

A close-up portrait of Dr Wayne Visser, a man with short brown hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

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change and poverty.

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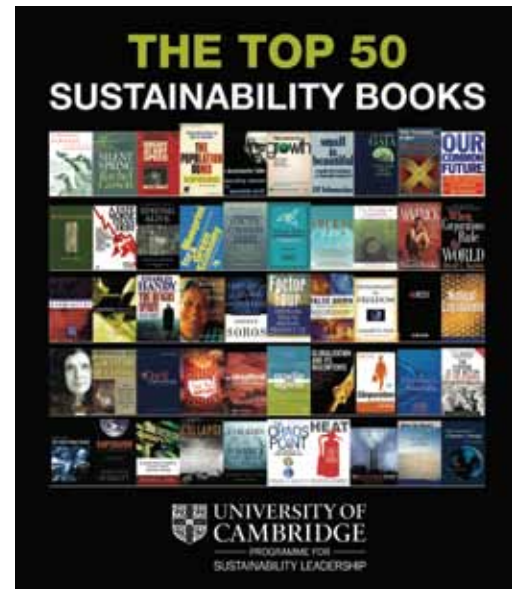
The Sustainability Bookshelf: Our Pick of the Best

Wayne Visser

The Top 50 Sustainability Books

The *Top 50 Sustainability Books*,¹ published in 2009, draws together some of the best thinking over the past 50 years and more on the most pressing social and environmental challenges we face as a society. The selection was based on a poll of CPSL's global alumni network and included many authors who have become household names in the environmental, social, and economic justice movements – from Rachel Carson, Ralph Nader and EF Schumacher to Vandana Shiva, Muhammad Yunus and Al Gore. Others, such as Aldo Leopold, Thomas Berry and Manfred Max-Neef, were relatively undiscovered gems, whose work should be much more widely known.

The profiled books tackle our most vexing global challenges, including globalisation (e.g. *Globalization and Its Discontents* and *No Logo*), climate change (e.g. *Heat* and *The Economics of Climate Change*) and poverty (e.g. *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* and *Development as Freedom*). Some of the featured thought-leaders are highly critical of the status quo (e.g. David Korten, Eric Schlosser and Joel Bakan), while others suggest evolutionary ways forward



(e.g. Amory Lovins, Hunter Lovins, Paul Hawken and Jonathon Porritt). Some place their faith in technological solutions (e.g. Janine Benyus, Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker), while others are upbeat about the potential of business to be a force for good (e.g. John Elkington, Ricardo Semler, William McDonough and Michael Braungart).

After its publication, *The Top 50* inevitably sparked lively debates in the media about which authors and books had been left out.² One of the most frequently cited, for example,

¹ CPSL, Wayne Visser (2009) *The Top 50 Sustainability Books*. Sheffield: Greenleaf Publishing

² See *The Guardian* website for a healthy dose of the dialogue and suggestions <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2010/jan/27/top-50-green-books>

The 2010 Top 40 Sustainability Books

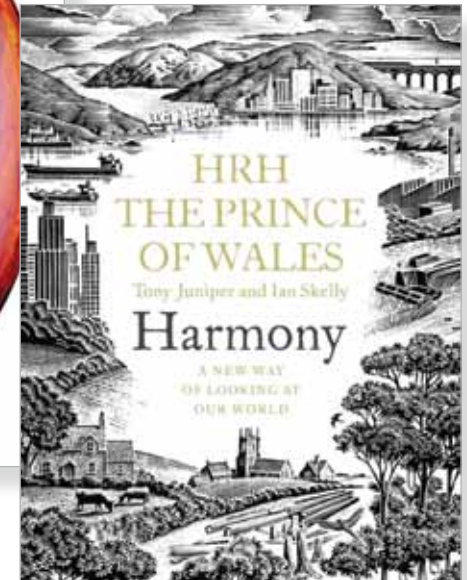
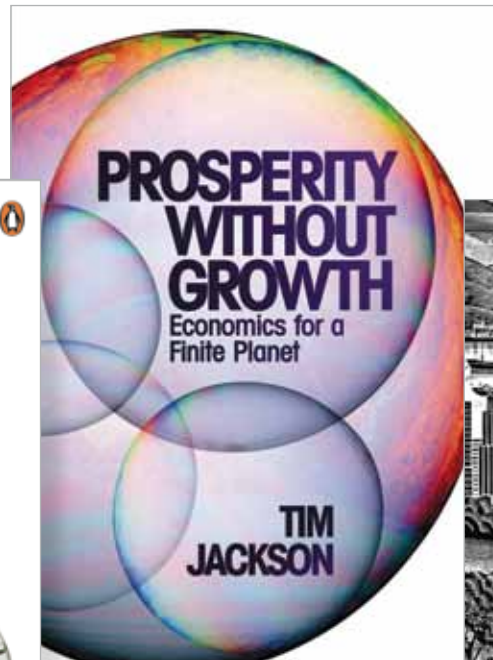
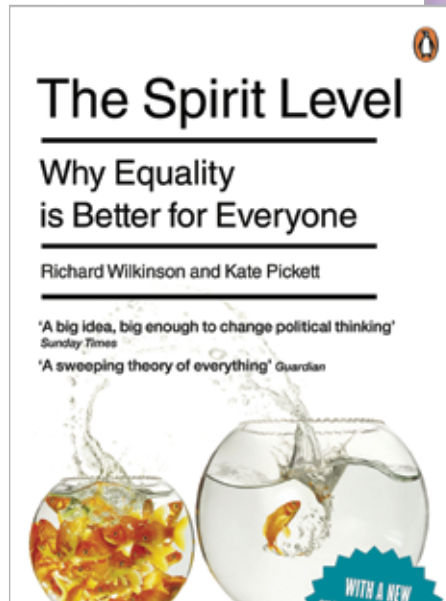
1. *Accounting for Sustainability* (Anthony Hopwood, Jeffrey Unerman & Jessica Fries)
2. *Adaptation to Climate Change in Southern Africa* (Steffen Bauer & Imme Scholz)
3. *A Blueprint for a Safer Planet* (Nicholas Stern)
4. *Building Social Business* (Muhammad Yunus)
5. *Cents and Sustainability* (Michael H. Smith, Karlson 'Charlie' Hargroves & Cheryl Desh)
6. *The Climate Files* (Fred Pearce)
7. *Corporate Community Involvement* (Nick Lakin & Veronica Scheubel)
8. *CSR for HR* (Elaine Cohen)
9. *CSR Strategies* (Sri Urip)
10. *Dynamic Sustainabilities* (Melissa Leach, Ian Scoones & Andy Stirling)
11. *The Economics of Climate Change in China* (FAN Gang, Nicholas Stern, Ottmar Edenhofer, XU Shanda, Klas Eklund, Frank Ackerman, Lailai LI and Karl Hallding)
12. *Factor Five* (Ernst von Weizsacker Karlson 'Charlie' Hargroves, Michael H Smith, Cheryl Desha & Peter Stasinopoulos)
13. *Freefall* (Joseph E Stiglitz)
14. *Globalizing Responsibility* (Clive Barnett, Paul Cloke, Nick Clarke & Alice Malpass)
15. *Finders Keepers?* (Terence Daintit)
16. *Harmony* (HRH The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper and Ian Skelly)
17. *How Bad Are Bananas?* (Mike Berners-Lee)
18. *Innovative CSR* (Céline Louche, Samuel O. Idowu & Walter Leal Filho)
19. *Integrated Sustainable Design of Buildings* (Paul Appleby)
20. *Nature and Culture* (Sarah Pilgrim and Jules Prett)
21. *The New Pioneers* (Tania Ellis)
22. *The New Rules of Green Marketing* (Jacquelyn A Ottman)
23. *Next Generation Business Strategies for the Base of the Pyramid* (Ted London & Stuart L Hart)
24. *Our Choice* (Al Gore)
25. *Peoplequake* (Fred Pearce)
26. *The Positive Deviant* (Sara Parkin)
27. *The Power of Sustainable Thinking* (Bob Doppelt)

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| <p>28. <i>Prosperity Without Growth</i> (Tim Jackson)</p> <p>29. <i>Requiem for a Species</i> (Clive Hamilton)</p> <p>30. <i>Responsible Business</i> (Manfred Pohl & Nick Tolhurst)</p> <p>31. <i>The Responsibility Revolution</i> (Jeffrey Hollender & Bill Breen)</p> <p>32. <i>Smart Solutions to Climate Change</i> (Bjorn Lomborg)</p> <p>33. <i>The Spirit Level</i> (Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett)</p> <p>34. <i>Sustainability Education</i> (Paula Jones, David Selby & Stephen Sterlin)</p> | <p>35. <i>Sustainability in Austerity</i> (Philip Monaghan)</p> <p>36. <i>The Sustainable MBA</i> (Giselle Weybrecht)</p> <p>37. <i>Tackling Wicked Problems</i> (Valerie A Brown, John A Harris & Jacqueline Y Russell)</p> <p>38. <i>Too Smart for Our Own Good</i> (Craig Dilworth)</p> <p>39. <i>The Top 50 Sustainability Books</i> (CPSL, Wayne Visser)</p> <p>40. <i>The World Guide to CSR</i> (Wayne Visser & Nick Tolhurst)</p> |
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number of changes. The 'All Time Top 50' list included a fairly balanced coverage of social and environmental issues. By contrast the '2010 Top 40' list is heavily skewed towards environmental challenges, and dominated by climate change. The Top 50 contained numerous treatises on capitalism and globalisation, while the Top 40 (in the wake of the financial crisis) has shifted almost exclusively to a focus on the economy. The Top 40 also has a much stronger emphasis on business responses and creating change. In fact, it is altogether a more pragmatic list, with titles that contain words like 'plan', 'how to', 'strategy' and 'guide'. This shift to action-orientation is a positive development, as is the increase in the number of female authors (28%, as compared with 17% for the Top 50),

although the gender imbalance remains.

Among the books on our Top 40 list that have been creating a real buzz are Tim Jackson's *Prosperity Without Growth*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's *The Spirit Level* and The Prince of Wales's *Harmony*. Jackson's book revives a much older debate about 'economics for a finite planet', led since the 1970s by the likes of former World Bank economist Herman Daly (*Steady State Economics* and *Beyond Growth*). Jackson restates the challenge starkly: "Questioning growth is deemed to be the act of lunatics, idealists and revolutionaries. But question it we must." While others like Jonathon Porritt (in *Capitalism as if the World Matters*) argue for 'smart growth' instead of 'dumb growth', the global financial crisis has



given Jackson's more uncompromising zero-growth position a renewed resonance.

Wilkinson and Pickett's *The Spirit Level*, subtitled 'Why More Equality is Better for Everyone', is a highly complementary partner to Jackson's book. Using a plethora of data and analysis, the authors build a case that countries should focus on equity rather than growth in order to create healthy societies. In countries of equal overall wealth, argue Wilkinson and Pickett, less equal societies suffer more social ills – shorter, unhealthier and unhappier lives; higher rates of teenage pregnancy, violence,

obesity, imprisonment and addiction; poorer relationships between socio-economic classes; and higher environmental impacts through resource consumption. The book has created some controversy, and some dispute the authors' arguments. Nevertheless, its message is timely and urgent.

Harmony is an entirely different book, which looks at social and ecological problems through a more aesthetic and philosophical lens. The Prince of Wales, together with Tony Juniper and Ian Skelly, range far and wide across the intellectual and practical territory

HRH The Prince of Wales, Patron of CPSL, photographed by Julie Bergman Sender



of sustainability, questioning many widely held beliefs and modern assumptions about nature and society. The book reveals The Prince's deeply held perspectives on the interconnectedness of life, and illustrates how this can be (and is being) applied to secure a more sustainable future. This beautifully presented and data-rich book proposes

combining the best of modern science and technology with the wisdom of traditional ways, in order to restore the balance between humans and nature.

Harmony has now been made into a documentary film, which premiered on NBC in November 2010. It follows the great tradition of other educational films over the past ten years, such as *The Corporation* (2003), *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005), *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), *The 11th Hour* (2007) and *The Age of Stupid* (2009), to mention but a few. In 2010, two new films that continued this tradition were *Carbon Nation*, which is described as "an optimistic (and witty) discovery of what people are already doing, what we as a nation [America] could be doing and what the world needs to do to prevent (or at least slow down) the impending climate crisis,"³ and *GasLand*, which is an investigative documentary about the "trail of secrets, lies and contamination" behind the natural gas drilling boom in the United States.⁴

We look forward to hearing your views and suggestions about what books and films are pushing the envelope in 2011.

The Top 50 Sustainability Books is available to order via the website of the University of Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership, www.cpsl.cam.ac.uk, as are video interviews with a range of the featured authors.

³ IMDB, The Internet Movie Database – www.imdb.com

⁴ <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com>