From Neighbourhood to Bioregion: Urban-Rural Re-connection

The industrial age distracted us from a whole-systems understanding of the world. Paving over the soil, and filling our lives with media, obscured our interdependency with living systems. The urban-rural divide was the most damaging expression of this ‘metabolic rift’. As a first step in healing this urban-rural divide, ecological urbanism, or civic ecology, means designing for the health of living systems at a bioregional scale: watersheds, foodsheds, fibersheds and food systems. New kinds of social infrastructure are now emerging that connect urban people and rural communities - and also create livelihoods: collaborative ways to grow food, repair the land, and increase biodiversity - plus new forms of hospitality and tourism, learning journeys. Social infrastructure also includes new business models such as co-operation platforms.

John Thackara is a philosopher, writer and advisor. He helps companies, cities and regions design place-based innovation platforms that benefit all life, not just human life. His most recent book - How To Thrive In the Next Economy: Designing Tomorrow’s World Today - will be published in China in 2018. John curated the celebrated Doors of Perception conference for 20 years, first in Amsterdam, and later in cities throughout India; and has led xskool workshops in 15 countries. He was the first director of the Netherlands Design Institute, and he has helped establish other research institutes in Italy, India, Japan, Hong Kong, and the UK. Thackara was commissioner of the social innovation biennial, Dott 07, in England, and the ecological city biennial, City Eco Lab, in France. At the Royal College of Art, where he was formerly Director of Research, he is now a Senior Fellow.