORY OF CHANGE:

DMI implements initiatives (education, training, publishing, etc)

so that

The mindsets and values of our audience are in step with a finite planet and each other and people feel empowered to see themselves as part of the solution

so that

More people master the skills necessary for a sustainable transition

so that

More decisions and actions are taken toward sustainability, and Dana is remembered as a role model.

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES PROGRAM THEORY OF CHANGE:

DMI implements initiatives (such as endorse and add value to existing credible research, research and disseminate best practices, convene and educate)

so that

The mindsets and values of decision makers (within state government, leading companies, state-wide organizations in VT, networks, media and the general public) are changed

so that

These decision makers implement changes in the economic system, such as **changing the goals of the economy** (beyond GDP) in a way that is supported by policy and action, **internalizing social and environmental costs** (and benefits), and fostering **generative ownership structures**

so that

The economy delivers sustainable wellbeing in Vermont and DMI inspires sustainable wellbeing in other economies

DONELLA MEADOWS' LEGACY PROGRAM



DONELLA MEADOWS ARCHIVE

As of now, the archive includes more than 1,000 resources between, papers, videos, and letters, including timeless resources like her “Dancing With Systems” and “Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System” articles as well as digital access to the complete 1972 version of Limits to Growth.

DONELLA MEADOWS FILM PROJECT (CONCEPT STAGE)

As heirs of Dana’s work, we want to be able to sustain her memory as an influential and inspiring thought leader and be able to tell a motivating story that can draw more people to Dana’s work and writings. Dana has been a role model for many and many others are on a similar journey of living purposeful lives and creating a sustainable and just world. We think that there is tremendous value in capturing Dana’s personal journey in understanding systems and living with them.



We also are interested in the legacy that she has left behind, of people inspired by her directly and through her writing and people who are bringing a similar spiritual inclination and systems view in the shaping of solutions. The film focuses on Dana’s qualities as a system leader but will include other exemplars, such as people directly or indirectly inspired by Dana and embarked on a similar journey as shapers of sustainability.

Through Dana’s writing, existing film and photo materials, interviews with close friends, family, and exemplars, we want to build a body of research that makes Dana’s insights, aims and path in life be more accessible and shareable.

LEVERAGE POINTS CURRICULUM (DESIGN AND TEST PHASE)

In 1997, Donella Meadows published “**Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System,**” an essay that identified twelve levers, or places within a complex system where a “small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything.”

We are developing experiential, modular curricula (in-person and online) for educators in higher education and community leaders interested in exploring how systems thinking, leverage points for change, visioning, and/or reflective conversation can enhance their work.

Our idea is that trainings and curriculum material should be first tested within existing initiatives and programs at a college level but should have the potential to grow and become independent DMI offerings.

ONLINE MODULES



IN A WORLD OF SYSTEMS, URL:
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/A_BTS008J0K](https://youtu.be/A_BTS008J0K)

Last summer we developed a simple, everyday story to create curiosity about “systems” and systems thinking. The result was the video “In a World of Systems” (see URL above), narrated and illustrated by David Macaulay (of “How Things Work”) and developed in collaboration with systems analyst, Linda Booth Sweeney.

The video is only a first step in the experiment of how to communicate systems and leverage points in new ways for young audiences. Over the medium-term we intend to build an online series of learning experiences dedicated to understanding and applying leverage points. Videos such as “In a World of Systems” will be accompanied by supporting materials and made available to a range of audiences, especially young adults -- high school and college students and young professionals in their early careers. This is a critical age, when people have a clearer sense of the societal challenges and when a systems perspective might help problem-solve and take action in a more holistic and effective way.

COLLEGE COURSES AND LECTURES

In the **summer of 2015** our staff developed materials and co-taught a graduate-level course on Outcomes and Evaluation for the Learning Organization at **Marlboro College's** Master in Management for Mission Driven Organizations (MDO), in Brattleboro, Vermont. The college has a strong focus on systems thinking and organizational learning and the leaders who go through their MDO program are professionals in their 30s or early 40s who work in non-profits and government.



In **November 2015**, our staff presented a three-hour interactive lecture, “An Introduction to Systems Thinking,” to a Sustainable Living and Lifestyles undergraduate course at **Lyndon State College** in Lyndonville, Vermont. The lecture engaged students in the basics of systems and systems thinking using case studies, games, and activities that helped students to apply a systems-approach to their culminating class projects.



In our various visits with students, our favorite system games are Moon Ball (on the left, played by Brearley School students and teachers next to our office last summer) or Speed Catch (above, played with Marlboro students last summer).

1000 MEADOWS WRITING PROJECT (PILOT STAGE)

The One Thousand Meadows Project is a writing and training initiative in a systems thinking framework to enrich the public discourse with stories that have a deep personal element and tackle the question of how to live meaningful and desirable lives at a time of deep change in climate, ecosystems, economies and society. In addition to developing practices and exercises to develop one's voice, see systems, and write system stories, we are working on securing venues for publication through online news sources such as Vermont Digger, The Guardian, Op Ed Project, Cowbird, and more.



PUBLISHING

Part of our Legacy program focuses on promoting Donella's work through the release of translations in other countries and drawing attention to her thinking by applying it to current issues.

Examples of this work include:

- An Italian edition of *Thinking in Systems*
- A book chapter on systems thinking for Routledge's *Handbook on Sustainable Design*
- The publication of Dana's textbook "*A Sustainable World*", in some form that reflects current needs of educators and publishers (traditional textbooks are not popular anymore)
- An (auto)biography book, a "conversation with Dana" led by a "fake" interviewer where answers would come from Dana's writings (journals, Dear Folks letters, Global Citizen Column).

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES PROGRAM

NEW ECONOMY WEEK



DMI is a member of the New Economy Coalition (NEC), a Boston-based organization that is building a national New Economy community encompassing organizations in higher education, community grassroots, policy think tanks, and more. NEC launched its first national New Economy Week in **October 2013** with Vermont as a keystone of activity. That month, DMI as lead organizer for Vermont's New Economy Week, co-organized 18 events and

produced a booklet on the status of the new economy in Vermont, a report on public banking inspired by the German banking system, four radio commentaries that aired on Vermont Public Radio, and online resources.

In October 2014 the institute helped convene twenty-four initiatives across the state and was the lead organizer of **"Who Owns Vermont?"** a half-day public forum on October 15 in Montpelier, VT on emerging ownership models in land, business, energy, and finance and **"Integrating Mission into Ownership: New approaches to Business Ownership, Control, and Finance,"** a business breakfast that addressed maintaining a socially responsible mission through the life cycle of a company.

In October 2015 the institute decided to focus on fewer events across the state and put more effort in coalition building with Slow Money Vermont, Clean Yield, BALE (Building A Local Economy), Two-Rivers Ottaquechee Planning Commission, and Vermont Law School.

The result was a half day symposium (world café style) on **"Transforming Investments for the Sake of Climate and Communities,"** with the goal of helping people put their money where their beliefs are and to do that without putting their assets at risk.

Our event brought state of the art alternative investors in the region and drew around 70 people and 213 online watchers. Participants and organizers considered the event inspiring, engaging, and overall highly successful (based on personal conversations and on-paper feedback).



ENERGY AND CLIMATE UPPER VALLEY



DMI was instrumental in launching Energy and Climate Upper Valley, a group that includes members from the regional Sierra Club, Next Gen Climate, and other committed individuals working for a 100% renewable and efficient Hanover and Upper Valley by 2050. The group is working with Dartmouth's Sustainability Office, Sustainable Hanover, major employers, state representatives, and businesses to advance the science, action, and solutions for a clean energy in the region. DMI has been a co-sponsor of two community forums and panels, which drew 130 and 150 people in the two occasions.

FEE FOR SERVICE WORK



Ecosystem services modeling in agricultural systems of Southern Italy, University of Molise (total project budget: \$35,000)

Marta is the coordinator and senior analyst in the quantification and mapping of ecosystem services and their economic values in alternative scenarios of multifunctional agriculture in the Molise region using the **ARIES modeling platform**.

Frankincense ecological economy in Somaliland (proposal phase, total project budget: \$24,000)

Marta is the lead ecological economist in a study to design and test pricing and incentive mechanisms that can sustain best practices for frankincense over the longer term targeting harvesters and illegal harvesters.

Economic Benefits of community forests in New Hampshire (completed for the Trust for Public Land, total budget: \$9,000)

Marta leads a study on the benefits that the community forest in Errol, NH generates with a focus on sustainable timber and recreation.

Economic valuation of ecosystem services and rural development options in the transboundary Prespa Lake region (completed for UNDP Macedonia, total budget: \$13,000)

Marta conducted an economic valuation of restoration options of an imperiled lake in Macedonia and trained UNDP managers on the economic valuation of ecosystem assets and services.