

Box 2. The Essential Role of Cultural Pioneers

Considering that consumerism is such a powerful force and that the majority of resources and wealth are still overwhelmingly being used to stimulate it, how realistic is it to think that the pattern can shift? James Davison Hunter's analysis of how cultures change is instructive. As Hunter, the Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, explains, cultural change can best be understood not through the Great Man approach (whereby heroic individuals redirect the course of history), but through the Great Network approach. "The key actor in history is not individual genius but rather the network."

When networks come together, they can change history. But not always. Change depends on "overlapping networks of leaders" of similar orientation and with complementary resources (whether cultural clout, money, political power, or other assets) acting "in common purpose." Networks can spread many ideas, whether consumption patterns, habits, political views, or even a new cultural paradigm.

But as Hunter notes, as culture is driven by institutions, success will depend on pulling ideas of sustainability into the center of these institutions, not allowing them to remain on the periphery. This means that as individuals internalize new norms and values personally, they also need to actively spread these ideas along their networks. They need to bring these ideas directly to the center of leading human institutions—spreading them through all available vehicles—so that others adopt this orientation and use their own leadership capacities to spread it even further. Like brand

agents who now volunteer to surreptitiously promote the newest consumer product, individuals who recognize the dangerous ecological and social disruptions arising from unsustainable consumerism need to mobilize their networks to help spread a new paradigm. These networks, tapping whatever resources they have—financial, cultural, political, or familial—will play essential roles in pioneering a new cultural orientation.

The story of the documentary *The Age of Stupid* illustrates this point. The filmmakers raised funds from small investments by friends and supporters, and they marketed the film and organized 600 showings in over 60 countries by tapping into a global network of concerned individuals. They then channeled the momentum of the film to build a climate change campaign. This campaign, 10:10, encourages people to commit to reduce their carbon emissions by 10 percent in 2010 and to mobilize policymakers to do the same. By October 2009, some 900 businesses, 220 schools, 330 organizations, and 21,000 individuals had signed the 10:10 pledge.

And if all these networks of pioneers fail? As scientist James Lovelock notes, "Civilization in its present form hasn't got long." Consumerism—due to its ecological impossibility—cannot continue much longer. The more seeds sown by cultural pioneers now, the higher the probability that the political, social, and cultural vacuum created by the decline of consumerism will be filled with ideas of sustainability as opposed to other less humanistic ideologies.

Source: See endnote 53.

2008, Ecuador even incorporated this into its new constitution, declaring that "Nature or Mother Earth, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structures, func-

tions and its evolutionary processes" and that "every person, community, and nation will be able to demand the recognition of nature's rights before public institutions."⁵⁶

Film, the arts, music, and other forms of