



## "How crucial is Callenbach's deep ecological utopia for the 21st century environmental crisis? An ecocritical reading of Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975)"

de Haan, Olivier

### ABSTRACT

After the 20th century (which has often been called the dystopian century), many green utopias influenced by the sixties and the seventies now seem to resurface in several forms. Indeed, green utopian fictions involve the rediscovery of inspiring models which make sense in the 21st century environmental crisis. One of them is Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) which has recently been republished and translated into French and Chinese. Given that almost no study has drawn a parallel between Callenbach's *Ecotopia* and Naess' deep ecology (which is an environmental philosophy which dismantles a world centred on human values), the present work investigates why Callenbach's *Ecotopia* can be considered as a deep ecological utopia. Indeed, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* embodies several principles of deep ecology. For instance, *Ecotopia's* holistic environmental philosophy advocates nature-centred values, circularity and the natural regeneration of the ecosystems. Besides, *Ecotopia* promotes small...

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Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

# How crucial is Callenbach's deep ecological utopia for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis?

An ecocritical reading of Callenbach's  
*Ecotopia* (1975)

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**How crucial is Callenbach's deep ecological utopia for the 21<sup>st</sup>  
century environmental crisis?**

**An ecocritical reading of Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975)**

Professor Véronique Bragard

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to warmly thank professor Véronique Bragard for the numerous enriching discussions we have had about Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. I am also grateful to her for her patience, valuable feedback on my work and helpful suggestions to improve my work. At a more abstract level, I feel the desire to thank Callenbach as well as Dion's imagination and solution-based approach to sustainability because without their creativity, this dissertation would not have been possible. I also believe that literature can act as a driving force behind change on the grounds that I feel much more committed to environmental sustainability now that I have written this dissertation. For instance, when it is possible, I now prefer bicycling to driving. Interestingly, my friends and my family also begin to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle since my mother now tries to buy organic bulk products.

## Abstract

After the 20<sup>th</sup> century (which has often been called the dystopian century), many green utopias influenced by the sixties and the seventies now seem to resurface in several forms. Indeed, green utopian fictions involve the rediscovery of inspiring models which make sense in the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis. One of them is Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) which has recently been republished and translated into French and Chinese. Given that almost no study has drawn a parallel between Callenbach's *Ecotopia* and Naess' deep ecology (which is an environmental philosophy which dismantles a world centred on human values), the present work investigates why Callenbach's *Ecotopia* can be considered as a deep ecological utopia. Indeed, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* embodies several principles of deep ecology. For instance, *Ecotopia*'s holistic environmental philosophy advocates nature-centred values, circularity and the natural regeneration of the ecosystems. Besides, *Ecotopia* promotes small-scale self-sufficient minicities which are in tune with their bioregion and which embody the ideal mix between the urban and the rural.

But Callenbach's *Ecotopia* also foregrounds a number of social, political, technological and environmental solutions. Therefore, I re-read this novel from today's ecocritical perspective adopting a positive solution-based approach since the significance of *Ecotopia* for the 21<sup>st</sup> environmental issues has not been stressed yet. Indeed, as the present study shows, green utopias (such as Huxley's *Island*, Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, Robinson's *Pacific Edge*, Hegland's *Into the Forest* and Caron's *Utopia XXI*) suggest positive, inspiring and sustainable alternatives which manage to make environmental issues more palpable and concrete in fictional forms. Consequently, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (and thereby literature) not only raises environmental consciousness, but also has the potential to engage with and contribute to the sustainability debate. However, although Callenbach's seemingly perfect ecological society conveys ground-breaking and inspiring ideas as to environmental, social and economic sustainability, *Ecotopia* should never be implemented as such since a utopia is a dynamic process and since it involves an array of paradoxes, failures and hidden aspects. For example, *Ecotopia* involuntarily reinforces gender stereotypes and its political system is too informal as well as too personal. Finally, it is worth mentioning that Callenbach was a visionary since he invented videoconferencing and even anticipated climate change to some extent.

**Key words:** Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, (deep) ecology, utopia, ecological crisis, ecocriticism, sustainability, resilience, permaculture, bioregionalism, grassroots, environmental ethics, minicities, failures, paradoxes.

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## Introduction

What would happen if California seceded from the USA and formed what Callenbach called “Ecotopia” forty four years ago? Believe it or not, this is not a mere utopian dream completely cut off from the reality. Indeed, since Trump won the presidency, there has been a strong mobilisation in favour of “Yes California Independence Campaign” or “Calexit plan”<sup>1</sup>. This can be explained by the fact that the progressive Californian state vehemently rejects Trump’s political, social, cultural and especially environmental ideas.

Although the numerous environmental agreements (such as the Kyoto Protocol and the COP 21 Paris Climate Conference Summit) could be seen as breakthroughs since they aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the recent failures to implement them reveal that they are “far too weak to prevent devastating climate change”<sup>2</sup>. This stems from the fact that these agreements on climate change do not actually change our western lifestyles<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the COP 22 Marrakesh Climate Conference which was expected to put the agreement of the COP 21 into action turned out to be an “extreme disappointment”<sup>4</sup> on the grounds that “rich countries fail to do enough to help the developing world”<sup>4</sup>.

Climate change, rampant pollution, rising sea levels, melting ice caps, overpopulation and widespread species extinction ... These are some of the major environmental issues the planet is currently facing. Accordingly, environmental issues are of utmost importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If technological solutions are looked for and implemented, how can literature engage with and contribute to the sustainability debate? This is precisely the question that Johns-Putra, Parham and Squire address in their book entitled *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*. They rightly hold the view that sustainable development tends to be too human-centred because it “fails to consider the nonhuman world sufficiently, its agencies and our kinship with it” (2017: 2). It is the reason why the term “sustainability” is deeply controversial. The term “critical sustainability” (2017: 5) which they adopt in their

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<sup>1</sup> Daniels J. “The ‘Calexit’ plan to split California from the US gets a second chance, while others are looking to break up the state.” *CNBC*. 24 April 2018. 09/03/19. < <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/24/calexit-plan-to-divorce-california-from-us-is-getting-a-second-chance.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> Bawden T. “COP21: Paris deal far too weak to prevent devastating climate change, academics warn.” *Independent*. 8 January 2016. 17/04/18. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change/cop21-paris-deal-far-too-weak-to-prevent-devastating-climate-change-academics-warn-a6803096.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Worley, Will. “Marrakesh climate conference: Campaigners react with ‘extreme disappointment’ over lack of progress.” *Independent*. 19 November 2016. 17/04/18. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/marrakech-climate-conference-cop-22-campaigners-extreme-disappointment-a7426426.html>>.

work critically discusses sustainability from a literary perspective. In the same way as a utopia remains a dynamic and open process, they posit the view that “sustainability might be seen as something the human species has continually to strive towards, while knowing it will never reach it” (2017: 4). Similarly, Girardet argues that the term “regeneration”<sup>5</sup> should be used instead of “sustainability” since the damaged soils, forests, ecosystems and watercourses should be regenerated instead of sustained.

Extensive research on Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* has already been conducted on several issues such as race, gender, ecology and class. However, some key ecological aspects such as the Ecotopian stable-state, minicities and attachment to the wilderness have not been dealt with. Very few studies if any, to the best of my knowledge, have drawn a parallel between Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* and the concept of deep ecology. In short, deep ecology is an environmental philosophy which has been created by Naess in the seventies and which considers that all the organisms and ecosystems are interrelated with each other. In addition, deep ecology “respects all human and non-human individuals in their own right as part of [a] whole” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 68). Therefore, nature is seen as a continuum in which humans are no longer at the top of the natural order. In this dissertation, I will however work with an open and nuanced definition of deep ecology.

On the premise that Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* is the epitome of many deep ecological principles, I intend to demonstrate that *Ecotopia* can be considered as a deep ecological utopia. Moreover, given that the significance of Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis has not really been stressed yet, my second hypothesis is that a number of social, environmental and ethical solutions put forward in *Ecotopia* might be used as a source of inspiration for our current societies in order to mitigate the looming threat of climate change. Indeed, Callenbach’s novel might help us to imagine another desirable and sustainable future society. Even before climate change was discovered, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* had already put forth an innovative and visionary vision of a more sustainable society.

Nowadays, apocalyptic ecodystopias or narratives of environmental collapse are much more popular than ecological utopias on the grounds that their plots tend to be more compelling and suspenseful. However, after decades of dystopias, several ecological utopias

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<sup>5</sup> Girardet H. “Sustainability is unhelpful: we need to think about regeneration.” *The Guardian*. 10 June 2013. 13/10/18.  
< <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/sustainability-unhelpful-think-regeneration>>.

influenced by the sixties and the seventies (such as Hegland's *Into the Forest* (1996), *Ecotopia 2121* (2016), Wagner's *Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation* (2017) and Caron's *Utopia XXI* (2017)) seem to resurface. Among these utopian narratives, Dion and Laurent's film *Demain* (2015) is a turning point in the utopian thought in Europe because it portrays a positive feel-good story which emphasizes the ecological alternatives and solutions to the current climate change debate. Contrary to Buell's view that "apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (cited in Garrard, 2012: 101), I aim to show that green utopias, which depict a positive and ecological model society, are as powerful as (and maybe even more powerful than) ecodystopias. By doing so, I would like to highlight the major role of deep ecological utopias, and thereby literature, in showing more nuanced, alternative and ecological modes of being as well as inhabiting the planet. Besides potentially making the readers aware of their individual responsibility in terms of sustainability, green utopias might engage with and contribute to sustainability debates. Accordingly, it is my contention that people might need to read deep ecological utopias (such as Callenbach's *Ecotopia*) because green utopian fictions are crucial for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis. Indeed, green utopias provide them with a positive, inspiring and sustainable vision of the future society. Therefore, *Ecotopia* might act as a driving force behind change because besides raising environmental consciousness, *Ecotopia* can also help the reader to implement a sustainable behaviour. However, I also aim to show that even though Callenbach's *Ecotopia* puts forth ground-breaking ideas as to sustainability that make sense in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ecological crisis, this green utopia should never be implemented as such since a utopia is a dynamic and open process. Moreover, *Ecotopia* involves an array of paradoxes, failures and hidden aspects such as the underestimation of the importance of its politics which are too personal and informal (Mathisen, 2001: 56). In addition, even if *Ecotopia* seemingly fosters a more humane and environmentally-friendly future society, many of its social, political, moral and cultural values are at odds with the values it is supposed to embody.

In my dissertation I will mainly attempt to address the following research questions: "why can *Ecotopia* be considered as a deep ecological utopia?", "what are *Ecotopia*'s hidden aspects and failures?" and "how significant are deep ecological utopias such as Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, and thereby literature, for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis?". Another related question is: "how can literature engage its readers and respond to the challenges of the current climate change crisis?".

In what follows, I explain how I will analyse Callenbach's *Ecotopia* which is the core element of my literary corpus. Given that Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) was written in the context of the counterculture of the sixties and seventies<sup>6</sup>, I have chosen to analyse it via an ecocritical approach. Ecocriticism is a field of literary study which deals with environmental issues and which examines how literature illustrates environmental concerns. In addition, I have opted to re-read this book from today's perspective because it still resonates with the present in many ways. Since Callenbach's *Ecotopia* adopts a positive solution-based approach, I would like to analyse how the power of positive thinking conveyed by this novel might contribute to sustainability. However, in order to critically examine this creative work, I will also analyse *Ecotopia*'s numerous flaws and inconsistencies such as its hippie-like, heteronormative, racist and homeostatic character. Another paradox which will be analysed pertains to the Ecotopian relations which are very loose and free whereas the government imposes tough regulations and strict rules as to work, property and inheritance (99).

The following paragraph describes how I will proceed to answer my research questions. The first chapter reports on the general context. The first part gives an overview of the structure of the novel and stresses the importance of the concept of home. This second part sets out the hectic emergence of Ecotopia and its general organisation. The third part of this chapter introduces the theoretical framework of my dissertation. It encompasses four short sections, the first of which deals with ecocriticism. The second one focuses on the definition of green utopias while the third and the fourth ones concentrate on the deep ecological movement and its criticisms. The fourth part examines the possible literary influences on Callenbach's *Ecotopia* such as More's *Utopia* and Huxley's *Island*. The fifth part shows how green utopias are currently resurfacing. Then, the sixth part investigates what some scholars have already written on Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. The second chapter shows why Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, which is one of the first attempts to portray a sustainable society, can be considered as an inspirational deep ecological utopia. Indeed, *Ecotopia* can be viewed as one of the best illustrations of the principles of deep ecology. For instance, the Ecotopians try to reduce their population to lower the pressure on natural resources and their agriculture embodies their

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<sup>6</sup> The counterculture of the sixties and the seventies refers to a group of hippies whose values and behaviours were opposed to those of the mainstream. This anti-establishment movement was very influential in San Francisco. Hippies heavily protested against wars and advocated sexual freedom, women's rights and tolerance. They also promoted environmental values while they rejected materialism, capitalism and hierarchy.

stable-state because it is based on circularity. Besides looking at how the Ecotopian society is politically and socially organised, I will consider the way animals are represented and considered. I also highlight that *Ecotopia* is an ongoing process which is based on grassroots community projects. By contrast, the third chapter focuses on the failures and hidden aspects of *Ecotopia*. The penultimate chapter considers the significance of deep ecological utopias (such as Callenbach's *Ecotopia*) for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis. This section also includes the multidimensional concept of sustainability in Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. The last chapter of my study deals with the considerable impact of *Ecotopia* on the American West Coast and on the world.

## Chapter 1: Context

### ***Ecotopia*: structure of the storyline and the concept of home**

*Ecotopia*'s originality lies in the alternation of the narrator Weston's official reports and diary entries. It is the reason why the subtitle of Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is "The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston". His diary entries are subjective as well as personal because they deal with his innermost feelings. They are thus originally not intended to be published. By contrast, his official reports are intended to be published in *Times-Post*, the newspaper for which he works. They are thus written in an "objective" and detached journalistic style which adds authenticity. Thanks to this realistic style the reader could believe that *Ecotopia* really exists. It is worth mentioning that the diary entries are well separated from the reports because the former are written in italics while the latter are written in standard font. This suggests that he is able to separate his private life from his working life. However, the juxtaposition of the diary entries and the reports makes them come into conflict with each other. Indeed, his reports are supposed to be in favour of the American ideas while his diary entries, which were first pro-American, gradually turn out to promote the Ecotopian ideas and beliefs

Almost the whole novel is narrated by the journalist Weston except for the first and the last reports which have been written by Max (who is Weston's boss and editor of *Times-Post*). These two reports seem to act as a frame in which Weston's narrative is embedded. The last report highlights the authenticity and "objectivity" of the novel since Max tells the reader that he has "respected Weston's wishes [to] keep the text just as he wrote it" (181). By contrast, the first report mentions that Weston has been assigned to officially meet *Ecotopia*'s President in order to re-establish the diplomatic relations between the USA and *Ecotopia* in the hope that the two countries could be reunited. Indeed, *Ecotopia* has seceded from the USA and is made up of Oregon, Washington and the northern part of California. It is worth noting that the story takes place in the future because it happens in 1999 whereas the story was written in 1975.

*Ecotopia*'s storyline mainly deals with three key elements. As already mentioned, the first one concerns Weston's attempt to meet Vera Allwen who is *Ecotopia*'s President. However, before meeting her, he needs to visit the country and to learn how it is organised. He also discovers its people, customs and institutions. Along with Weston, the reader

discovers a country which looks like a hospitable and welcoming utopia. Indeed, Weston feels immediately welcomed by all the citizens who speak to him with a “friendly-tone that [he] now begin[s] to recognize as a national trait” (7). He later discovers the pollution-free society of Ecotopia which is characterised by a “bucolic atmosphere” (13). He notices that the Ecotopian cities are relatively small, green and quiet because there are no cars. He is also surprised by the Ecotopian widespread lack of formality, which might result from their hippie-like lifestyle. He is then introduced to their ecological stable-state which entails that everything needs to be recycled. It is only after having discovered all the essential features of the Ecotopian society (such as their organisation in small communities which fosters feelings of belonging, solidarity and collectivity) that he meets Vera Allwen. However, this meeting turns out to be a failure on the grounds that she vehemently rejects Weston’s request which consisted in reuniting the USA and Ecotopia. He thus feels that “his whole trip now seems like a waste of time” (163). Even though the narrator seems oblivious to Ecotopia’s flaws, they are actually ubiquitous if we read between the lines.

The second key element of the storyline pertains to its romantic overtones as Weston begins a relationship with Marissa Brightcoud. However, it is not the best romance a reader could expect. After being sexually frustrated because he does not understand how to court the Ecotopian women, he finally encounters Marissa who bluntly seduces him. Little by little, he falls in love with her and becomes gradually more involved in the life at the forest camp since Marissa is a lumberjack. Therefore, he feels that he is part of a community. Although they regularly argue with each other, they always reunite. At the end, they even intend to “conceive a child” (179).

The last element concerns Weston’s emotional growth. This personal transformation is especially noticeable in his change of mind regarding his fancy New York clothes and his attachment to his mobile and solitary lifestyle. As a top international affairs reporter, Weston has a very mobile, detached and independent way of life. In addition, he lives away from his first wife as well as his children and he has a lover. As he often travels for his work, he is used to staying in hotels. It is the reason why he first sleeps in a “hotel which had been recommended as suitable for an American” (15). Weston also attaches much importance to beautiful and powerful cars (which epitomize his mobile lifestyle) because “no one can be utterly insensitive to the pleasures of the open road [driving a] powerful, comfortable car [with] a girl’s hair blowing in the wind” (29). His vision of mobility (which is very

representative of the American mobility paradigm), masculinity and freedom thus sharply contrasts with the Ecotopian aversion to polluting cars.

As the story unfolds, he begins to neglect his fancy drip-dry clothes and he finds that the hotel is increasingly boring (32). He thus decides to move to Franklin's Cove which is an Ecotopian press commune made up of forty hospitable journalists and writers. He also begins to realise that he has led a lonely, stressful and senseless life in a capitalistic society. He then slowly understands the importance of living in communities "to have a structure [and] social surroundings [on which] you can rely on" (35). After his participation in the War Games (a bestial and typical Ecotopian practice in which men fight against each other until one man is wounded), Weston notices that "Marissa's attitude toward [him] has somehow changed" (152) because he has become a real Ecotopian man. Therefore, in his article "Homecoming in the California Visionary Romance", Charles Crow argues that "the stages of Weston's growth are marked by increasing participation in Ecotopian life" (1989: 9). At the end of the story, when he puts his fancy drip-dry New York clothes on, Weston suddenly realises that

I looked awful. I didn't look human! My image was tight, stiff. [...] This time the awful American was almost sickening – I really thought I might have to throw up. [...] My body longed to get out of those terrible clothes (178).

Then, the independent, rootless and detached Weston decides to stay in Ecotopia because he has "fallen in love with her country as much as with Marissa" (180). Therefore, "a new self has been coming to life" (180). He then thanks his boss for having sent him to Ecotopia because "it led [him] home" (182). As Tschachler puts it, Weston's self-transformation takes place in the three following stages: "[he] starts out a sceptic, becomes aware of his own alienation and bursts into selfhood" (1984: 305). It might be argued that Callenbach consciously portrayed Weston as a character who was first sceptical about the Ecotopian ideas because by gradually changing Weston's mind about Ecotopia, the reader might be convinced too. Moreover, given that Weston prefers Ecotopia over the USA and thereby, a sustainable way of life over a consumerist one, the novel ends with a call to action.

Consequently, the concept of home or homeplace is of central importance in *Ecotopia*. Indeed, on the first page, Callenbach explains it by breaking the meaning of Ecotopia down into eco- (home) and -topia (place). Just like the environmental ethics put forward in *Ecotopia*, the novel is built on circularity since it comes full circle. Indeed, the first and the last words are "home". However, the notion of "home" is put into question because it connotes sweet feelings of "safety, security and stability" while "utopians should emphasize



change and renewal as essential characteristics of a good society” (Mathisen, 2001: 69). Indeed, instead of being static and stable, a utopia should always be an open-ended and dynamic process.

It is worth noting that the notion of “home” varies according to the different characters. For Weston, the entire Ecotopian society becomes his home whereas for Marissa, “home” is the feeling she experiences when she is in the forest: “the forest is my home [...] I feel best when I’m among trees” (54). In addition, “home” can also be related to ecology because as Capra defines it, it is the “study [which] connect[s] all the living beings with one another on the earth as home” (cited in Kato, 2014: 40).

### **The hectic emergence of Ecotopia and its general organisation**

Ecotopia is a fictional country which is made up of the former states of Oregon, Washington and the northern part of California. This country has completely closed its borders with the USA from which it has seceded. Therefore, its diplomatic and economic relations with the USA have been totally broken. However, Ecotopia is relatively open to the rest of the world because it hosts international art exhibitions as well as tourists, imports iron and exports the culture (music, poetry, novels) of the black segregated enclaves. Given that there is a lack of details with regard to how Ecotopia exactly came into existence, Callenbach has written a prequel called *Ecotopia Emerging* to fill this lack. This prequel describes the green and revolutionary political movement which finally managed to establish Ecotopia as an independent nation. This widespread lack of details also turns out to permeate the Ecotopian political and societal organisation. This view is supported by Mathisen who argues that *Ecotopia* does not “provide us with any detailed descriptions of the political institutions or the relationship and distribution of power between them” (2001: 59). Therefore, it is not clear how the Ecotopian society is precisely run or organised and how their ecological policies are enforced.

The reasons which might explain the Ecotopian voluntary secession from the USA are numerous and clearly mentioned in *Ecotopia*. Firstly, the Ecotopians have had enough of the American imperialism. Indeed, in the context of the Cold War, the USA was losing the Vietnam War, tried to maintain control over underdeveloped countries and launched secret wars against uprisings. Therefore, the American government spent a large amount of money on arms race, which generated “a profound long-term decline in the world competitiveness of

American civilian industry [and] [...] a widespread misery” (50). In addition, the gap between the poor and the rich was widening. It is worth noting that the counterculture movement which strongly protested against the Vietnam War was very influential in the region depicted by the novel (Berkeley and San Francisco). Secondly, the Ecotopians were opposed to the American capitalism which constantly promoted consumerism via advertising and a higher standard of living resulting from a “relentless pressure on work hours and worker productivity” (48). Thirdly, they “were literally sick of bad air, chemical foods” (51). What this quote reveals is that the Ecotopians strongly rejected the environmentally harmful American practices. Although climate change is not explicitly mentioned in the novel, *Ecotopia* shows a political will to tackle environmental issues. This thus means that Callenbach was ahead of its time. Indeed, it might be hypothesized that Callenbach had already anticipated climate change to some extent since the first reports on global warming had barely appeared at the time. It is worth mentioning that today’s real California secession movement mainly protests against Trump’s policies on climate change.

All these reasons led the Ecotopians to realise that “if [they] wished to survive [they] had to take matters into [their] own hands” (51). The Ecotopians were accordingly eager for change. In the first part of the novel, Weston criticized the Ecotopians for having seceded from the USA and said that they followed “an extremist ecological program” which compromised their economic and social welfare (51). Weston was also told that after the break from the USA, there was a dramatic decline in the GNP (Gross National Product) and an important flight of capital which brought about massive unemployment and dislocations. However, the Ecotopian government took this opportunity to promote its social as well as environmental values and to completely reorganise its economy as well as politics. Two radical measures were adopted to tackle the high unemployment rate.

Firstly, the Ecotopian economy was isolated from the international capitalistic competition and the Ecotopians chose to limit the workload to twenty hours a week (49). This allowed them to double the number of jobs and to enjoy more free time. However, their income was considerably reduced. This thus explains why many Ecotopians lost the comfort and luxury in which they used to live. This considerable change enabled them to put forth their philosophical, social and environmental values. Indeed, they realised that “mankind [...] was not meant for production [...] Instead, humans were meant to take their modest place in a seamless, stable-state web of living organisms, disturbing that web as little as possible” (47). As will be explained later, this quote illustrates deep ecology. In addition, they were ready to

cut down on their consumption in order to ensure their future. Similarly, the Ecotopians began to believe that “people were to be happy not to the extent they dominated their fellow creatures on the earth but to the extent they lived in balance with them” (48). As a result, humans’ happiness does not result from being at the top of the natural order but from living in harmony with nature and with other species. Secondly, the government dismantled the corporations as well as the oil industry, nationalized many sectors of the society (such as the agriculture) and employed many Ecotopians to build its train network, “sewage and other recycling facilities necessary to establish stable-state life systems” (49).

It is worth noting that the transition was relatively easy since the regions of California, Oregon and Washington have natural advantages (such as a temperate climate) which facilitate a sustainable form of agriculture. Besides these natural advantages, these regions also have other assets such as excellent universities, numerous doctors, “a higher percentage of skilled workers [as well as] a greater number of engineers” (49). However, as will be explained in the section devoted to *Ecotopia*’s flaws, Ecotopia was also built on violence and lies. Indeed, in order to strengthen the nation’s defences, Ecotopia claimed to have “mined major eastern cities [such as Washington and New York] with atomic weapons” (49). This blackmail enabled them to avoid an attack from the USA.

In what follows, I will shortly explain how the Ecotopian politics work in general. To begin with, the Ecotopian politics are governed by the Survivalists Party who is a women-dominated ecological party. Therefore, the Ecotopian life apparently seems equalitarian. However, this statement will be nuanced in the section dedicated to *Ecotopia*’s flaws. Their politics are particularly informal since “a meeting has no formal agenda” (92) and are basically organised as follows: politicians first gather and voice concerns. Afterwards, they express their feelings about these issues and usually reach a consensus. Nonetheless, there are no motions and no votes. Once the consensus has been reached, the decision is ratified. Social consensus is thus at the core of the Ecotopian decision-making. The risk of their politics based on consensus is that everyone has to agree with each other. Given that it rarely occurs, the Ecotopians have invented a “healing process” which involves that they “take pains to assuage the feelings of those members who have had to give ground in order to achieve the consensus” (83). This evident lack of formality can also be spotted in the fuzzy border between work and play. For instance, “during an important discussion in a government office, suddenly everybody will decide to go to the sauna bath” (172). Therefore, the difference between work and play is not clear-cut. It should also be stressed that the Ecotopians often

smoke marijuana or drink beer while working. This freedom, looseness and absence of hierarchy can partly explain why the Ecotopians generally love and enjoy their work. On this basis, it may be inferred that the Ecotopian politics lack rationality. Indeed, their political meetings focus on emotions and are informal, friendly, personal as well as relaxed.

In her article entitled: “The underestimation of politics in Green Utopias”, Mathisen also criticises this lack of formality regarding politics. However, she acknowledges that the main advantage of these informal politics is that “the threshold for taking part in political decision-making [is lowered]” (2001: 63). Therefore, each Ecotopian can participate in the political system since politics are not a specialised, formal or institutionalised activity. Indeed, politics have been integrated into the Ecotopians’ everyday life. Nonetheless, the problem of this informal political system is that it tends to be neglected on the grounds that it is not “considered as the most important instrument of social change and renewal” (Mathisen, 2001: 72). By contrast, the Ecotopians “use culture as an instrument of social change and regulation” (Mathisen, 2001: 66). Consequently, the Ecotopian culture as an instrument of social change, control and regulation has been overestimated while their politics have been underestimated (Mathisen, 2001: 72). In other words, the main deficiency of *Ecotopia* is that it fails to emphasize the importance of its political institutions and processes of democratic deliberation.

The instrumentalisation of the Ecotopian culture can also be seen in their widely shared eco-friendly lifestyle which involves a heightened ecological consciousness and informal social control. Given that the Ecotopian culture has been instrumentalised “in the name of ecopolitical correctness” (Mathisen, 2001: 70), Ecotopia actually promotes a culture of conformity. As Mathisen points out, the artists are the first “victims of the reign of conformity” (2001: 71). Indeed, their individual freedom is limited since any deviation from the ecopolitical correctness is sanctioned. High culture and art as a professional activity are thus disregarded because autonomous cultural institutions might lead to dissenters who might “think differently and provokingly” (Mathisen, 2001: 70). Similarly, education has also been instrumentalised since the subjects taught in schools (namely mainly ecology) are imposed. Therefore, if art, culture and education are not free (since they have been instrumentalised), a real democracy cannot be safeguarded. Indeed, in a democratic society, art, culture and education embody social innovation, creativity as well as resistance and can freely call the political system into question. As a result, Mathisen strongly believes that the Ecotopians should “free culture from its heavy political responsibilities” (2001: 76). According to her, the

fact that the African Americans live in segregated communities illustrates Callenbach's underestimation of the significant role of politics. Indeed, politics have the power to "create social reconciliation between different ethnic groups" (Mathisen, 2001: 73). In other words, if there was a strong political will, the African Americans could perfectly be integrated into the white Ecotopian population.

Besides politics, the Ecotopian lack of formality also concerns every aspect of their daily life. This lack of formality is generally also associated with a lack of privacy and inhibition. For instance, in addition to liking deep and frank conversations, the Ecotopians are fond of "emotional dramas" (46) which are commonplace and acted out in front of everybody. In keeping with their lack of privacy, the Ecotopians constantly want to know what the other person is thinking and feeling. Therefore, their conversations also lack formality and often take a personal turn. The epitome of these personal, emotional and informal conversations is the interview between Weston and Vera Allwen. Although Weston had been asked to formally discuss the possible future reunification of the USA and Ecotopia, he "was told this morning that Vera Allwen would see [him] today at four, though totally off the record and informally" (160). After categorically rejecting any hope for a possible future reunification, the conversation even turns into "a psychiatric interview" (162) with a woman who looks more like his grandmother than a powerful president. Indeed, "even the president wants to mess with your soul" (162) since she desires to know Weston's feelings about Ecotopia.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Ecocriticism as the study of literature and the environment**

Given that I will adopt an ecocritical approach to Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, it is necessary to briefly define what ecocriticism is. In *the Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty describes ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (1996: Xviii). Ecocriticism enables scholars to adopt an earth-centred approach to literary texts. In addition, ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary and literary discipline which involves literature, ecology, cultural theory as well as philosophy. This literary approach dates back to the early nineties when the discipline rapidly developed thanks to the creation of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992 and the journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE) in 1993. Notwithstanding the wide range of investigation, the common thread is the assumption that "human culture is

connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (Glotfelty, 1996: XIV). Currently, ecocriticism is growing in importance since more and more scholars investigate literary works from an ecocritical perspective. For instance, Garforth has recently published *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature* (2018) in which she examines green future visions.

### **Defining green or ecological utopias**

In what follows, I give a brief overview of how some scholars define “green utopias”, “(deep) ecological utopias” and “ecotopias” which are interchangeable terms. In the *Encyclopaedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, Meinhold states that “Ernest Callenbach coined a name for the sub-genre dedicated to ecological utopias in which *Ecotopia* [...] is the major landmark” (2014: 551). In other words, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* has given its name to the literary genre of ecological utopias or green utopias. The term has now been used in many different ways. In her article on “Green utopias”, Garforth points out that ecological utopias “address the question of how humans can live better with nonhuman nature” (2005: 393). She also argues that ecological utopias might “prompt a reconceptualization of the good life for human societies” (2005: 393). Moreover, Berry, the editor of *Utopias and the Environment*, explains that green utopias “stand for hopes of ecological regeneration, biodiversity, and an atmosphere not made ruinous by carbon pollution” (2017: 103). Similarly, de Geus (lecturer of Political Science in the University of Leiden) argues that ecological utopias “stimulate reflection on desirable models of the future and changes in society” (2002: 198). In other words, ecotopias portray enticing, inspiring and sustainable alternatives to the current western societies. Finally, besides Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975), ecotopias or green utopias include among others Huxley’s *Island* (1962), Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home* (1985), Robinson’s *Pacific Edge* (1990), Hegland’s *Into the Forest* (1996), Wagner’s *Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation* (2017) and Caron’s *Utopia XXI* (2017).

### **Deep ecology as an environmental philosophy**

Arne Naess (professor at the University of Oslo) coined the term “deep ecology” in 1973 and set out its key principles in his article entitled: “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary”. According to Garrard (the author of *Ecocriticism*), deep ecology is the most radical form of environmentalism. The latter is a political, social,

philosophical and ethical movement which strives to enhance and safeguard the environment. Deep ecology levels strong criticism at the western “anthropocentric dualism humanity/nature” (2012: 26) which is thought to be at the basis of the current environmental crisis. In other words, nature (instead of humans) is at the core of deep ecology.

Environmental approaches are divided into the “shallow” and the “deep” ecology. Since 1973 this divide has provoked a fierce debate among ecologists since deep ecology pitted against shallow ecology. In order to move away from this shallow versus deep divide, some scholars have invented the concept of “deep sustainability” which is a mixed framework which reconciles these two seemingly contradictory views (Rigby, 2017: 52).

Shallow ecology or managerial ecology is anthropocentric and more oriented towards technology and economic growth. Therefore, deep ecologists have criticized it because it compromises with the dominant social and economic order (Garrard, 2012: 22). As Citton points out in his book *Attention Ecology* and in his conference “Etudes littéraires et éducation de l’attention à l’âge du capitalisme écocidaire” (on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018), the approach adopted by the managerial ecology is “from above” (107) or on the government level because it entails a green economy, different incentives and taxes. Although shallow ecology promotes environmental ethics, it is essentially human-centred and therefore, only implements ecological measures in order to increase human wellbeing. Anthropocentrism refers to the belief that humans are at the top of the natural hierarchy and that anything is given value in relation to humans. Just like deep ecology, shallow ecology aims to curb pollution and to preserve the earth’s natural resources, biodiversity as well as wilderness.

By contrast, besides prolonging some principles of shallow ecology, deep ecology “digs conceptually deeper” (Fox cited in Keller cited in Callicot & Frodeman, 2008: 206). Indeed, deep ecology is much more spiritual, religious and philosophical than shallow ecology. At a more spiritual level, inspired by Buddhist and Native American cultures, deep ecology aims to develop “Self-realisation” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 66). The idea is to consider the “self-in-Self” in which “Self” stands for organic wholeness (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 66). In order to promote spiritual growth, humans are encouraged to identify with and relate to non-human species as well as with nature since everything is interconnected. Therefore, “if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 68). Deep ecology thus seeks to foster an ethic of responsibility towards nature and other species. Likewise, deep ecology intends to increase the species diversity, symbiosis and harmony of the ecosystems.

Deep ecology is essentially an “ecosophy” (Naess cited in Devall & Sessions, 2007: 74), which means that it is a holistic environmental philosophy which considers that “all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 67). Likewise, Clark explains in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* that “all human actions should be guided by a sense of what is good for the biosphere as a whole” (2011: 2). Therefore, instead of adopting an anthropocentric stance, deep ecology advocates biocentric equality which involves that “all organisms and entities in the ecosphere as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 67). In the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, Keller points out that the intrinsic worth given to organisms and ecosystems is independent “of human wants, needs or desires” (cited in Callicot & Frodeman, 2009: 205). The idea is thus that nature is seen as a continuum in which everything has value in itself and is interconnected. Although Naess argues that humans must not reduce the diversity and the richness of the ecosystems, he acknowledges that humans need to satisfy their vital needs. Indeed, humans need to eat vegetables and meat in order to survive. Therefore, he adds the clause “in principle” to the concept of biocentric equality because “any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation and suppression” (1973: 95).

In addition, Yves Citton (professor of French literature) explains that radical ecology or deep ecology is organised from the bottom-up since it is based on “concrete collective alternatives” which emerge from the “political activism of grassroots organisations” (107). The grassroots movement is essentially local and advocates degrowth<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, deep ecology favours grassroots democracy, local autonomy and decentralisation in order to strengthen and boost the self-sufficiency and resilience of the communities. The following deep ecological principles will be sketched out because they will be thoroughly discussed and illustrated thanks to Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*. In keeping with the search for the minimal environmental impact and the smallest interference with the ecosystems, deep ecology maintains that human needs and population should be considerably reduced. This results from the willingness to improve people’s quality of life and to alleviate the pressure on natural resources. Indeed, rapid population growth leads to higher consumption and pollution. In addition, deep ecology promotes solidarity, egalitarianism, an appropriate use of technology, renewable energy and recycling (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 69, 133). Interestingly, besides

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<sup>7</sup> “By ‘degrowth’, we understand a form of society and economy which aims at the well-being of all and sustains the natural basis of life”.

“What is degrowth?” *Degrowth*. s.d. 16/03/19. < <https://www.degrowth.info/en/what-is-degrowth/> >.



being translated by “*écologie profonde ou radicale*”, deep ecology can also be translated by “*antispécisme*”, although antispeciesism tends to focus on animal issues. Since its beginning, deep ecology has evolved and now especially concentrates on how to prevent climate change. It still fuels environmental debates among environmentalists and policymakers such as Vice-President Al Gore.

### **Criticisms of deep ecology**

One of the fiercest criticisms of deep ecology concerns misanthropy (Garrard, 2012: 25). This critique takes root in the following quote: “the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 70). It has even been believed that some deep ecologists considered AIDS as the natural solution to overpopulation (Devall, 1987: 20). However, deep ecologists have countered this argument by stating that they intend to “reduc[e] the rate of population growth by humane means [and that] AIDS is a terrible disease not to be wished on anyone” (Devall, 1987: 20). Moreover, some deep ecologists have been accused of being inhospitable since their approach to sustainability consists in curbing immigration and closing borders (Devall, 1987: 20).

Many deep ecological principles have also been criticized because they were too vague, contradictory and vacuous (Waller, 1997: 189). For instance, the principle of biocentric equality is unclear and might even “render deep ecology impotent” (Keller cited in Callicot & Frodeman, 2009: 208). Indeed, if all organisms or entities have the same intrinsic worth, decisions cannot be made. Similarly, Garrard even claims that “if value resides everywhere, it resides nowhere” (2012: 24). For example, if trees have the same rights as humans, critics “ask ‘are not we committing murder when we fell a tree?’ ” (Devall, 1987: 19). Deep ecologists respond to this criticism by saying that trees do not have rights from a legal perspective. Indeed, the concept of rights is used “as a metaphor and highly abstract norm [...] [in order to] convey the meaning of biocentrism” (Devall, 1987: 19). At present, some natural sites have legal rights and Ecuador has even proclaimed “a Declaration of the Rights of Nature” (Saguaro, 2016: 53).

Likewise, according to the “biocentric equality” principle, there would be no difference between eating vegetables and meat since plants and animals both have the same intrinsic worth. However, this principle leads to an absurdity because vegetarianism is clearly more

ethical and environmentally-friendly. Moreover, deep ecologists tend to be vegetarians. In an article entitled “A vegetarian critique of Deep Ecology and Social Ecology”, Waller acknowledges that deep ecology explicitly promotes animal ethics and implicitly advocates vegetarianism. However, he argues that deep ecology should express more interest in vegetarianism and forbid hunting on the grounds that eating meat is highly inconsistent with their programme (1997: 187). Indeed, meat production partly contributes to climate change.

Deep ecology has also been criticized for being too extreme or radical and thus, relatively similar to “ecological fascism” (Clark, 2011: 181). In an article entitled “Luc Ferry’s Critique of Deep Ecology, Nazi Nature Protection Laws, and Environmental Anti-Semitism”, Bratton explains that deep ecology has even been compared with Hitler’s programme. Indeed, both have been accused of being “antihuman” and argue that animals as well as nature “have intrinsic value” (Bratton, 1999: 4). It is worth noting that the way we currently treat animals (namely their industrial killing) echoes the way Jews were treated by Nazis (Singer). However, Bratton counters Ferry’s critique of deep ecology because despite some similarities, the huge difference between deep ecology and Nazism is that Nazi environmentalism was based on racial convictions, namely anti-Semitism. Moreover, this comparison is irrelevant since deep ecology is against any form of hierarchy and mainly deals with environmental ethics.

Another criticism which has been voiced against deep ecology relates to the issue of “ecoterrorists”<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, a few activists who belong to radical environmental organisations such as Earth First! exhibit an extreme, anarchistic and violent behaviour. For instance, in order to prevent deforestation, some radicals used “monkeywrenching (the sabotage of machinery involved in environmental destruction), [...] stand in front of bulldozers and put spikes [...] in trees”<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, given that violence might be used to support their environmental values, deep ecologists might sound dangerous, radical and scary.

Finally, in an article entitled “From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places: the Urban Challenge to Ecocriticism”, Bennett accuses deep ecology of “wilderness fetishism” and he counters Devall and Sessions’ view that “wild nature alone can provide the experience needed to foster ‘self-realisation and biocentric equality’” (2001: 297). In the same vein, he vigorously disagrees with the deep ecological idea that “only those in contact with the wild

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<sup>8</sup> Bevington D. “Earth First!” *Britannica*. s.d. 13/10/18. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Earth-First>>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

can become fully evolved humans” (2001: 301). According to him, by focussing on the wilderness areas and the wide-open spaces of the West, deep ecology has forgotten to pay enough attention to cities. This excessive focus on the rural, pastoral and wilderness stems from the fact that many ecocritics live near and work in “places like the University of Oregon, the University of Nevada, Reno or rural colleges” (Bennett, 2001: 302). Moreover, he challenges the deep ecological idealisation of the eco-friendly Native Americans on the grounds that they have not always lived in pure harmony with nature. To conclude, some feminists have also criticized deep ecology because it fails to address the gender issue as well as the fact that women generally tend to be more eco-friendly than men.

### **Intertextual echoes of Callenbach’s *Ecotopia***

The term “utopia” was first coined by Thomas More and refers to his seminal text, *Utopia*, which was published in Latin in 1516. In their article entitled “Ecotopia between traditions and technology”, Hanallah and Faragallah characterize a utopia as “an ideal, imaginary state of social and political perfection” (2010: 27). Ashcroft adds that a “utopia is by definition impossible, an unachievable ideal, a fanciful dream, unrealistic and naïve” (2007: 411). Right from the start, More’s coined word contains a tension between a non-place which does not exist (“ou”) and a good (“eu”) place (“topos”). Likewise, the etymology of *Ecotopia* partly echoes *Utopia* since it is made up of “eco” (“oikos”) which means home and “topia” (“topos”) which means place. This thus leads to the central concept of homeplace which has already been discussed.

More’s *Utopia* portrays a radically new society which is governed by a seemingly ideal government that tries to guarantee everyone’s happiness. Indeed, this society promotes religious tolerance, equality, no property, free time and education. More’s *Utopia* is generally believed to be a critical utopia. This term may be defined as “the critique of th[e] present conditions that make utopia necessary” (Ashcroft, 2007: 419). Indeed, especially the first part of More’s *Utopia* levels criticism at the monarchical and religious power of the English Renaissance. In the same vein, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* is also a critical utopia since it is highly critical of its contemporary American society. *Ecotopia* thus fosters “a culture of resistance” (Kumar, 2010: 560) as it criticizes the dominant capitalistic idea of consumption, profit, domination, exploitation and progress. It is worth mentioning that professor G. Latré argues that More’s *Utopia* could be considered as a dystopia since although it is a creative and imaginary thought-experiment, it portrays a society in which rationality has been driven to an

extreme (Latre's lecture, February 2018). He contends that reason is more often put in the service of power politics than in the service of order and harmony. For instance, the Utopians often conquer, colonise and enslave new territories. Moreover, they lack individual freedom since there is a widespread conformity as to housing and clothes. Likewise, we will also see that Callenbach's *Ecotopia* presents several flaws and inconsistencies.

As the founding text of utopias, More's *Utopia* epitomizes the characteristics of utopias as a literary genre. Usually a male narrator (here Hythloday or as to *Ecotopia*, Weston) goes on a journey to an unknown and faraway island in which s/he gets a tour of the island (the island of Utopia or the territory of Ecotopia which might be viewed as an isolated island since it seceded from the USA and closed its borders). S/he then discovers how this new society works. S/he later usually comes back to his/her original society and tells his/her fellow citizens how this wonderful visit has changed him/her. Sometimes, the depicted society is so welcoming and pleasurable that the narrator stays there, as is the case in *Ecotopia*. By telling his fellow citizens why the utopian society is better, the narrator shows didacticism. In *Utopia*'s second book, More explains how this revolutionary society works and suggests ground-breaking ideas to create a more just, equal and happier society. Several of More's ideas are revised in Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. These include: solidarity, easy access to education, religious tolerance, equality, abolition of private property, free healthcare and more free time due to a reduced work load.

Although More's *Utopia* is clearly situated in the context of the anthropocentric humanism of the Renaissance, an ecocritical reading of *Utopia* is possible as some passages might reveal an early environmental awareness. This surprising view is confirmed by McCutcheon who compares Callenbach's *Ecotopia* with More's *Utopia*. According to her, the latter has certainly influenced the former. Her comparison is supported by the fact that they both depict "imagined worlds where utopian dream and ecology interact" (2015: 150). Moreover, she holds that *Utopia* already "raises questions about the idea of human domination of the natural world" (2015: 151).

These husbandmen till the ground, [...] breed an infinite multitude of chickens in a very curious manner; for the hens do not sit and hatch them, but vast number of eggs are laid in a gentle and equal heat, in order to be hatched, and th[e chicken] seem to consider those that feed them as their mothers (30).

This passage might be interpreted in ecological terms since as McCutcheon puts it: "beast-man relationships [...] are reversed: now even the chicks treat 'homines' like mothers;

animals and human beings, nature and technology [...] are imagined in a harmonious balance” (2015: 161). Accordingly, the border between humans and animals becomes blurred and there is no more anthropocentric hierarchy between them. The following passage reveals an early awareness for animal rights.

That a weak, harmless and fearful hare should be devoured by strong, fierce, and cruel dogs. [...] all this business of hunting is, among the Utopians, turned over to their butchers; and those [...] are slaves and they look on hunting as the basest parts of a butcher’s work (51).

Contrary to More, Callenbach does not condemn hunting as a barbaric and cruel activity because Native Americans considered hunting as a spiritual sport. However, *Ecotopia* also speaks up for animals rights. In addition, in *Utopia*, the term “virtue” means “living according to Nature” (48) and there is a communal garden behind each town house. Moreover, the Utopians “cultivate their gardens with great care so that they have both vines, fruits, herbs and flowers in them and they have cisterns for receiving the rain-water” (31). Given this evidence, *Utopia* can be considered as an “ecologically balanced society [with] evenly-spaced garden-cities” (McCutcheon, 2015: 161). Indeed, each city is surrounded by the countryside. The Utopians are also said to pay attention to the air quality and “content themselves with fewer things” (37), which suggests a responsible and reduced consumption in a world which was characterized by colonial capitalism. The preceding passages demonstrate that more than five hundred years ago, More’s canonical *Utopia* already expressed an early ecological awareness. In many ways, it has remained a source of inspiration for present generations.

Two other texts seem to have influenced Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*. Besides being a prototypical masculine name and alluding to the Westward Expansion, William Weston (*Ecotopia*’s narrator) directly refers to the name of Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*’s narrator Julian West and to Morris’ *News From Nowhere*’s narrator William Guest. Therefore, it might be hypothesized that these two utopias influenced Callenbach. Certain ideas of Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* seem to have influenced Callenbach. For instance, Bellamy’s utopia depicts a socialist utopia in which all industries have been nationalised. Moreover, people are solidary, work less, share the profits and respect women. Morris’ *News from Nowhere* portrays a classless and agrarian society based on common ownership in which freedom prevails. In addition, this society puts forth the pleasure of working and living in nature. In many ways, these two utopias resonate with what *Ecotopia* promotes in terms of work.

Given that the environmental movement was ignited by Carson's *Silent Spring*<sup>10</sup> (1962), it might be hypothesized that Carson's book also influenced Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975). Indeed, Carson's harsh criticism of the detrimental effects of the use of pesticides resonates with Callenbach's concept of stable-state. In addition, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* also shares numerous commonalities with Huxley's *Island* (1962). Firstly, it can surely be no coincidence that William Weston echoes *Island*'s narrator Will Farnaby who is a journalist too. Both novels emphasize the need for a physical and muscular work. However, whereas the inhabitants of Pala (Huxley's fictional island) are encouraged to climb or work manually in the fields two hours a day, the Ecotopian men are prompted to get rid of their tensions by taking part in the War Games. These games involve two teams which violently fight against each other until one man is wounded. Just like *Ecotopia*, *Island* portrays a drug-inspired utopia in which children are raised by multiple parents in a Mutual Adoption Club. This society also advocates an appropriate use of technology and the yoga-love making. Mathisen points out that *Island* "depicts an anti-consumerist utopia, a utopia of decentralisation and self-reliance" (2001: 57). Indeed, Pala is made up of self-governing democratic units in which the difference between the rich and the poor is slight. This peaceful society also deters its inhabitants from buying new products. As Mathisen puts it, "to Huxley, meditation and a liberated and educated sexuality seem to be promising means of contesting consumerism" (2001: 66). The inhabitants of Pala have also developed a form of spirituality which mixes the best of the western and the eastern world. Thereby, they often practice the "moksha medicine" (136) which consists in a mystical and spiritual experience which puts the patient in deep trance thanks to the use of psychedelic drugs. This enables the patient to be fully aware of the present moment and to find who he is. When Will experiences the moksha medicine, he feels relieved because it eases his trauma, suffering and mourning resulting from the bereavement of his wife. Thanks to this meditation, he re-explores and comes to terms with his troubled past so that he can "remember and yet be free of the past" (107). It is thus easier to identify with Will because he experiences trauma and self-reflexivity.

In contrast to Huxley's round characters, *Ecotopia*'s hippie-like and promiscuous characters are difficult to identify with since they lack realism and depth. Although Mathisen argues that "Callenbach appear[s] to have great confidence in the power of religion" (2001:

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<sup>10</sup> Griswold E. « How 'Silent Spring' ignited the Environmental Movement." *The New York Times Magazine*. 21 September 2012. 14/10/18. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/magazine/how-silent-spring-ignited-the-environmental-movement.html>>.

66), *Ecotopia*'s spirituality lacks consistency and depth in comparison to other similar ecological utopias like Huxley's *Island*. Indeed, the Ecotopian spirituality almost only pertains to their "ecological religion" (156) and to their "tree worship" (60) which means that they show a "religious respect" (61) for trees. Contrary to Huxley's *Island*, *Ecotopia* does not involve a real meditation or mystical experience which enables the person to ease his/her trauma and come to terms with his/her past. Just like the Native Americans who they hold in high regard, the Ecotopians love, protect and take care of their forests. This is the reason why they have created the "forest service" (60). The Ecotopians' relationship with trees is so strong that they even talk to them. Yet, this spiritual relationship is naïve and simplistic. In addition, their spirituality is not really anchored in the present moment and does not advocate mindfulness. Besides, there are very few references to other religions such as Buddhism or Christianity except when a man is wounded after his fight in the War Games. Weston notices that "[the wounded man's] body [is] arranged in a startlingly crucifix-like way" (79) and that there is a ceremony which is called "the raising [of the cross]" (82) when the wounded man recovers from his wounds. Weston thus describes the War Games as an "abhorrent spectacle of fine young men deliberately trying to kill each other [in] a semi-religious rite" (82) because these games have their origin in "the ritual wars of savage tribes" (82). As a result, there is a gap between the Ecotopians who claim to be humane as well as peaceful and their primitive as well as bestial War Games in which fifty young men die each year (81).

In contrast to Huxley's high literary quality and refined language, *Ecotopia*'s literary quality is rather poor. There is thus a discrepancy between *Ecotopia*'s language which is too rational, descriptive, direct as well as simplistic and the Ecotopian society which is supposed to be emotional, spiritual as well as one with nature. In addition, *Ecotopia*'s plot lacks narrative complexity, attractiveness as well as "sophistication"<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, *Ecotopia* is not a good narrative in the way it is presented since the plot line is rather flat, tensionless and predictable. For instance, the plot just revolves around a male narrator describing an ecological utopia and falling in love with an inhabitant of Ecotopia. Similarly, *Ecotopia* is not famous for being the best romance with which the reader might identify. In addition, given the didactic dimension of *Ecotopia* and the "narrowing of narrative distance between the implied author and the real author", Tschachler argues that the novel "reads more like an essay" (1984: 313), as is the case with several utopias. However, Callenbach mixes genres because his novel shares similarities a romance, an essay and a diary. Finally, contrary to *Ecotopia*'s

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<sup>11</sup> Timberg S. *op.cit.*

“happy ending” in which Weston decides to stay in Ecotopia with his lover Marissa, Huxley’s *Island* suggests a harsh ending in which Pala is invaded for its oil resources. However, in his article “Choosing utopia”, MacDonald contends that despite this harsh ending, *Island* is an optimistic book because the effort of creating a utopia is “worth working for” (2001: 109).

### **Today’s resurgence of green utopias**

The following section intends to briefly replace Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* in the larger context of the succession of utopian and dystopian waves. As already mentioned, More’s *Utopia* (which was published in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century) is the first canonical utopia. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, utopias have had a major impact on literature. For instance, small communities decided to foreground more social equality and collectivism. This trend can be illustrated by Gilman’s *Herland* (1915). It depicts an isolated society which is exclusively made up of women and which is completely free of war, domination and conflict. In her article “Feminism and utopianism”, Johns states that this apparent perfect society also shows an early “environmental awareness” (2010: 190). Indeed, the inhabitants of Herland live in harmony with forests and respect the environment as a whole. Other influential late 19<sup>th</sup> century utopias are Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) and Morris’ *News From Nowhere* (1890) whose probable influences on *Ecotopia* have already been discussed.

Then, as Claeys puts it in his article “The origins of dystopia”, “the twentieth century dystopia becomes the predominant expression of the utopian ideal, mirroring the colossal failures of totalitarian collectivism” (2010: 108). In other words, with the Second World War and Stalinism, the utopian dreams failed and turned into dystopias<sup>12</sup>. A dystopia can be defined as an “anti-utopia [which is] a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand” (Claeys, 2010: 107). The epitome of this dystopian wave is Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) which expresses a warning against totalitarianism, dictatorship and modernity. Dystopias thus rely on fear, suspense, nightmares and possible negative visions.

Between the 1960s and the 1970s, utopias reappeared in the context of the counterculture movement. In her article on “Green Utopias”, Garforth identifies that it is precisely in this context that green or ecological utopias such as Huxley’s *Island* (1962) and



Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) were written since they both focus on sustainability (2005: 396). Similarly, in *Ecopolis: Architecture and Cities for a Changing Climate*, Downton explains that *Ecotopia* "captures the optimistic spirit of mid-1970s counter-cultural America" (2009: 103), embodied by the hippies who "rejected the mores of mainstream American life"<sup>13</sup>. Hippies condemned capitalism while they encouraged loose sexual mores, community life, psychedelic drugs, mysticism, peace activism and ecological awareness<sup>14</sup>. The hippie movement has also contributed to create the environmental movement or environmentalism<sup>15</sup> which is based on "the protection of the environment, grassroots democracy, social justice, and nonviolence"<sup>16</sup>. This period followed the publication of Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the creation of the first Earth Day<sup>17</sup> (22 April 1970) which celebrated the birth of the environmental movement.

In many ways, the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) marks "the symbolic end of communism's utopian dream"<sup>18</sup> since the dream of an egalitarian society turned into a dystopia. Today's capitalism also seems to become a dead grand narrative. To some extent, we are currently living in a dystopia since capitalism has turned into a form of totalitarianism. Indeed, as Caron puts it: "le néolibéralisme restreint ou annihile les droits des individus" (153) et bénéficie « de l'indifférence des masses aux injustices, au creusement des inégalités et à la catastrophe écologique » (151). Then, young adult dystopias as well as ecological dystopias such as McCarthy's *The Road* and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* flourished. Ecodystopias are very interesting and relevant since they convey warnings about the future consequences of an "exponential material growth on a finite planet" (Garforth, 2005: 398). These warnings make concrete what could happen if we do not change our western

<sup>13</sup> The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Hippie: subculture." *Britannica*. s.d.13/10/18. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/hippie>>.

<sup>14</sup> Slonecker B. « The Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. » *Oxford Research Encyclopaedias: American History*. June 2017. 13/10/18. <<http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-392>>.

<sup>15</sup> Environmentalism is "a political and ethical movement that seeks to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities" Elliott L. « Environmentalism. » *Britannica*. s.d. 13/10/18. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/environmentalism>>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> The Earth Day also celebrates the successes achieved by the environmental movement such as the Clean Air and Water Acts. Gabbatiss J. "Earth Day: what is it and how do people mark it around the world?" *Independent*. 21 April 2018. 14/10/18. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/earth-day-what-is-environment-campaign-sustainable-climate-change-paris-agreement-a8314891.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> Wallace L. "The Berlin Wall: The Symbolic End of Communism's Utopian Dream." *The Atlantic*. 15 August 2011. 14/10/18. < <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/08/the-berlin-wall-the-symbolic-end-of-communisms-utopian-dream/243602/>>.

consumerist way of life. In her article on “Green utopias”, Garforth acknowledges the importance of ecodystopias since they “signify the urgency and gravity of the environmental crisis and the need for radical actions” (2005: 398). Ecodystopias aim to forestall climate change by showing scaring negative models.

Recently, a rebirth or a return of the utopias of the counterculture has happened. Therefore, it is clear that there is a “pattern of ‘challenge and response’ conducted through utopias and antiutopias” (Kumar, 2010: 554) since dystopias respond to utopias and the other way round. The fact that utopias are resurfacing seems to be confirmed by Robinson’s *Pacific Edge* (1990), Hegland’s *Into the Forest* (1996), Wagner’s *Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation* (2017), Caron’s *Utopia XXI* (2017) and Laurent and Dion’s film *Demain* (2015). This film contains strong utopian elements because it portrays a feel-good story which highlights several ecological alternatives and solutions which are emerging all around the world. In many ways, the film shows that change is possible and is already taking place. *Demain* can be considered as a turning point in the utopian thought because, as Clément points out (in an article from *Imagine Demain le Monde*), “aujourd’hui, on sent un mouvement de fond autour du film *Demain*, des idées citoyennes, des idées émergentes” (2017: 87). He has also drawn attention to the fact that

quand on y pense, tout avait été dit dans les années 70. Ce discours choc, émergeant, a ensuite été repoussé dans les années 80 avec la naissance du modèle de l’ultralibéralisme globalisé. [...] Là, on assiste à un retour progressif de ces idées (2017, 87).

As a result, today’s utopian wave takes its inspiration from the utopias of the seventies. It is the reason why I have decided to analyse Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* from today’s perspective. It is worth noting that the film *Demain* was largely based on the Hopkins’ *Transition Handbook* (2008). Central to Hopkins’ Transition Movement is the belief in a “positive, solution-focused way of gathering those around you together to start exploring community-scale responses to peak oil and climate change” (2008: 133). Hopkins’ main idea is thus to create a positive vision which is so engaging and compelling that it would enthuse other people to join the Transition Movement. As will be explained in the section dedicated to the significance of green utopias for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hopkins argues that the telling of new inspiring, alternative and positive stories or narratives is crucial to overcome climate change. In the same vein, Hawken’s *Drawdown* (which is an American environmental study) offers a solution-focused narrative which aims to show that we can reverse climate change. It is thus counternarrative to Trump’s view on climate change. *Drawdown*’s solutions are much more concrete and

practical than those conveyed in *Ecotopia* since they are based on scientific facts. *Drawdown* also prioritizes the solutions according to their urgency and efficiency.

Caron's *Utopia XXI* has strongly been influenced by More's *Utopia*. Indeed, besides sharing almost the same title, Caron writes back and challenges More's founding text. One example of this is the dialogue between the fictional More, Giles and Hythloday which is updated in the form of email exchanges and interviews. In addition, Caron has updated his characters because Aymeric Caron is More's descendant and Camille Hythlodée is Hythloday's descendant. Caron has also changed the setting since the story takes place more than five hundred years later and especially refers to France instead of England. Therefore, the issues are also brought up to date. For instance, instead of criticizing the English monarchical and religious power of the Renaissance, Caron levels criticism at the current democracy, environmentally harmful human practices and animal suffering. He also suggests creating a "biodémocratie [qui] tient compte des intérêts du vivant dans son ensemble, qu'il soit humain ou non humain" (86). Just like *Ecotopia*, "son socle idéologique est l'écologie essentielle" (86) which can be considered as a translation of deep ecology. In other words, Caron portrays a deep ecological, solidary and pacific society in which humans are no longer at the top of the natural order. Just like *Ecotopia*, *Utopia XXI* engages with and contributes to the sustainability debate. *Utopia XXI* is also a solution-based utopia since it gives concrete ideas in order to improve today's world. He suggests (among others) that everyone should get a decent salary and that the highest salaries should be limited in order to reduce the inequality and the injustice between the workers. He also believes that the work load should be reduced to 15 hours a week, which will enable everyone to get more free time. Moreover, he argues that everyone should be given the opportunity to change jobs. Finally, in keeping with his biodemocracy, everyone should be vegan. It is worth pointing out that today's green utopias usually take the form of "intentional communities, ecovillages, permaculture plots, religious and secular retreats, cohousing projects, projects for 'low-impact' housing" (Kumar, 2010: 563). On this basis, it may be inferred that the bulk of these solutions were already suggested by Callenbach.

## State of the art

*Ecotopia*'s reception seems to have evolved. The first literary analyses of Callenbach's *Ecotopia* tend to highlight its positive aspects while the later literary reviews tend to stress its negative aspects. However, the more recent literary analyses (such as Mathisen's article "The Underestimation of politics" (2001)) seem to be more nuanced. Mathisen's article is of great importance since it examines how politics are portrayed in green utopias such as Callenbach's *Ecotopia* and Huxley's *Island*. As already explained, she notices that the Ecotopian political system is very informal, personal and decentralised. She also levels criticism at this political system since it is not enough considered as "an important and valuable activity" (2001: 57). As a result, she deplores "this lack of enthusiasm regarding politics" (2001: 71). By contrast, she stresses the significance of the Ecotopian culture since "there is a strong tendency to transfer political functions from the state to the cultural arena" (2001: 72). She thus comes to the conclusion that culture has been instrumentalised.

In his article on "Despotic Reason in Arcadia? Ernest Callenbach's Ecological Utopias" (1984), Tschachler strongly believes that "Callenbach exalts women [because he] shows women as politically liberated" (1984: 308). To support his argument, he gives the example of the Survivalist Party which is dominated by women and which rules the state. In addition to these gender-related issues, Tschachler explains that the "stable-state system" is a metaphor which is central to the novel since it emphasizes the successful integration of environmental ethics into the Ecotopian economic system. He makes clear that *Ecotopia* departs from a growth-oriented mindset and embraces a "holistic ecological perspective" (1984: 305). Moreover, he also discusses *Ecotopia*'s plot which, according to him, mainly revolves around a male narrator becoming infatuated with a woman who lives in a utopian society. He thus considers that it forms "the pattern of the identity quest of the romantic fable" (1984: 305). The love stories seem to be a recurrent motif in green utopias since they can also be found in other ecological utopias such as Gilman's *Herland* and Huxley's *Island*. These love stories suggest that the male narrator falls in love with an indigenous woman who embodies this utopian system. Finally, he reports on the Ecotopian communities which are made up of large families. However, he warns against the importance of the communities which might prevail over the individuals.

Crow supports Tschachler's view on women since he notices in his article "Homecoming in the California Visionary Romance" (1989) that the Ecotopian society is governed by a wise woman who is President Vera Allwen. This leads him to the contention that this society is characterized by matriarchal values. He later points out that California is the epitome of a life "in harmony with an inviting and nurturing landscape [...] where the dream comes true" (1989: 3). This results from the fact that he considers *Ecotopia* as "a perfect society" (1989: 9). In addition, he indicates that Weston's personality evolves between the beginning and the end of the book. Indeed, Crow contends that "the stages of Weston's growth are marked by increasing participation in Ecotopian life, and increasing disorientation" (1989: 9). Weston's increasing participation refers to his involvement in the War Games. Crow also mentions that the love relationship with Marissa is one of the reasons why Weston wishes to stay in Ecotopia. However, as already pointed out, the love relationships in *Ecotopia* tend to be relatively weird, bland and difficult to identify with.

Contrary to Crow's view that Ecotopia is a society in which "matriarchal values prevail" (1989: 9), Jacobs asserts in her article on the "Failures of the Imagination in *Ecotopia*" (1997) that Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is full of contradictions. Although she recognizes Callenbach's intention of creating a society which aims to be feminist, egalitarian and ecological, she calls these values into question. For instance, she notices that almost all of the characters to whom Weston speaks are male and that gender stereotypes are often reinforced. In addition, she points out that Callenbach's inconsistencies are not only related to gender but also to other issues such as aging and race. For example, there are very few references to babies, older people and African Americans. This homogeneity is also severely criticised in Schuster's article "Sustainability after extinction: on last animals and future bison" (2017). According to him, Ecotopia is characterised by a "homogeneous self-organisation" (2017: 106) because this nation rejects many different forms of otherness. Indeed, *Ecotopia* "turns out to be way too clean, managed, heteronormative, pain-free and quiet (no electric guitars, please, and God help us from our unwashed rivals, the punks)" (Schuster, 2017: 106).

Similarly, in his article entitled "Ecological Utopia: a study of Three Literary Utopias in the 1970s" (2005), Chang also contends that Callenbach's ecological society contains several contradictions and "loopholes" (2005: 266) such as the fact that "his apparent feminist ideas turn out to reinscribe gender stereotypes" (2005: 261). In addition, Chang states that "*Ecotopia* expresses the 1970s environmental concern as filtered through the lens of a white

patriarchy” (2005: 251). Besides pointing out the inconsistencies of *Ecotopia*, he indicates that “ecotopia” is a term coined by Callenbach which refers to the interaction between literature and ecology. He later explains that *Ecotopia* challenges the “ideal of affluence” (2005: 252) because instead of pursuing material wealth, *Ecotopia* favours environmental concern over economic growth. However, he mentions that Ecotopia seeks to strike a balance between the two. He also stresses the importance of the harmonious relationship between nature and humans.

In keeping with the ecological values put forward in *Ecotopia*, McCutcheon’s article “More’s *Utopia*, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* and *Biosphere 2*” (2015) underlines the importance of the interdependence or interconnectedness between humans and nature. McCutcheon thus emphasizes the need to reject the traditional “idea of human domination of the natural world” (2015: 151). Moreover, she holds that *Ecotopia* is a hopeful book which “is straightforwardly utopian in its point of view, unlike More’s *Utopia*, which is, after all, about a place that is not” (2015: 153). Finally, she refers to Tschachler’s ideas on the Ecotopian social relations and highlights the significance of the Ecotopian family communities which are large, extended and communal.

## **Chapter 2: *Ecotopia* as an inspirational deep ecological utopia**

### **Ecotopia’s stable-state**

Even if the Ecotopian stable-state is ubiquitous, their agriculture particularly embodies this central concept. Although Weston wants to investigate how the Ecotopians organise their agriculture, the Assistant Minister of Food changes the topic of the conversation by raising the issue of waste and sewage disposal. According to him, the food cycle functions on “a stable-state basis: all food wastes, sewage and garbage were to be turned into organic fertilizer and applied to the land, where it would again enter into the food production cycle” (18). In other words, given that waste is transformed into natural fertilizer, waste contributes to an infinite and circular food cycle. This principle of circularity also underlies many other aspects of *Ecotopia* such as their economy. Devall and Sessions point out that the bulk of today’s agriculture is an “agri-industry with massive use of herbicides, pesticides and other chemicals” (2007: 149) that fosters monocultures. Nevertheless, although the agri-food industry also reuses waste, this type of agriculture draws sharp criticisms on the grounds that it endangers the biodiversity of the ecosystems.

By contrast, the Ecotopian agriculture offers a sustainable alternative to the modern industrial agriculture and shares several commonalities with permaculture. It refers to a form of sustainable *permanent agriculture* which “put[s] the bioregional worldview into practice” (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013: 6). In their book entitled *Environmental Anthropology engaging Ecotopia*, Lockyer and Veteto define bioregionalism as “the understanding that humans and human activities are fundamental components of ecosystems [...] and that human organization should be guided by natural systems” (2013: 6). In other words, bioregionalism is the belief that human activity should be determined by the local bioregion or eco-region. Bioregionalism is thus especially a “vision of locally based forms of sustainable development” (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013: 7). Mathisen also supports the view that Ecotopia advocates a bioregionalist worldview since she argues that

The governmental structures have been reorganised to relate better to regional ecological systems, in accordance with the bioregionalist understanding of how human beings belong to the part of the earth they inhabit

With regard to permaculture, this form of agriculture is thus more attuned to the natural features of the landscape and the bioregion since it derives inspiration from the patterns found in nature. Bill Mollison (the founder of permaculture) defines it as follows:

Permaculture is a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labour; and of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a single-product system (cited in Hopkins, 139).

In other words, permaculture draws inspiration from nature and advocates productive agricultural systems which are resource-efficient. In addition, this ecological agricultural system does not require any artificial fertilisers as inputs or agricultural machinery<sup>19</sup>. Besides fostering the stability, the diversity, and the resilience of the ecosystems, it is also harmoniously integrated in the landscape and provides people with plenty of food in a sustainable way. Lockyer and Veteto mention that ecovillages such as those portrayed in *Ecotopia* usually use bioregionalism and permaculture to locally grow their healthy food (2013: 6). Given that Ecotopia is particularly well situated in California, its bioregions have many “natural advantages” (50) which ease its agriculture. This explains why Ecotopia generates a large amount of food. In addition, the Ecotopian food is grown for its taste and not

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<sup>19</sup> Dion C. & Laurent M. “Dossier pédagogique.” *Demain le film*. 2016. 07/03/18. <[https://www.demainlefilm.com/sites/default/files/assets/demain\\_dossier\\_pedagogique.pdf](https://www.demainlefilm.com/sites/default/files/assets/demain_dossier_pedagogique.pdf)>.

for its look. In what follows, we will see that the Ecotopian agricultural system shares a number of similarities with permaculture (put in italics in the following quote).

After seven years we were able to *dispense with chemical fertilizers* entirely. This was partly through *sewage recycling*, partly through *garbage composting*, partly through *reliance* on some novel *nitrogen-fixing crops* and *crop rotation*, and partly through methods of *utilizing animal manure* (19). [...] [This] *end[ed] extractive and polluting practices* in farming (20) [...] Our food supplies are *uncontaminated* with *herbicides* and *insecticides*, because we use cultivation for *weeds* and *biological controls* for insects (21) [...] Our agriculture has reached an almost totally *stable-state*, with more than 99 percent of our *wastes* being *recycled*. In short, we have achieved a *food system that can endure indefinitely* (22, my italics).

The self-reliance of the Ecotopian sustainable and local agriculture stems from its circularity. As the above quote suggests, in addition to producing no waste, permaculture advocates multi-cropping methods to get rid of pests and to regenerate the soil. This idea is thus very close to Girardet's regeneration of the soils, forests and watercourses. Indeed, his concept strives to "develop comprehensive rules for an environmentally enhancing, restorative relationship between humanity and the ecosystems from which we draw resources for our sustenance"<sup>20</sup>. In order to obtain a yield, permaculture relies on a good observation of the natural patterns and uses renewable resources (Holmberg cited in Hopkins, 2008: 138-139). Besides, the biodiversity and the natural edges between different ecosystems are extremely valued. In this context, weeds are no longer considered to be problematic because they contribute to natural biodiversity. Moreover, permaculture is often associated with organic farming methods.

Contrary to what Weston first thinks, permaculture turns out to be highly efficient and even economical. Indeed, it provides plenty of food and the Assistant Minister of food states that "our system is considerably cheaper than yours, if we add in *all* the costs" (19). Considering "all the costs" is vital for a proper understanding of the environmental ethics put forward in *Ecotopia* since it is central to the country's holistic approach to sustainability. In the *Encyclopaedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, Meinhold emphasizes this holistic approach by noting that "Ecotopia develop[s] a contrasting worldview in which economy's, society's and nature's sustainability is a consequence of a 'steady-state' economy" (2014: 549). For instance, the Assistant Minister argues that if the Ecotopians had kept the polluting practice of dumping all the waste in rivers, lakes or seas, they would have to take into account the costs related to their cleaning-up.

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<sup>20</sup> Girardet H. "Sustainability is unhelpful: we need to think about regeneration." *The Guardian*. 10 June 2013. 13/10/18.<<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/sustainability-unhelpful-think-regeneration>>.



In keeping with this holistic approach to sustainability, permaculture does not only concern a form of sustainable agriculture but it also engages with several other dimensions. Indeed, Hopkins states that the focus of permaculture on agriculture has “broadened, as it became clear that sustainability in food cannot happen in isolation from the range of other elements that make up society – economics, building, energy and so on” (2007: 137, 170). Therefore, besides developing local agriculture, permaculture also aims to build local resilience<sup>21</sup> by localising energy production, using local building materials to construct zero energy buildings and rethinking waste management.

Given that the Ecotopian stable-state is their “fundamental ecological and political goal” (19), this concept pervades all aspects of the Ecotopians’ everyday life. For instance, as far as waste is concerned, the Ecotopians “generate very little of what we would call garbage – material that simply has to be disposed of in a dump somewhere” (23). In order to curb plastic waste, the Ecotopian plastics are biodegradable since they “are entirely derived from living biological sources (plants) rather than from fossilized ones (petroleum and coal)” (83). These plastics can also be used as organic fertilizer for the fields “which in turn would nourish new crops, which in turn could be made into new plastic – and so on indefinitely” (83). We can thus notice this constant idea of circularity, recycling and re-use. However, the risk of downcycling<sup>22</sup> increases since the recycled material might be based on another recycled product. The Ecotopians distinguish biodegradable plastics with a short lifespan from durable plastics which are used for “extruded houses” (84) and for minibuses. Even though the Ecotopian plastics are eco-friendly, some purists disregard them because they consider that this material is unnatural. Instead, they prefer using wood as trees are more spiritual, authentic, viable and sustainable. As a purist, Marissa is strongly opposed to these plastics because she views them as “a piece of your American junk! [...] [an] insane artificial crap [...] [with] a sort of pale, neutral, clammy feel” (137). Even though these plastics are biodegradable, they are widely used and thrown away since they can be used as natural fertiliser. Therefore, the Ecotopian society risks being littered with plastic bags, which sharply contrasts with the idea of an ecological society. In addition, although these biodegradable

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<sup>21</sup> To quote from Hopkins, a community is resilient if it has “the ability to not collapse at first sight of oil or food shortages, and [...] to respond with adaptability to disturbance” (2008: 54).

<sup>22</sup> Downcycling is when the recycling of waste entails a recycled material of lower value or quality. Merriam-Webster, “Downcycle.” *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster*. 16/03/19. <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/downcycle>>.

plastics are derived from cotton, they require much energy to be produced and hence, generate pollution.

Given the importance that the Ecotopians attach to recycling everything, waste is paradoxically valued from an environmental perspective. Thus, the idea of waste as a dirty material that needs to be thrown away has been called into question. The Ecotopians do not find it disgusting to use their own waste (from their septic tank) to produce heat (thanks to methane gas), to water their gardens with the effluent and to use the remaining sludge as fertilizer. However, some citizens might object to this kind of recycling given the unpleasant smell it emits. Similarly, the Ecotopians faced a scarcity of metals after their independence. To tackle this issue, they decided “to recycle junked cars, which had littered the Ecotopian landscape [...]. These formerly worthless heaps of junk skyrocketed in value [...]. Cans were [also] collected and recycled” (84). This passage illustrates the usefulness of recycling waste since it is assigned a new value. These cars and cans represent remnants of the old capitalistic and consumerist world since the Ecotopians are not allowed to produce cars or cans anymore, which sharply contrasts with the America of the seventies.

In line with their obsession with recycling, the Ecotopians have the intention of being themselves recycled when they die. This is emphasized by the following quote: “when they feel their time has come, they let it come, comforting themselves with their ecological religion: they too will now be recycled” (156). This Ecotopian practice bears a resemblance to the “green burial”<sup>23</sup> or “humusation”<sup>24</sup> which is an eco-friendly alternative to the traditional polluting burial and incineration. It consists in recycling and composting a dead human body. However, this humusation involves no real ritual, mourning, dignity and spirituality.

Given *Ecotopia*’s significant impact on the region of Northern California and San Francisco, it might be hypothesized that the Zero Waste Movement might have been influenced by Callenbach’s ethic of recycling. The San Francisco Department of the Environment defines Zero Waste as “waste prevention, reducing consumption, reusing, recycling, and composting with nothing going to landfill or incineration”<sup>25</sup>. This is precisely

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<sup>23</sup> *York Times*. 22 March 2018. 09/03/19. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/22/smarter-living/green-funeral-burial-environment.html>>.

<sup>24</sup> RTL. “Qu'est-ce que l'humusation, le nouveau rite funéraire moins polluant que l'inhumation et l'incinération?” » *RTL INFO*. 2 November 2017. 09/03/19. < <https://www.rtl.be/info/belgique/societe/qu-est-ce-que-l-humusation-le-nouveau-rite-funeraire-moins-polluant-que-l-inhumation-et-l-incineration--967169.aspx>>.

<sup>25</sup> San Francisco Department of the Environment. “Zero Waste.” *SF Environment*. 14/10/18. <<https://sfenvironment.org/zero-waste-in-SF-is-recycling-composting-and-reuse>>.

the sustainable approach to waste adopted by the Ecotopian government since Ecotopia also encourages its citizens to dramatically reduce their waste.

### **The aversion to consumerism**

The idea of recycling or re-using undermines one of the basic notions of capitalism, namely consumerism and its typical pattern which consists in buying something new, using it and then throwing it away. Rather than an “endless yearning after materialistic abundance” (Berry, 2016: 105), *Ecotopia* advocates minimalism. In other words, Ecotopia encourages its inhabitants to live a simple life with less material goods. The Ecotopians are thus supposed to live with only the things they really need. Curbing excessive consumption is precisely one of the key ideas of deep ecology. Accordingly, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* makes the reader ponders on the ethics of waste and on the ethics of consumption, including its environmental impact. As a result, the Ecotopians do not attach much importance to material possessions because they favour other values such as solidarity, community and sharing. Indeed, as the journalist Bert puts it, it is crucial for the Ecotopians to “have a group of people to live with, to support you emotionally, to keep your collective life going on actively and strongly [...] here we try to arrange it so we are not lonely very often” (34-35).

In addition, if some products are considered unhealthy or not ecological enough, consumer co-ops can decide to put them on a “Bad Practice list” (20) which curbs the consumption and hence, the production of those objects. We can relate this ethic for a curtailed and ecological consumption to Lebduška’s article on “How green was my advertising” in which she makes a comparison between environmentalists and deep ecologists. “Because ecologism contests consumption itself, it remains ideologically opposed to capitalism, unlike environmentalism which often exists comfortably, even collusively, within a capitalist frame” (144). What this quote reveals is that the environmentalists tend to support capitalism since they consume a lot but in an eco-friendly way whereas the (deep) ecologists tend to reject it since they drastically cut down on their consumption. The Ecotopians are clearly more linked to the deep ecologists even though they also consume environmentally-friendly products. Therefore, in his article on “Sustainability after extinction: on last animals and future bison”, Schuster criticizes the Ecotopian “blissful eco-minded consumerism” (2017: 106). In addition, the Ecotopians cannot really be who they want because they cannot buy what they desire. For instance, they can only buy towels in one colour, namely white.

Weston also points out that the commercials in Ecotopia are “limited to mere announcements [and] are similarly bland” (43). This lack of enticing commercials in Ecotopia results from the government’s willingness to limit consumption. These bland commercials sharply contrast with the ones to which Westerners are accustomed since advertising intends to urge potential consumers to buy more than they really need. Moreover, Weston notices that the Ecotopian products are “old-fashioned” (44) and easily repairable. Despite this apparent lack of aesthetics, this “fix-it-yourself” ethic also emphasizes their lack of consumerism since they prefer mending to buying something new, which is the exact opposite of the consumerism advocated in Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Lebduska concludes her article by endorsing “*ECO*consumerism as opposed to *ecoCONSUMERISM*” (1993: 153, my italics). In other words, it would better if ecoconsumerism was more based on ecology than on consumerism.

### **The willingness to curb pollution**

The motif of waste is intrinsically intertwined with the issue of pollution since an excessive amount of waste (be it industrial, household or nuclear) engenders the pollution of the soil, land, air and watercourses. This harmful pollution can then lead to an ecocide (which literally means a crime against the ecosystems). By way of example, plastic pollution is nowadays unfortunately responsible for the killing of many animals on land and in the sea. Deep ecologists consider pollution as a central issue to tackle because it threatens the human and non-human well-being. The fact that the Ecotopians (re-)use biodegradable plastics shows that they are deeply concerned about the pollution issue. However, the fact that the Ecotopians still widely use these plastics shows that there is a discrepancy between their ecological ideals and the way they act.

Moreover, the Ecotopians try to preserve the unspoiled nature as much as possible because they bear in mind that they have a duty towards their future generations. The following quote suggests that Weston (who gradually identifies with the Ecotopian healthy and relaxed lifestyle) becomes aware of the paramount importance of the pollution issue for the future generations:

tearful to think of my children so far away [...] living what is after all a dangerous life and getting worse. It’s not just the crime and the crazed people everywhere, but the expectation that our children’s children will go on being poisoned by smog and chemicals. (Or will New York and Tokyo produce a race of mutants who can breathe carbon monoxide?) (86).

This quote reveals Weston's fear with regard to the long-term and disastrous consequences of environmental pollution.

Similarly, as already mentioned, the Ecotopians want to “end extractive and polluting practices in farming” (20). As a result, they claim that they eat the best food in the world because their “food supplies are uncontaminated with herbicides and insecticides” (21). This harsh criticism of herbicides and pesticides resonates with Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) which intended to raise public awareness of the pollution generated by the use of pesticides. As already explained, when the Assistant Minister states that “our system is considerably cheaper than yours, if we add in *all* the costs” (19), he maintains that the costs related to the purification of the contaminated air, soils, rivers and seas also have to be taken into consideration. This Ecotopian view thus fully corresponds to the following deep ecological statement: “if humans have distressed an ecosystem, they have an obligation to help heal that system” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 152).

Although the Ecotopians try to reduce their own pollution as much as possible, they are powerless when foreign poisons are dumped on their lands owing to rain or wind (22). This shows that environmental issues such as climate change or pollution do not have any geographical limits and concern everybody. Following the detection of an “increase in the radiation level of air blowing in from the Pacific”, the Ecotopians became anxious and wanted to establish an “international pollution-fine system” (72). They thus believe that international agreements need to be ratified in order to tackle these issues with a coherent and efficient action plan. In addition, the Ecotopians severely punish the deliberate pollution of water and air because they consider that the environment is endowed with rights which are protected by legislations. For instance, a deliberate act of pollution might lead to several years of imprisonment. By contrast, other crimes such as prostitution, gambling and drug use are no longer illegal. This emphasizes the importance they bestow on tackling pollution issues and their lack of moral values regarding other crimes. Even if the Ecotopians want to curb pollution, they paradoxically still use polluting diesel trucks and nuclear fission plants.

### **The controversial stance on population reduction**

In order to maintain their stable-state and to enhance their quality of life, the Ecotopians constantly intend to reduce the size of their population. The Ecotopians thus question the American view that “only economic and population growth can lead to improvement in life”

(69). A drastic population decline is precisely one of the most controversial ideas put forward by deep ecologists. Indeed, they assert that: “the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 70). Due to this controversial view, a number of deep ecologists as well as the Ecotopians might be accused of being misanthropic (Devall, 1987: 20). This view results from the fact that overpopulation leads to a constant increase in production and consumption, which generates waste, pollution and pressure on natural resources. Overpopulation is thus often associated with dystopias since it gives rise to “environmental collapse, international instability, nuclear war [and] epidemics” (Ehrlich cited in Garrard, 2012: 104).

So as to forestall the “dangers of overpopulation” (67), the Ecotopian government has set up a three-stage scheme. The first stage consists in an immediate nationwide educational and medical program involving a controversial promotion of widespread birth-control devices and abortion, which reflects the American policies of the sixties. The second one consists in implementing a gradual decentralisation policy which aims to disperse the population over the countryside and hence, to reduce the density of the population in big cities such as San Francisco, Oakland and Seattle (67). The third one is a “watchful waiting” (68) because abortion costs are really low and contraception has become widespread. Some Ecotopians desire to drastically reduce the population to “the number of Indians who inhabited the territory before the Spaniards and Americans came” (69). However, a rapid drop in the population would endanger Ecotopia since this nation would be too weak and vulnerable to counter a potential military attack from the USA (69).

### **The Ecotopian attachment to the wilderness and to Native American cultures**

*Ecotopia* displays an array of references to the wilderness. Right from the start, Weston mentions that “[t]he train then swooped down the long canyons of the Sierra forests, occasionally flashing past a river with its water bubbling blue-back and icy between the rocks” (9). Moreover, the Ecotopian schools prepare the children to go on wilderness expeditions. Indeed, teachers teach them how “to improvise ecologically acceptable equipment in the wild” (38). Similarly, “many Ecotopians [...] envy the Indians their lost natural place in the American wilderness” (31). It is well-known that the wilderness has shaped the American identity and culture because the Americans progressively conquered the wilderness as they moved westwards. The Frontier ended when the settlers arrived in

California (or what partly corresponds to Ecotopia). As already mentioned, the name William *Weston* alludes to this Westward expansion. Given that Ecotopia was part of the USA, the wilderness has also deeply influenced its culture and national identity. It is worth noting that the preservation of the wilderness is a key deep ecological value. Devall and Sessions define the wilderness as “a landscape or ecosystem that has been minimally disrupted by the intervention of humans” (2007: 110). Their definition underscores the deep ecological principle of the least human interference with the ecosystem. Therefore, although many deep ecologists are aware that the wilderness areas are managed by humans, they argue that “the best management is [...] the least management” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 152).

However, a possible flaw relates to the fact that the Ecotopian wilderness actually only reflects a “mythologized image of what [they] would like the wilderness to be” (Byerly, 1996: 58). This implies that the Ecotopians alter the natural landscape to “maintain the aesthetic illusion of wilderness” (Byerly, 1996: 59). The reference in the previous quote (9) to the “Sierra” directly echoes the Sierra Nevada (a stunning mountain range in California) and the Sierra Club whose main aim is to preserve the wilderness area.

[E]xtensive areas, too steep or rugged to be lumbered without causing erosion, have been assigned wilderness status. There all logging and fire roads have been eradicated. Such areas are now used only for camping and as wildlife preserves (63).

This quote highlights the importance that the Ecotopians attach to the wilderness. Just like the deep ecologists, the Ecotopians make a case for the preservation and conservation of the wilderness. They thus advocate what Garrard calls a “wilderness ethic” (2012: 92). In the same way as the Ecotopians, the deep ecologists consider the wilderness as a national heritage that needs to be preserved for future generations. Contrary to the American wilderness which has considerably been reduced to vast areas, the Ecotopians have organised a “campaign to return nature to a natural condition” (64). This reversed movement might also be seen in the fact that they have decided to increase the wilderness by razing entire cities and transforming them into woods or vast wild grasslands (30). The Ecotopians consequently feel the need for a “rewilding” (Saguaro, 2016: 43).

In addition, deep ecologists attribute spiritual values and personal growth to the wilderness. They contend that humans have “a vital need for wilderness, wild places, to help us become more mature” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 111). Indeed, in front of the wilderness, deep ecologists experience a feeling of “organic wholeness” which enables them to achieve self-realisation (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 110). Furthermore, the wilderness is the habitat of

plants and wild animals which also have an intrinsic value and thereby, the right to live and blossom. As a result, besides contributing to self-realisation, the wilderness is also vital for the whole biosphere. In Ecotopia, the wilderness is so much valued and cherished that the Ecotopian gardens look like the wilderness to some extent. Thereby, Weston describes that Franklin's Cove, a community of journalists, has a "beautiful *wild* garden in back where people spend a lot of time lying around on sunny days – part of it in crumbling ruins" (32, my italics).

The following quote highlights the importance that the Ecotopians attach to their cherished wilderness and to the Native Americans who are a constant source of inspiration. Weston notes that:

many Ecotopians [are] sentimental about Indians, and there's some sense in which they envy the Indians their lost natural place in the American wilderness. Indeed, this [is] probably a major Ecotopian myth; [I] keep hearing references to what Indians would or wouldn't do in a given situation (32).

The deep ecologists as well as the Ecotopians are both deeply influenced by Native American cultures which consider the wilderness as a sacred and spiritual place. The Ecotopians also draw inspiration from the Native Americans because they possess a heightened ecological consciousness and live in harmony with the natural world. From this perspective, "the stereotype of the 'ecological Indian' " (Garrard, 2012: 130) with his biocentric values stands in stark contrast to the stereotype of the greedy and anthropocentric white who heavily pollutes. On this basis, it may be inferred that the Ecotopians idealize the Native Americans for their oneness with nature and their environmental ethics. The fact that "many Ecotopians are sentimental about Indians [...] [and] their lost natural place" evokes feelings of nostalgia and guilt because America's growth was based on the appropriation of the wilderness in which the Native Americans lived. However, Garrard also deconstructs the stereotype of the ecological Native American since many of them have also modified their ecosystems according to their own interests. As we will see later, this mythical status attributed to Native American cultures suggests that they have been wiped out.



## **The tree worship**

Forests have an ambiguous status in Ecotopia. On the one hand, many forested areas have been assigned a wilderness status in order to be preserved. On the other hand, they are managed by the Ecotopians for the lumber industry and the production of paper. In addition to being their most precious and cherished material, wood is also used for a wide variety of uses. Consequently, the fact that the Ecotopians exploit and extract this natural resource for human uses reveals some anthropocentrism. However, the Ecotopians have opted for a biocentric “long-term [and] ecologically sensitive forest management” (Veteto & Lockyer, 2013: 102), which reflects their deep ecological and holistic approach to forestry. Just like the deep ecologists, the Ecotopians feel the need to heal a damaged ecosystem by reforestation. This notion of duty towards nature is exemplified by what the Ecotopians call the “forest service” (60). It means that if a citizen wants to buy a large quantity of wood for the building of his house, s/he is obliged to contribute to the growth of new trees during a specific period. It thus helps to raise environmental consciousness and to limit the anthropocentrism resulting from their exploitation of the natural resources. Thereby, the Ecotopians realise that lumber is not a product to consume carelessly but a rare and precious commodity that needs to be respected. The underlying idea is that trees are given rights. The Ecotopians also argue that reforestation should at least compensate for and even outweigh deforestation.

According to the Ecotopians, ethical and environmental values must always outweigh economic profitability. For instance, Weston argues that the forest service is not economically efficient since amateur citizens have to participate. Another example is the mature-tree cutting because it stands in sharp contrast to what is done in a capitalistic economy. The following passage underscores the use of permaculture in their ecologically responsible forestry:

It does seem to be true that their methods disturb the forest very little – it continues to look natural and attractive. Several types of trees usually grow in stands together, which is supposed to encourage wildlife and cut the chances of disastrous insect and fungi invasions. Curiously, a few dead trees are left standing – as home for insect-gobbling woodpeckers! – and there are occasional forest meadows to provide habitats for deer and other animals (61-62).

As already explained, permaculture is a perennial approach which advocates diversity and avoids monocultures. For instance, different types of trees are intermingled and planted together in order to increase the resilience of the forest. This enables the Ecotopians not to use any chemical or insecticide. Moreover, although we would generally expect that dead trees have to be removed in order to be replaced by young ones, the Ecotopians purposefully leave

them because these trees are the natural habitat of “insect-gobbling woodpeckers” (61). The presence of forest meadows shows that the Ecotopians are aware that forests are the natural habitat of several species of plants and animals.

I [Weston] noticed that the stream passing near the camp did not become muddy – evidently it is true, as they claim, that Ecotopian lumbering leaves the topsoil intact, cuts down erosion, and preserves fish (62).

This passage reveals that permaculture is also used to preserve and to enrich the soil. Thereby, the Ecotopians respect the deep ecological principle of the least human intervention in the bioregion. Moreover, the Ecotopians only buy locally produced lumber, which emphasizes their concern for minimizing their ecological footprint.

In her article on “The Republic of trees”, Saguaro demonstrates that: “there is in European and Western literature a persistence of reference to trees or forests as a utopian locus of liberty and individual authenticity” (2016: 42). Indeed, it seems difficult to imagine a utopian society without trees. This is confirmed in Ecotopia because each city is “planted with thousands of trees” (12). Trees are also highly symbolic and occupy a central place in the Ecotopian lifestyle as they epitomize their sustainable and ecological thinking. Some Ecotopians even put a tree inside their houses and live within a tree, which lacks credibility. The character who is the most clearly associated with trees is Marissa Brightcloud. Being a strong female lumberjack, Marissa embodies the egalitarian character of the Ecotopian society because she challenges the stereotype of the male lumberjack who drives tractors.

The whole Ecotopian society takes good care of trees and shows “religious respect” (61) towards them. This “tree worship” (60) can directly be related to the Native American attitudes towards nature.

[D]ucking around a particularly huge redwood tree, she disappeared into a hollow at its base. Springing in after her, I found myself in some kind of shrine. She was lying there on a bed of needles [...]. Dimly visible were charms and pendants made of bone and teeth and feather [...]. It was as if I was being sucked into the tree, into some powerful spirit (58).

This passage emphasizes the link between spirituality and trees. It is worth noting that Marissa has chosen a Native American name “Brightcloud” to underline her commitment to their spiritual and ecological values. Weston characterises her as a “tree-worshipper” (58) who talks, interacts and prays for trees. Weston also points out that when Marissa selects trees, she follows “a ritual of some kind; there is a holiness to it” (104). This spirituality can be related to a form of animism which is “the belief that all features of the environment [are]

enspirited” (Callicot cited in Garrard, 2012: 130). The Ecotopians are not only convinced that trees have a soul but they also almost consider trees as humans. One example of anthropomorphism (which is “the metaphorical treatment of non-humans as humans” (Zhang et al., 2017: 44)) comes to the fore in the following quote: “I saw a quite ordinary man [...] lean against a large oak and mutter ‘Brother Tree!’” (63). However, except for trees, the Ecotopians lack spirituality.

Moreover, although the Ecotopian society officially promotes its citizens’ well-being, forests might offer a feeling of freedom and escape, especially if Ecotopia is viewed as an ecototalitarian state which restricts individual freedom. Thereby, Marissa says: “this forest is my home [...] I feel best when I’m among trees’ [...] Among trees you’re safe, you can be free” (54-55). The fact that Marissa “is immensely happy if they [the trees]’re thriving and cast down if they’re not” (74) can be related to the deep ecological principle of mirroring the emotions of other living beings (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 75). Given that Marissa lives a simple and happy life among trees, she completely overrules Weston’s proposal to live with him in New York. Indeed, if she went there, she would lose her oneness with nature and hence, her communion with trees.

### **The decentralised minicities as the only sustainable solution in the long run**

The Ecotopian urban landscape refers to big cities like San Francisco which is Ecotopia’s capital. The Ecotopian cities embody what Berg calls “green cities” in his article entitled “Growing a life-place politics”. Berg defines them as ecologically responsible cities which further a highly sustainable ethic because they “lessen their strain on the bioregions where they are situated” (2013: 42). The following passage describes Market Street (which is an important and busy thoroughfare in San Francisco) and epitomizes the Ecotopian green cities.

Market Street [...] has become a mall planted with thousands of trees. [...] [It] has shrunk to a two-lane affair. The remaining space, which is huge, is occupied by bicycle lanes, fountains, sculptures, [...] and absurd little gardens surrounded by benches. [...] There is even the occasional song of a bird, unbelievable (12).

What this passage reveals is that Weston’s visit to San Francisco comes as a shock to him since his stereotypical view of cities is challenged. Indeed, he is surprised by the quietness of this city in comparison with the hustle and bustle of large cities such as New York where he used to live. For instance, there are no horn blasts, dense crowds or people in a hurry. In the

first pages of the novel, Weston is depicted as a complete stranger who has lost all his landmarks. Weston portrays San Francisco as follows:

The bucolic atmosphere of the new San Francisco can perhaps best be seen in the fact that, down Market Street and some other streets, creeks now run. [...] So now on this major boulevard you may see a charming series of little falls, with water gurgling and splashing, and channels lined with rocks, trees, bamboos, ferns (13).

The fact that little falls and creeks now run on a former boulevard completely challenges the conventional city model. Therefore, this passage embodies Berg's description of green cities. Indeed, he writes that green cities "create wild corridor parks so that native creeks, vegetation, birds and other animals can pass through and provide a natural presence" (Berg, 2013: 42). In addition, Weston notices the "lacy bridges" linking the skyscrapers which were "once the headquarters of far-flung corporations [and which] have been turned into apartments" (14). The lacy bridges between the skyscrapers evoke the interconnectedness of the urban Ecotopian life.

It is worth emphasizing that the language used in the previous quote "bucolic atmosphere, gurgling, splashing" (13) alludes to a sublime landscape which calls the genre of the pastoral into question. Indeed, in the literary tradition, the genre of the pastoral is often associated with a tranquil and beneficial retreat in the countryside away from the city. Therefore, the countryside is often described in contrast with the urban (Garrard, 2012: 37). However, in green cities, the contrast between the city and the countryside is blurred. In the seventh chapter of *Environmental Anthropology Engaging Ecotopia* entitled "Permaculture in the city", Delay and Berezan assert that many principles of permaculture can be put into practice in cities (2013: 131). For instance, the Ecotopians usually share backyard gardens in which they grow vegetables. These vegetable gardens form small-scale urban farms which improve the urban sustainability and which also increase the resilience of the city.

Transportation has also been redesigned in order to be efficient and emission-free. Therefore, cars have been abolished whereas freely available bicycles, wide sidewalks and free buses have been promoted. Even the train that leads to San Francisco contains some "greenery" (8) and recycling bins. In addition, each means of transport tries to increase the passengers' well-being. For instance, the train is designed as a lounge and is equipped with huge windows to admire the natural scenery.

However, although these green cities are highly ecological, they are doomed to disappear. Indeed, these cities will be replaced with new minicities which are the “ideal long-term line of development of Ecotopian living patterns” (26). The existing cities “will be gradually razed, although a few districts will be preserved as living museum displays” (30). Therefore, the utopia suggested by Callenbach entails the destruction of old cities and structures. In addition, given that many people like living in big cities, they would hate being forced to move in smaller decentralised cities.

The Ecotopian government actively promotes the creation of small-scale minicities because they are in line with their decentralisation policy. This political measure stems from the fact that the population is steadily declining. The decentralisation policy is also the only solution which is truly consistent with the deep ecological principle of living in harmony with the natural bioregion. Indeed, as the following quote suggests, these new minicities intend to “lessen pressure on resources and other species” (67).

separatism is desirable on ecological [...] grounds – that a small regional society can exploit its ‘niche’ in the [...] biosystem more subtly and richly and efficiently (and of course less destructively) than have the superpowers (165).

In addition, the Ecotopians use several principles of bioregionalism and permaculture to produce locally grown food in these minicities. Accordingly, the decentralised minicities epitomize the reconciliation between the rural and the urban.

The basic idea behind this decentralisation policy is to reduce the populated urban areas by dispersing their inhabitants in the countryside so that the population and the resources are more homogeneously spread over the whole country. Similarly, in his article on “Apocalypse and Ecotopia”, Fiskio explains that the decentralisation policy involves a “reverse migration to the countryside, a return to the land and to small-scale, local food production [and therefore] a return to the pastoral and to decentralised collectives” (2012: 9). Moreover, these self-reliant cities are interrelated with each other because they have been designed to completely dispense with cars. Indeed, each citizen only has a five-minute walk to the train station, which enables them not to commute to their work. Therefore, besides being more ecological, decentralised minicities are also economically efficient since traffic jams, parking places and pollution are avoided. Although these cities are interrelated, they are separated from each other by the countryside or woods so that the citizens can remain in touch with nature. It is worth mentioning that the concept of decentralisation has a direct effect on every aspect of the Ecotopian daily life. For instance, instead of having crowded hospitals in the city

centre, there are many smaller hospitals all around the country. Consequently, the advantage of these small hospitals is that the patient's well-being is increased. However, these hospitals lack many top-notch specialists (such as obstetricians) and services (such as intensive-care units (156)).

### **The Ecotopian extensive use of renewable energy and their sustainable housing**

To increase their resilience, the Ecotopian minicities or ecovillages heavily rely on renewable energy. Green energy can be linked to their stable-state because the energy can theoretically be used or recycled indefinitely. Renewable energy is thus supposed to avoid harming the environment. It is worth pointing out that in the seventies the idea of using renewable energy was completely revolutionary and avant-gardist. It can therefore be hypothesized that many innovative ideas were first imagined in literature. However, as we will see in Pitron's book *La guerre des métaux rares*, renewable energy production requires the environmentally harmful extraction of rare metals. Given that the Ecotopians are heavily reliant on and generate a lot of renewable energy, their extensive use of renewable energy raises several questions: how do they exactly produce this energy? Where do they get the resources from? How much does renewable energy actually pollute? Therefore, although the Ecotopians claim to take all the costs into account, it seems that they failed to take into consideration the indirect costs of solar panels, wind turbines and other technological devices (such as the picturephones).

After the independence of Ecotopia, the government implemented a transition from fossil fuels towards renewable energy such as "solar energy, earth heat, tides, and wind [which] can be tapped indefinitely without affecting even the local biosphere" (112). This use of renewable energy enables the minicities to considerably lessen their energy demand and to be independent from fossil fuels. Thereby, many Ecotopian houses have a vegetal rooftop (which naturally increases the insulation) with wind-driven generators and solar panels. Moreover, some houses even have a waterwheel to produce electricity. In order to integrate their house in the local bioregion, the Ecotopians build passive solar-oriented houses which make the most of the natural features of the landscape (Veteto & Lockyer, 2013: 101). As a result, they design their architecture according to the sun's cycle and the natural patterns so that their house absorbs the solar rays. This is suggested by the following quote: "this house, like many city dwellings, is heated by the system now widespread in Ecotopia – using solar radiation [...]. Much of the south walls and roofs of Ecotopian buildings are devoted to the

heat-receptors” (114). It thus “reduce[s] the cost of operating a house” (115). In addition, the Ecotopians use ecological building methods and materials. For instance, they use the timber which has been locally harvested in their bioregion. Thanks to their technological innovation, the Ecotopians have inaugurated the new “Punta Gorda thermal sea-power station” (113) and intend to tap electricity into “the photosynthetic chemistry of a green growing plant” (115). Once again, this innovative process embodies their stable-state since: “your garden could then recycle your sewage and garbage, provide your food, and also light your house” (115).

Although timber is widely used, building a house with lumber is expensive and time-consuming. It is the reason why many Ecotopians live in “extruded house[s]” (137) or “plastic tubing” (133). This plastic is sustainable since it is derived from cotton. The main advantages of these extruded houses are the following: portability, recycling, low cost and flexibility. For instance, if a new family member comes, a new room can easily be added to the existing structure. Extruded houses usually have an indoor garden with trees, which stresses the Ecotopian attachment to nature because besides being integrated in the natural landscape, nature comes inside the house. Despite the advantages of this type of house, it is not very popular because plastic is considered to be unnatural and is still associated with consumerism as well as pollution. While Weston is excited by these new houses, Marissa “got furious when she saw [that he] was fascinated and impressed. ‘I knew it! They’re just a piece of your American junk’ ” (137). Her angry outburst stems from the fact that she prefers living in wooden houses because she is attached to the feeling, smell, authenticity and warmth of these houses.

### **The Ecotopian version of animal ethics**

Although the Ecotopians strive to respect animal well-being by prohibiting intensive animal farming, there is no explicit promotion of vegetarianism. However, there is an implicit promotion of it since it is the only diet which is really sustainable and consistent with deep ecological tenets. It is worth mentioning that in the seventies, vegetarianism was hardly known since people were not aware of the detrimental effects of meat production. Deep ecology attributes rights to animals and condemns animal suffering which often results from anthropocentrism. Indeed, certain humans ill-treat and exploit animals because humans consider that they are more important than animals. By contrast, deep ecology rejects this hierarchy between humans and other species on the grounds that every species is part of an interrelated whole. Interestingly, Ecotopia adopts an ambiguous stance towards animals. On

the one hand, Ecotopia advocates hunting and on the other hand, Ecotopia promotes animal ethics which consist in taking animal well-being into consideration. The Ecotopian concern for animal well-being is suggested by these quotes:

Our farm animals are not kept in close confinement like yours. We like them to live I conditions approaching the natural (19). Beef cattle [...] are never concentrated in forced-feeding fattening lots (63).

On this basis, it may be inferred that the Ecotopians are convinced that animals cannot be confined or exploited for human use since confinement leads to animal suffering. As a consequence, the Ecotopians promote healthy animals raised in the open air and condemn the polluting factory farming which entails animal suffering. They also believe that “animals’ evident capacity for sentience and suffering make them worthy of moral consideration as individuals with inherent value” (Regan cited in Clark, 2011: 180). This reference to “inherent value” echoes the deep ecological concept of biocentric equality. However, as we will see later, Schuster argues that there is “a curious lack of animals and animal activism” in Ecotopia (2017: 105), which might suggest that the animal issue is not Callenbach’s priority.

Ecotopia also harshly condemns some human activities such as deforestation, urbanisation and overhunting because they have led to biodiversity loss and to the disappearance of some endangered species. In *Ecotopia*, the issue of species extinction is raised when Ben (Marissa’s brother) reproaches the Americans for having mistreated whales. Weston realises that “our role in it was heavy, and thousands of marvellous creatures that once inhabited this earth have now vanished from the universe forever. We had gobbled them up in our relentless increase” (76). As a result, the Ecotopians as well as the deep ecologists make a case for the preservation of all the species, especially if they are endangered. Thanks to the application of the deep ecological principle of protecting the biodiversity, wildlife and environment, the Ecotopian ecosystems begin to restore and regenerate themselves. This can be illustrated by the following quote: “on the way back we passed shrimp boats and other small fishing craft – apparently the Bay, once an open cesspool, has again become the fertile habitat which estuaries naturally are” (76). The fact that the Ecotopians implement measures to help the ecosystems to regenerate as well as to restore themselves can be related to Girardet’s concept of regenerative development. Indeed, as already mentioned, it is crucial



that concrete measures are taken “to help regenerate soils, forests and watercourses rather than just sustaining them in a degraded condition”<sup>26</sup>.

The Ecotopians do not have pets because it would deprive animals of their freedom by making them dependent on humans and by objectifying them, which would go against the willingness to respect the animal well-being. Given that hunting is a common practice in Ecotopia, the only exception to pets is hunting dogs. Hunting is also ambiguous because on the one hand, animals live in complete freedom and “are evidently left as wild as possible” (16), which stresses their well-being. On the other hand, animals are brutally killed for their meat or for the pleasure of the sport. Moreover, the fact that the Ecotopians admire the game which has been brought back by the hunters underscores some cruelty and savagery. The Ecotopians tend to like hunting because it involves some “spiritual qualities” (16). The combination of respect for the animal’s welfare and the spiritual dimension of hunting is similar to the Native American beliefs concerning hunting. By way of example, the Native Americans venerated and lived in harmony with the buffaloes without exploiting them. This respect for animals stems from the fact that they believed in animism. Indeed, the Native Americans argue that animals should be respected as they have a spirit and a soul. However, apart from the killing which can be cruel, the act of hunting is eco-friendly.

“ ‘You’ll probably feel livelier after a few more weeks here. The food, the air, getting in better touch with yourself’ ‘What do you mean?’ ‘Knowing yourself as an animal creature on earth, as we do’ ” (87- 88). This quote shows that the Ecotopians consider themselves as animals and hence, not superior to them. The Ecotopians even believe that “human beings are tribal animals [...]. They need lots of contact” (35). This quote reveals that living in communities is crucial for the Ecotopians because humans need support and social interactions. They thus reject any form of solitary life and individuality. In the same vein, the subsequent characteristics also suggest that the border between the Ecotopians and animals is fuzzy. Firstly, as to hunting, Weston points out that “the hunters looked savage enough” (16). Secondly, the War Games highlight their savagery and “bestial practices” (39). Just like the gladiator games or Hunger Games, the crowd is ecstatic about these violent War Games. Thirdly, Marissa is also portrayed as a wild animal, which reinforces the gender stereotypes. The following quote illustrates the concept of zoomorphism: “sometimes, when she looks at me, my hair stands up as if I’m confronting a creature who’s wild and incomprehensible,

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<sup>26</sup>Girardet H. “Sustainability is unhelpful: we need to think about regeneration.” *The Guardian*. 10 June 2013. 13/10/18. <<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/sustainability-unhelpful-think-regeneration> >.

animal and human at once” (57). In their article “Environmental information in modern fiction and ecocriticism”, Zhang et al. define zoomorphism as “the tendency of representing human behaviour or thoughts in terms of the behaviour of animals” (2017: 44). Marissa’s strong link with nature is highlighted by the fact that she lives among trees in a lumber camp.

### **The central place of education in deep ecological utopias**

Education is of paramount importance to the Ecotopian society. It is also a central feature of *Herland*, *Island*, *Drawdown*, *Utopia XXI* and *Demain*. Indeed, education tends to be a crucial issue in utopias because it enables the pupils to achieve freedom, independence, emancipation and empowerment (Johns, 2010: 178-182). Moreover, education is highly significant since « il est indispensable de montrer [...] particulièrement aux jeunes générations qu’il existe des solutions pour résoudre la plupart des problèmes écologiques, économiques et sociaux »<sup>27</sup>. According to Hawken’s American study *Drawdown*<sup>28</sup>, educating girls in poor countries is one of the most effective solutions to reverse climate change because girls will be less domestically-subdued, more financially independent and aware of the environmental crisis.

In keeping with its decentralisation policy, Ecotopia fosters the creation of small alternative schools such as “Crick School” (126). Some key principles of these schools are the following: creative playing thanks to educational games, child-centred activities, hands-on projects, workshops and group discussions. Moreover, children are not aware that they are being educated since the learning happens in a natural way. In order to promote the children’s wellbeing, the Ecotopian schools have a lighter work schedule, which enables them to do many outdoor activities such as expeditions in the wilderness. Before undertaking these expeditions, children have to learn how to “improvise ecologically acceptable equipment in the wild” (38). Moreover, they are also taught how to fish, to hunt and to develop survival skills. The Ecotopian education focuses on teaching biology and ecology. The strength of their educational system is that children put what they have learned into practice. Indeed, when they go on expeditions, “the experiences of the children are closely tied in with studies of plants, animals and landscape” (38-39). The Ecotopian students alternate between studying

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<sup>27</sup> Dion C. & Laurent M. “Dossier pédagogique.” *Demain le film*. 2016. 07/03/18. <[https://www.demainlefilm.com/sites/default/files/assets/demain\\_dossier\\_pedagogique.pdf](https://www.demainlefilm.com/sites/default/files/assets/demain_dossier_pedagogique.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> Hawken P. “WOMEN AND GIRLS EDUCATING GIRLS.” *Drawdown*. 2018. 14/10/18. <<https://www.drawdown.org/solutions/women-and-girls/educating-girls>>.

and working in factories or on fields because they need to strike a balance between intellectual and manual work. In addition, the Ecotopian schools, which are surrounded by the countryside or woods, “look more like farms” (126) because children take part in ecological projects such as growing their own vegetables. However, as we will see later, the Ecotopian schools are run like “private enterprises” (129). Indeed, they are not free and aggressively compete with each other in order to attract many pupils. Besides, the Ecotopian bias for ecology and biology entails that the funding is almost only allocated to biological research whereas the funding for other fields of research is scarcer.

The role of the Ecotopian schools is to prepare children for the Ecotopian life. Indeed, the Ecotopian education system aims to convey the key values of their society such as tolerance, compassion, moderate consumption, solidarity and respect for each other as well as for the environment. The aim of the Ecotopian schools is thus to implement a long-term vision since “teaching young people to value the planet and the resources it provides is the way to ensure that our potential to solve the sustainability problem is achieved” (Cohen et al., 2016: 234). However, inculcating those positive environmental values in the children’s brains echoes Shioda’s view on *Ecotopia* which is, according to him, “a dystopia that brainwashes its people to force environmentally coexistent lifestyle upon them” (cited in Chang, 2014: 37). Besides transmitting ecological values, Ecotopia as well as deep ecology posit the view that we have “have obligations to future generations” (Devall & Sessions, 2007: 120). We thus have the responsibility to protect the environment so that the future generations can live in a viable environment.

In line with their decentralisation policy, the Ecotopian universities have been divided into a multitude of small colleges because research functions have been separated from teaching functions. The atmosphere in the research institutes is very playful and relaxed. Contrary to our current societies, degrees are of lower importance in Ecotopia since they confer little status and there is “no jobs in Ecotopia for which a degree is an absolute prerequisite” (142). Universities are also highly democratic since “any citizen may acquire an education in biology, engineering, musicology, or hundreds of other subjects by enrolling in video courses” (142). Callenbach was thus a visionary since he had already imagined e-learning. In addition, universities’ management is heavily reliant on students’ power. For instance, professors are hired and dismissed by students’ votes. The fact that professors are regularly taken on or made redundant by students suggests a form of consumerism. As already pointed out, there is thus a discrepancy between the way the Ecotopians act and their ideals.

Finally, reading ecological utopias such as *Ecotopia* is in itself didactic. This can be explained by two reasons. Firstly, in a typical utopia, the narrator (who has just discovered a new society) shows some didacticism because s/he explains what can be learned from this revolutionary society in order to improve his/her own. Secondly, readers might be inspired and prompted to partially imitate the positive and sustainable model of the future society portrayed in *Ecotopia*. Imitating positive models is precisely the instructional strategy called “modelling” which entails that people might develop more sustainable behaviours if they are shown how to act in favour of the environment. The importance of modelling is also stressed by Kumar who states that “in our own era of globalization and ecological crisis, we might expect these utopias to be something of models, or at least to inspire” (2010: 554). The idea that *Ecotopia* could serve as a model society was Callenbach’s intention because he explains that “then, as now, people didn’t have easy hope, and *Ecotopia* served as a beacon”<sup>29</sup>. However, sustainable models should never be imposed because, otherwise, the society becomes a dystopia.

### ***Ecotopia* as an ongoing process based on grassroots community projects**

As already mentioned, deep ecology is essentially organised from the bottom-up because it is based on collective initiatives resulting from grassroots activism (Citton, 107). Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* illustrates this grassroots activism on the grounds that *Ecotopia* is made up of small, eco-friendly and self-sufficient minicities which are completely decentralised and run from the bottom-up (or from below). Except for collecting taxes, spending public money and passing stringent environmental laws, the power of the Ecotopian government has been considerably reduced in favour of the decentralised minicities which take the bulk of the important decisions. The Ecotopian minicities thus encourage “small-scale initiatives and democratic leadership” rather than the “concentration of power in dictatorial hands” (Mathisen, 2001: 61). As already explained, the Ecotopian politics are integrated into their daily life and are much more personal as well as informal. Given that “the threshold for taking part in political decision-making processes” has been significantly lowered (Mathisen, 2001: 63), the Ecotopian political system fosters a greater equality among its citizens. It also boosts the political activity of engaged citizens since everybody can and

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph P. “Revisiting the 1970s eco-cult classic that gripped a nation.” *Grist*. 13 May 2005. 09/03/19. <<https://grist.org/article/joseph-ecotopia/>>.

should take part in political decisions. Consequently, the Ecotopian grassroots movement is very empowering and democratic for the local communities.

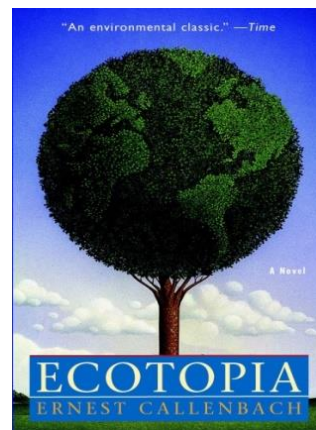
The Ecotopian minicities have developed a strong sense of place because grassroots activism is essentially local. In their article on “Local Environmental Grassroots Activism”, Mihaylov and Perkins argue that a “strong connectedness to a place’s nature predicts pro-environmental behaviours and attitudes” (2015: 137). This can be explained by the fact that the community members view nature as an essential part of their community. Moreover, this strong place attachment facilitates a sense of community, collectivity, conviviality, equality and solidarity. Even the organisation of the Ecotopian families bears a resemblance to the grassroots movement since these families consist in “a self-organising process [...] run from below” (Mathisen, 2001: 61).

Ecotopia is also in a “transition” (50) process because the government intends to dismantle and destroy the former big cities in order to create more and more decentralised minicities which are in line with their stable-state. Weston asks the journalist Bert whether this stable-state is not “awfully static” (33). Bert counters this criticism by replying that “there’s no stable point. We’re always striving to approximate it, but we never get there” (33). He also points out that the Ecotopians prefer to keep their “eye on the process and not on the goal” (73). He goes on to explain that the Ecotopian stable-state is like a meadow because although it might look static, “there’s a lot of change going on – plants growing, other plants dying, bacteria decomposing them, mice eating the seeds, hawks eating mice [...]” (34). In other words, the Ecotopian stable-state is actually an ongoing process because although it maintains equilibrium, it constantly changes. The definition of the stable-state as a process with a lot of change is similar to the definition of utopias as ongoing processes since utopias have “always been open [...] rather than closed [and] static” (Garforth, 2005: 397). Ashcroft also supports this view when he states that a utopia is “a place in process” (2007: 424).

### **The Ecotopian ideal combination of bottom-up and top-down**

So far, we have focused on the grassroots or bottom-up movement but we will now examine its relation with the top-down policy. Although initiatives on the local level are crucial, the government also plays a vital role in encouraging, supporting and facilitating these initiatives. Indeed, in order to be really successful, a grassroots movement needs to be supported by the top-down because the government can pass laws which empower engaged

citizens. Otherwise, the grassroots movement might be stuck or of limited importance. As Hopkins puts it, “we can do a huge amount without government, but we can also do a great deal more with them” (2008: 77). Accordingly, the best would be to ensure that political issues “are democratically decided by central authorities, while at the same time empowering local communities” (Mathisen, 2001: 77). In other words, the ideal consists in striking a balance between the local initiatives (bottom-up) and the macropolitical decision-making (top-down). For instance, this ideal combination is expressed in the seemingly paradoxical sentence: “think globally, act locally” which relates “grassroots actions to national and global concerns and movements” (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2015: 129). This is exactly the policy adopted by Ecotopia because despite living on their own, “the Ecotopians consider themselves as citizens of the planet” (Callenbach). Similarly, *Ecotopia*’s cover suggests that Ecotopia has struck a balance between the local initiatives (bottom-up) and the macropolitical decision-making (top-down). Indeed, on the cover, we can see a green earth made up of branches (seen from top-down) while the roots of the tree stem from the grassy ground (which highlights the grassroots movement from bottom-up).



(Callenbach, 1990: book cover).

### **Chapter 3: The hidden aspects and failures of Callenbach's *Ecotopia***

Up to now, this thesis has mainly focused on *Ecotopia* as an inspiring and sustainable future model society that makes sense in today's environmental context. However, if we read between the lines, we discover a society which is far from being perfect because this novel presents a number of flaws. For instance, as already discussed in the first part of the dissertation, *Ecotopia's* literary quality is rather poor and the Ecotopian spirituality lacks depth and is too naïve as well as simplistic. The following section reports on other possible criticisms of the Ecotopian society. The analysis of the drawbacks of this society is essential in order to have a critical reading of *Ecotopia*.

#### **Is *Ecotopia* a real hospitable and welcoming utopia?**

Although "all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in" (Morrison)<sup>30</sup>, a real utopia is hospitable, open and united. We might doubt that *Ecotopia* is hospitable since it is relatively isolated from the rest of the world and especially from the USA. Indeed, *Ecotopia* is a protectionist nation with "closed borders" (3). Ashcroft mentions that "the peril of utopia is that, although imagined, it is a place, and spatial perfection requires boundaries, control, limits and direction" (2007, 413). In other words, if the utopia is closed, it fails to be hospitable because it lacks openness. The closed borders of *Ecotopia* facilitate the identification of *Ecotopia* as a utopia since it bears a resemblance to the concept of island usually associated with utopias. Besides their geographical isolation, the Ecotopians have no phone service or wire service to communicate with people from other countries.

The Ecotopian protectionist policy also applies to their economy since *Ecotopia* imposes "sky-high and draconian tariffs" (101) on products that come from other countries in order to prevent the Ecotopians from buying them. It is worth noting that the portrayal of an isolated society which remains out of touch with the rest of the world is not realistic anymore in today's context of globalisation. *Ecotopia* also fails to be hospitable for four other reasons. Firstly, as we will see later, the Ecotopian population is segregated according to its race. However, it seems that the minority groups have decided themselves to self-segregate. Secondly, there are some horrific rumours about the possible presence of "cannibals" (5).

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<sup>30</sup> Harz V. "Building a Better Place: Utopianism and the Revision of Community in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*." *Current objective of postgraduate American studies* 12 (2011): n. pag. Web. 14/10/18. < <https://copas.uni-regensburg.de/article/view/135/161> >.

Thirdly, Ecotopia is famous for its “barbaric” (4) customs (the War Games) and many crimes such as prostitution as well as rape are not punished. Finally, there is also an open hatred directed against the Americans since a number of Ecotopians “turn out to be surly and viciously anti-American” (75). For instance, Weston notices that “there is a widespread tendency to blame technological disasters on Americans” (72).

### **Ecotopia as an eco-totalitarian state**

*Ecotopia* might also lack hospitality on the grounds that the state can seem totalitarian. Although the Ecotopian citizens are said to be completely free and loose, they have to obey numerous laws as well as strict rules in favour of the protection of the environment. As these laws are imposed from the state, the ecological utopia might turn into a dystopia. Indeed, utopias should never be imposed and always consist in a gradual process of constructing a better society. Ashcroft also shares this view because he claims that “all realized utopias are degenerate” (2007: 418). Despite Bert’s reply, one of the biggest flaws of the Ecotopian stable-state is that it risks becoming “awfully static” (33) and thereby, too little flexible. In addition, Schuster mentions that the Ecotopian “homeostatic ecological paradigm [has been] undermined with the introduction of chaos theory into ecology” (2017: 106). Indeed, ecosystems are only partly homeostatic since they are especially characterised by dynamic interactions and changes. Besides this lack of dynamism, the problem with this focus on stability is the excess of authoritarian control. For instance, if citizens do not respect the “rigid practices of recycling and re-use” (8) or if they pollute, they might be imprisoned. It is the reason why Tschachler notes that the “Ecotopian institutions threaten to become rigid structures of a *gemeinschaft* [=community] dominated by ‘despotic reason’, ultimately endangering the existence of utopia itself” (1984: 309). This can explain why *Ecotopia* could be viewed as an example of ecototalitarianism or ecofacism.

Another flaw pertains to the Ecotopian lack of individual freedom as to consumer goods. Indeed, in order to curb consumerism, the variety of material goods has disappeared and all the goods which are considered to be ecologically harmful (such as electric can openers or hair curlers) are unavailable. Despite the Ecotopian willingness to reduce consumerism, Schuster levels criticism at Ecotopia on the grounds that it still advocates “blissful eco-minded consumerism” (2017: 106) to some extent. Moreover, many Ecotopian products have been standardised. For instance, as already explained, bath towels only exist in one colour, white. This standardisation and uniformity can also be seen in certain clothes such as the



“bird-suits” (87) which are impermeable as well as ventilated. This uniformity goes hand in hand with a lack of personality, individuality and free will since individuals cannot choose what they really want to buy. Because of all these imposed tough rules and stringent policies, the Ecotopians cannot fully be who they really want and their agency is reduced. In addition, there is a hidden norm of what is expected of them since they are forced to behave like others. For instance, when Weston wants to quickly finish the washing-up, he gets told off because it is “very un-Ecotopian!” (73).

Besides prohibiting environmentally harmful products, the Ecotopians have invented the “Bad Practice list” (20). It is a mechanism of moral persuasion which deters consumers from buying products which are not ecological enough. Weston states that persuading consumers not to buy certain products is a totalitarian means of control (21). For instance, when Weston asks for drip-dry clothes, the shop assistant lectures him on the detrimental effects of synthetic fibres. Therefore, the Ecotopian clothes are usually hand-made, comfortable, practical and plain. Moreover, they tend to be old-fashioned, second-hand, “loose, with bright colours striving to make up for what is lacking in style and cut” (13). This evident lack of aestheticism is not only obvious in their clothes but also in their buildings since no paint is used.

In keeping with their lack of aestheticism, the Ecotopians “have no art” (147). However, every Ecotopian is involved in an artistic activity such as playing an instrument, dancing and painting. Interestingly, the Ecotopians disregard masterpieces because they argue that “if art is something everybody does, a Picasso or a Van Gogh no longer seems quite so special” (145). The fact that the Ecotopian government ignore artists might result from the government’s fear that some artists might imagine another sustainable and alternative society which would call their stable-state into question. Mathisen warns thus against “the danger of suffocating conformism in the name of ecopolitical correctness” (2001: 70). Indeed, one of the major problems of the Ecotopian society is that the Ecotopians do not really distinguish themselves from each other because they are not given the opportunity to think differently. In other words, the Ecotopian lack of artistic expression leads to a lack of personal creativity, freedom of expression, autonomy and innovation. By contrast, high art and culture are essential components of a democracy since they “safeguard the possibility of thinking differently and provokingly and [they] stimulate intellectual innovations and social creativity” (Mathisen, 2001: 70). The Ecotopian lack of individual freedom can also be spotted in the censure of the press. Indeed, Weston’s writings to *The New York Post* are checked before being sent. However, despite this lack of art, the Ecotopians have a heightened craftsmanship

and they host international art exhibitions (145). It is worth noting that the black segregated areas (such as Soul City) attach much more importance to art since they play music (jazz, blues) and write poetry as well as novels.

The Ecotopian totalitarian drift might also be seen in Weston's abduction. Unable to resist against his four kidnappers, Weston screams that Ecotopia is not a free country and that he wants to "get out of this fucking country!" (167). Vera Allwen had ordered this abduction because she wanted to force him to change his downcast state of mind. His kidnapping can thus be viewed as her last attempt to indoctrinate him. Indeed, Weston was only freed when he realised that Ecotopia was worth staying in. This highlights the brutality of the Ecotopian regime which aims to impose its ideology. However, although he was kept against his will, the term "kidnapping" is exaggerated since Weston was brought to a beautiful hot springs resort.

### **Some noteworthy inconsistencies in the Ecotopian ideology**

Right from the start, the reader learns that "the secessionists filched uranium fuel from power plants for the nuclear mines they claimed to have set in New York and Washington" (2). In addition, the reader discovers that Ecotopia was involved in a "Helicopter War" (122) which led to seven thousand American casualties and prisoners of war. Moreover, the Ecotopians created a militia system which "sounds more like guerrilla bands than a real army" (131). Just like Gilman's *Herland*, it thus seems paradoxical that the Ecotopian society, which claims to be peaceful, was actually built on violence, crimes, bloody wars and internal strives. Moreover, the Ecotopians, who claim to be the champions of environmental sustainability, are ready to launch a nuclear war if the United States do not recognize their independence.

It might also seem counterintuitive that a society which describes itself as a peaceful utopia needs an "army of lawyers" (93) and several prisons. Furthermore, even though the deliberate pollution of water and air is severely punished by jail sentences, we might doubt that Ecotopia is a good place to live in given that "victimless crimes" (93) such as prostitution, gambling and drug use are no longer punished. Moreover, Ecotopia might turn out to be a dangerous and inhospitable country since people responsible of "sex crimes [such as rape], loitering, drunkenness, and vagrancy" (108) are not prosecuted anymore. Contrary to what it claims, Ecotopia is thus not the safest country where even the police are not armed and where there is no need for security gates, doormen or guards. Therefore, although Ecotopia

advocates environmental and social ethics, the Ecotopians lack moral values as to crime. Moreover, the Ecotopian legalisation of drug use entails that people become addicted to marijuana and heroin. The government has not only legalised marijuana but it has also freely distributed top-quality seeds. The Ecotopian addiction to marijuana partly explains why the Ecotopians are often described as hippie-like potheads. Just like the use of soma in Huxley's *Brave New World*, the massive use of this happiness drug might be interpreted as a way of controlling the population. Indeed, if the Ecotopians always live in social harmony and are always happy, calm and playful, they are less likely to overthrow the government. This legalisation is also highly inconsistent with their environmental ethics since smoking all sorts of drugs produces toxic substances and ashes which pollute the environment. For example, the fact that Weston's taxi has needed a special dispensation for the pollution engendered by its combustion engine is incoherent with the widespread use of marijuana in the train. Besides polluting the environment, those substances also deteriorate the humans' health. The Ecotopians thus seem to be oblivious to the harmful consequences of smoking such as lung cancers.

We might also note a contradiction in the way animals are treated. Schuster points out that *Ecotopia* does not really correspond to an animal utopia because even though animal welfare is advocated, there is a "curious lack of animals and animal activism" (2017: 105). Indeed, no animals are portrayed in *Ecotopia* except for the hunting dogs which have just killed deer at the beginning of the story. Therefore, instead of promoting vegetarianism, Callenbach seems to advocate "today's caveman diet movement" (Schuster, 2017: 105) which involves a feeling of nostalgia for meat. Furthermore, the fact that the Ecotopians are not really enticed to cut down on their meat consumption might be explained by two main reasons. Firstly, "meat is reasonably cheap, and beef cattle are common features of the landscape" (63). Secondly, the Ecotopians are convinced that they respect the animal wellbeing by prohibiting forced-feeding fattening lots. However, as already explained, Callenbach did not explicitly promote vegetarianism since the fact that meat consumption is highly unsustainable has only recently been discovered. On this aspect, a number of Americans seem more eco-friendly because they eat "synthetic meat" (20).

What does Ecotopia do with those who disagree with its hippie-like values or with those who do not conform to its "ecological craziness" (52)? Are the religious, punks, hard-working businessmen and conservatives doomed to be relegated to the margins of the society? Even though Ecotopia claims to be an inclusive and tolerant society, it actually rejects every form

of otherness on the grounds that those people do not correspond to the “steadiness [social] consensus” (Schuster, 2017: 106). In addition, all the opponents of the ruling ecological party are repressed and spied by the secret Ecotopian counter intelligence. The opponents thus form a clandestine group (called “the Opposition” (52)) which is mainly made up of businessmen who have lost everything with the advent of Ecotopia and who are ready to fight for their ideas. According to them, Ecotopia is a dystopia given that Ecotopia stifles their spirit of enterprise. Furthermore, they argue that Ecotopia is an economic catastrophe as the economy and the Gross Domestic Product have severely declined. Consequently, the presence of this illegal group entails a hidden violence because Ecotopia considers them as potential terrorists. This group approached Weston since they hoped that he could improve the diplomatic relations between the USA and Ecotopia. Moreover, they asked him to contact the President of the USA because they wanted an American support to overthrow the Ecotopian government. A few days later, the counter intelligence told Weston that if he delivered the Opposition’s message, he would never meet the President of Ecotopia for his interview. In other words, they blackmailed Weston who replied that he hates being intimidated. He thus comes to the conclusion that the Ecotopians “are not so easy-going as they look” (66).

In the early days of Ecotopia, numerous policies were implemented to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. The idea was to promote a socialist state (instead of a capitalistic one) where the income differences were eliminated. For instance, the poor were given a decent minimum-guaranteed allowance and an expropriation law was imposed on all the exclusive estates which were seized and transformed into schools, hospitals or museums. Besides, many Ecotopians were “deprived of [the] hard-earned comforts they had been used to: their cars, their prepared and luxury foods, their habitual clothes and appliances [and] their service industries” (49). Inheritance and land ownership were also prohibited. The rich thus felt resentment about the unfair way they were treated. However, there are now still poor and rich in Ecotopia. For example, Weston points out that the people who have just invented a new successful product (such as the bird-suits) can still become extremely rich. Therefore, he wonders whether these newly rich could “use their profits to control other enterprises, or become absentee owners, and thus end up as capitalists” (100). Similarly, another inconsistency pertains to the fact that the “Ecotopian enterprises generally behave much like capitalist enterprises: they compete with each other, and seek to increase sales and maximise profits” (101). On this basis, it may be inferred that although Ecotopia promotes a form of ecological socialism, it fails to completely go away from capitalism.

In addition, many other policies are also paradoxical since they involve a conflict between two opposing Ecotopian values, namely the decentralisation (which reduces the power of the government) and the nationalisation (which expands its power). For instance, the agriculture, medical care and banking system have been nationalised. By contrast, instead of nationalising and democratizing the education, the Ecotopian schools are against all odds “private enterprises” (129) which fiercely compete against each other in order to attract more pupils. Therefore, the children from poorer families are discriminated against since the Ecotopian schools are not free of charge. It is thus inconsistent with the Ecotopian principles of solidarity and equality. The Ecotopian schools are also completely free to operate as they want and to follow whatever educational program they desire. As a result, there is a lack of official curriculum, supervision, regulation and national examination. This lack entails a high risk of inequity, inefficiency and inequality because at the end of their studies, the pupils from different schools might have acquired different abilities and “miss the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic” (130). However, the only common point between all the Ecotopian schools is that they respect Ecotopia’s dominant ecological ideology. For instance, since their childhood, the pupils learn to live in harmony with nature in an almost religious way. They are thus conditioned to think in a certain way. One example of this is that they “are *forced* to learn not only the basic techniques but also how to improvise ecologically acceptable equipment in the wild” (38, *my italics*). The fact that the subjects taught in schools (such as ecology) are imposed curtails the teachers’ freedom. Another problem concerns the fact that children “do actual hard adult work” (86) and “wear miniature versions of adult clothing” (14). Consequently, if children are treated as adults, they might lose their innocence, naivety and imagination.

Finally, another flaw pertains to the uselessness of degrees in Ecotopia. Indeed, there are “no jobs in Ecotopia for which a degree is an absolute prerequisite” (142). If degrees are no prerequisite, anyone could become a teacher, a physician or a lawyer. Therefore, the quality, professionalism and efficiency of many jobs could be diminished. Furthermore, Ecotopia attaches so much importance to its ecological stable-state that it excessively focuses on and funds biology as well as ecology whereas other disciplines (such as political sciences, sociology and psychology) are completely overlooked. The Ecotopian research is thus completely biased.

## **The reinforcement of gender stereotypes and the senseless violence of the War Games**

It is worth noting that the gender roles might contribute to sustainability because the gender approach reflects the larger theme of equality. Gender and sustainability are thus intermingled and act together. The analysis of gender issues in an ecocritical reading of Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is very relevant since, as Bookchin puts it, "the very idea of dominating ... nature has its origins in the domination of human by human" (cited in Clark, 2012: 2). Although Callenbach's intention was to depict a society in which men and women have the same rights, it is debatable whether *Ecotopia* especially portrays a matriarchal or a patriarchal society. At first sight, *Ecotopia* seems to have achieved gender equality because "women in *Ecotopia* have totally escaped the dependent roles" and also because "they exercise power in work and in relationships just as men do" (35-36). In other words, women have the same career prospects as men. Even the President's name "Allwen" alludes to a reconciliation between all men and all women. Tschachler contends that *Ecotopia* is a matriarchy since "Callenbach exalts women [and] shows women as politically liberated" (1984: 308). He goes on to explain that "the exemplary state is womanhood" (1984: 308). Indeed, the President is a woman and the major political party is overwhelmingly women-dominated. Crow supports Tschachler's view because he notes that in *Ecotopia*, "matriarchal values prevail" (1989: 9).

On the contrary, *Ecotopia* also presents the flaw of being pervaded by patriarchal values. Indeed, Chang argues that "*Ecotopia* expresses the 1970s environmental concerns as filtered through the lens of a white patriarchy" (2005: 251). He also strongly believes that Callenbach's feminist ideas actually reinforce gender stereotypes (2005: 261). By way of example, even though "mothers have the final say, [...] the fathers [...] feel that their time of greater influence on the young will come later" (70). What this passage reveals is that patriarchal rules actually dominate. In a similar way, just after having said that "people can just be people, without our symbolic loading on sex roles" (36), Weston continues to attribute gender stereotypes to all the women he meets: "Ecotopian women still seem to me feminine" (36). In addition, even though Marissa is said to be strong (since she is able to cut trees), she is still a very feminine and sensual character who is "slender [...] with solid hips; dark curly hair [and] large intense eyes" (54). The following quote highlights that Weston associates her with the stereotype of the wild woman: "when she looks at me, my hair stands up as if I'm confronting a creature who's wild and incomprehensible, animal and human at once" (57). Moreover, the story is male-focused since the narrator is Weston and since he is also the only

character who has really evolved throughout the story. Furthermore, the majority of the characters to whom Weston speaks are male: his boss, the other journalists, the old man, the members of the Opposition, the Assistant Minister, Marissa's brother and his kidnappers. The only noticeable exception is the meeting with the President Vera Allwen who reminds him of his "grandmother" (162), which is not the characteristic usually associated with a strong, powerful and independent woman.

Another criticism deals with the Ecotopian sexuality which is very alternative and which rejects more conventional forms of sexuality. It is therefore not always easy to identify with the hippie-like Ecotopians who advocate sexual freedom, looseness and promiscuity. They tend to consider sexual practices as only pleasurable moments devoid of feelings of passion and desire. Indeed, Weston notices that "they seemed to regard sex the same way we'd regard eating, or maybe walking – a pleasant biological function, but without any heavy emotional expectations" (97). The Ecotopians thus act as animals and make love everywhere without paying attention to other people. Indeed, they are "very noisy at their lovemaking" and do not have "any inhibitions about others hearing what's going on" (47).

Although the Ecotopian women are looser, more open and blunter, they first seem to be indifferent to Weston's signals and charm. He is thus completely puzzled when a woman tells him: " 'if you just want to fuck why do not you say so?' and marched off in disgust" (46). Another example of this bluntness is when Marissa directly asks him: "do you want to make love with me?" (56) whereas they were complete strangers. Marissa's assertiveness completely takes him off guard because he is not used to being propositioned by women. Indeed, in the USA, he usually adopts a macho attitude and believes that it is up to men to seduce the women they want. Moreover, as the above quote (47) reveals, the Ecotopian sexual looseness is also characterized by a total lack of inhibition and privacy. Similarly, Weston is shocked when he learns that Marissa has told the entire forest camp "many details about [their] relationship" (89). The Ecotopian alternative sexuality can also be spotted in their rejection of monogamy, in their advocacy of their mysterious yoga of love-making and in Weston's threesome experience. The following quote reveals their relatively weird sexuality:

It turns out she [Marissa] has a regular lover [Everett] in the camp. But [she] has somehow arranged it so she can be with me [Weston] during my stay. [Her] lover is blond, shy, blushes a lot about other things but doesn't seem at all jealous about his woman having made love with me (58).

This quote also shows that Marissa does not attach importance to her relationship with Everett because “[they]’re just good friends – fucking partners, not mates” (59). This situation seems perfectly normal in Ecotopia and there are even special periods when being unfaithful to his partner is encouraged by the government. Indeed, during “four holidays each year, at the solstices and equinoxes, [...] sexual promiscuity is widespread” (71).

Their typical looseness and sexual promiscuity might stem from their excessive drug use which makes people much more relaxed and easy-going. This sexual looseness is so widespread that even in hospitals, patients are given sensual massages in order to accelerate their recovery. For instance, after his severe wound in the War Games, Weston has regularly been seduced by the nurse Linda. Playing with the stereotype of the sensual nurse, Weston says that he has been “assigned a rather beautiful nurse” (150). From what he explains, we can notice that he still overwhelmingly praises women for their physical appearance and for their feminine attributes. Indeed, later in the novel, he states that “Linda, I’m beginning to realise, really isn’t quite as pretty as I thought at first” (158).

In his article on “Sustainability after extinction: on last animals and future bison”, Schuster levels criticism at the overwhelming Ecotopian heterosexuality. He also relates the Ecotopian ecology with heterosexuality because “a heteronormative libido would assume also a libido for greenness” (2017, 105). In other words, in order to be integrated in the Ecotopian ecological society, the implicit norm is heterosexuality. According to Weston, “generally there are more or less permanent heterosexual couples [...], though both male and female homosexual couples also exist” (71). Weston goes on to say that “same-sex relationships pose less of a problem psychologically than they do with us” (71). This quote suggests that even though Ecotopia is more progressive in terms of social mores, homosexuality is still a problem to some extent. There is thus a contradiction between what Ecotopia claims to be (namely a tolerant and inclusive society) and the fact that there is no reference to any homosexual couple or to other forms of queerness such as transgender.

“No Ecotopian woman ever bears a child by a man she has not freely chosen”. What this quote suggests is that the Ecotopian women have free will and are empowered. However, several examples contradict the seeming gender equality. For instance, after the barbaric War Games, “one of the winning warriors came up, propositioned [a woman in the crowd], and literally carried her away” (82). The fact that women are dragged into the woods to celebrate men’s victory reduces them to mere sexual objects. Then, we learn that Marissa Brightcloud



(who is said to be stronger than Weston) is “raped” (82) by him and “seemed almost to have expected this” (82). These two passages clearly show that women are not always set on equal footing with men since women still keep a submissive status in comparison to them. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that a woman stronger than Weston would accept such a rape without struggling against his aggressive and violent behaviour.

In addition, the primitive and bestial War Games often reinforce gender stereotypes. Indeed, women are not allowed to take part in them because the Ecotopians “prefer to focus women’s competitiveness in other ways: through contests for political leadership, through organising work [...] and through rivalry over men to father their children” (81). This is all the more unjust because only men are entitled “to test their comradeship, to put their beautiful resources of speed and strength to use, to let their adrenalin flow, to be brave” (81). This unequal treatment is even more unfair since “it is not only young men who need a violent outlet” (Jacobs, 1997: 324). Indeed, it is mainly the elderly and the women (who are not involved in the War Games) who struggle with violent impulses (157). Jacobs goes on to explain that “Callenbach simply could not imagine or envision women fighting as men do” (1997: 324). As a result, Jacobs shows that *Ecotopia* lacks coherence since “the fictive dimensions of the text directly contradict its conscious program” (1997: 319). Lipschutz also supports her view because he contends that “sexism continues” in *Ecotopia* (2015: 9).

The gender stereotypes are also strengthened since only the men who are involved in the War Games are described as courageous and brave heroes. Indeed, according to the Ecotopian men, taking part in the War Games enables them to become masculine and “real” men. This is confirmed by the following quotes: “I feel like a man” (79) or “it’ll make a man of you” (148). Even Marissa’s attitude towards Weston has changed since his participation in the War Games because “she seems to feel I am a better person” (152). Besides reinforcing gender stereotypes, these bloody games are a “senseless violence” and represent “a blot on *Ecotopia*’s name among civilised nations” (82).

Another flaw which partly relates to the War Games is the “unsporting life of *Ecotopia*” (37). Indeed, several sports which usually attract crowds of people in America and which unleash passions (such as football, basketball, ice hockey, roller derby, boxing and wrestling) are nowhere to be found in *Ecotopia*. Instead, the Ecotopians only practice healthy and “dull” (37) sports such as hiking, fishing, hunting, camping and ping-pong. However, given that the Ecotopians often practise these sports, they are extremely fit. The substitute for

this lack of thrills, excitement, drama and suspense is provided by the War Games. Weston learns that these games are partly based on American football and that they are vital for the upholding of the Ecotopian life which is too stable. Indeed, men need “to develop some kind of open civic expression for the physical competitiveness that seemed to be inherent in man’s biological programming” (80). These games thus provide men with action and allow them to get rid of their violence in a relatively controlled way. Hence, these games deter some men from launching a real war or a revolt against the government.

### **Racial homogeneity as a result of a “voluntary” apartheid**

We could expect from a deep ecological utopia that all the people (regardless of their race) live in harmony with each other. However, Callenbach tends not to idealise the relationships between the white and the black population. Contrary to its environmental and social ethics, Ecotopia’s population is overwhelmingly white and homogenous. Indeed, all the characters to whom Weston speaks are white and there are “few dark-skinned faces on San Francisco streets” (107) since people of different races are separated. In comparison to the other chapters of the novel, the racial issue is barely dealt with since Callenbach only discusses this issue from page 107 to page 110. Therefore, it might be hypothesized that this issue is not his main concern. In his article entitled “Ecotopia the Whitewashed”<sup>31</sup>, Garcia has noticed that right from the start, Weston describes the Ecotopians as “oldtime westerners [and] Gold Rush characters” who look like Charles Dickens’ descendants (10). On this basis, Garcia inferred that Callenbach’s target audience is white. In addition, Chang argues that “Weston’s narrative of Soul City [...] is from the gaze of the whites which objectifies the blacks, allowing them no genuine autonomy” (2005: 260). From a postcolonial perspective, it is the white narrator Weston who (just like the colonizers in the past) makes a tour of the Ecotopian black cities.

Contrary to the South African apartheid in which the dominant white minority imposed segregation, the Ecotopian segregation is ambiguous because it is voluntary. In his article “The novel that predicted Portland”, Timberg contends that Callenbach’s intention was not to create a racist society but to “reflect black nationalist ideas of the time as well as an early 70’s skepticism about integration”<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, the black minority decided to self-

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<sup>31</sup> Garcia J. “Ecotopia the Whitewashed.” *Medium*. 9 July 2016. 09/03/19. < <https://medium.com/literary-analyses/ecotopia-the-whitewashed-fc29623dfa6a>>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

segregate since the Ecotopian African Americans were “nationalist and separatist” (107). Therefore, even though many readers “were made uncomfortable by the way black people were excluded from the Ecotopian society”<sup>33</sup>, it was actually their wish and decision to live on their own in small neighbourhoods. These self-segregated neighbourhoods can thus be considered as utopian black cities in which the inhabitants are free to leave. These black cities allude to America’s cultural mosaic which is made up of different ethnic groups, cultures and languages. In contrast to the majority of the Ecotopian citizens, the Ecotopian African Americans still drink whisky, import luxury goods and drive private cars (108). They thus “cling to certain symbols of the old ways” (108). However, the Ecotopian African Americans also seem to be victims of “environmental racism”<sup>34</sup> because they live in ghettos, suffer from economic deprivation and have “more hold-overs from pre-Independence days” (108), which means that they live in more polluted areas.

The fact that Ecotopia tolerates people who disagree with its environmental principles and who have different values reveals that Ecotopia might be considered as a hospitable and open utopia. This hospitality and openness are also suggested by the following quote: “a few black people have preferred to continue living or working outside the black areas [...] They seem to be fully integrated into the white society, with intermarriage [and interbreeding] frequent” (107). Therefore, even though racial segregation is common practice, Ecotopia strongly rejects racism and intolerance. Given that Callenbach had heavily been criticized for this self-segregation, he said that he “probably would write it quite differently at this point”<sup>35</sup>.

Although Callenbach might have been influenced by Oakland’s Black Nationalism, the fact that African Americans are separated from whites represents a severe regression as to racial and social issues. Indeed, even the situation at the time (in the seventies) was much better given the achievements made by the Civil Rights Movements. We might doubt that African Americans have voluntarily segregated because they “have been strangled by white suburbs” (107). Garcia also supports this view since he argues that they “were coerced to this

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<sup>33</sup> Timberg S. “The novel that predicted Portland.” *The New York Times*. 12 December 2008. 13/10/18. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/14/fashion/14ecotopia.html>>.

<sup>34</sup> Environmental racism refers to a situation in which racial minority groups or people of lower socioeconomic status live in environmentally harmful areas.

Cheprasov A. “What Is Environmental Racism?” *Study.com*. 16/03/19. <<https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-environmental-racism-definition-ethics.html>>.

<sup>35</sup> Timberg S. *op.cit.*

condition by the majority [of the white] population”<sup>36</sup>. As a result, this self-proposed segregation might also result from a feeling of alienation and unaccepted otherness.

In his article “Utopia or catastrophe? Reflections on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ecotopia’s publication”, Lipschutz define the black “city-states” (107) as “segregated enclaves” (2015: 9) which are overwhelmingly located in San Francisco and Oakland. They are almost tiny independent countries with their own government, police, courts, industries and farms. However, given that the city-states are still reliant on the Ecotopian foreign affairs policy, they are described as being highly unstable. Indeed, the Ecotopian African Americans want to achieve full independence. In keeping with this segregation, the Ecotopian government intends to relocate the entire population of African Americans in “a new territory including Monterey Bay and the Salinas Valley” (107). Moreover, there is an increasing cultural and linguistic division between the whites and the African Americans. For instance, Weston intimates that the whites and the African Americans will not be able to communicate with each other in the future on the grounds that the Ecotopian African Americans show an acute “awareness of Africa” (109) and become increasingly familiar with Swahili.

In addition, the African American ghettos such as “*Soul City*” (107, my italics) are strongly associated with stereotypes because they are depicted as “heavy exporter[s] of music and musicians, novels and movies and poetry” (108). Indeed, the African American artists play *soul* music which has its “roots in the jazz and blues [...] and in [the] Caribbean music” (146). Apart from these positive stereotypes, the African Americans are stigmatised on the grounds that the vast majority of criminals is African American. The “substantial black inmate population” (108) has given rise to the prison reform which consists in reducing the size of the prisons and giving “inmates the time and opportunity to develop non-criminal modes of life” (109). In other words, the inmates are supposed to take part in the daily life of the society by holding ordinary jobs. This humane policy aims to prevent inmates from committing another crime when they will be freed because they are already integrated into the society. However, despite this nice portrayal of the Ecotopian penitentiary system, some Ecotopian prisons “verge on slave-labor camps” (94).

Because of this segregation, Ecotopia appears to be a whitopia which advocates the hegemony of the white homogenous population. Indeed, Ecotopia completely lacks the diversity or multiculturalism which we could expect from a utopia. For instance, there are

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<sup>36</sup> Garcia J. *op.cit.*

almost no references to Hispanic, Jewish, Chinese and Japanese characters. The only exception to this lack of diversity relates to the numerous references to Native American cultures. At first sight, we might believe that they are given a heroic and mythical status because the Ecotopian society has considerably been influenced by the Native Americans. Indeed, the Ecotopians try to do “what Indians would or wouldn’t do in a given situation” (32). The Ecotopians even adopt Native American names like Marissa Brightcloud and use Native American sayings like “it is a good day to die” (148). Weston points out that many Ecotopians are “sentimental about Indians” and envy “their lost natural place” (31). Given that the Ecotopians always idealize and talk about the Native Americans in the past, the Native Americans seem to have been wiped out. Similarly, Garcia contends that the whites “treat Native Americans as extinct” and have even “appropriate[d] their clothing, ideas, and lifestyle”<sup>37</sup>. It is worth noting that if we dwell on the literal meaning of the women-dominated party “the Survivalists”, we realise that the Native Americans are actually the real survivors and not this political party. In addition, this racial homogeneity seems highly unstable since “minorities all contain militants who desire a greater autonomy for their peoples” (164). As is often the case in utopias (such as Gilman’s *Herland*), the Ecotopian population is also homogenous because there are almost no references to the disabled, the old and the children, which seems paradoxical for a society which claims to be inclusive.

### **The dark underside of the Ecotopian renewable energy and technology**

The idea that environmental problems can be solved by robots or technology alone is a widespread belief. By contrast, a number of people counter the view that technology will save us. For instance, Hopkins argues that “there is no single technology that can enable us to continue as we are” (2008: 81). Therefore, instead of promoting high technology, the future society should especially advocate a sense of belonging, spirituality and collectivity. Before dealing with the issue of minerals, attention needs to be drawn to the Ecotopian use of technology.

After his disappointment at his failed interview with President Allwen, Weston harshly criticizes the Ecotopian society: “the Ecotopians propose only separatism, quietism, a reversion toward the two-bit principalities of medieval Europe, or even perhaps to the tribalism of the jungle” (164). What this passage reveals is that Ecotopia is characterised by a reversion or regression which mainly pertains to their use of technology. Indeed, the

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<sup>37</sup> Garcia J. *op.cit.*

Ecotopians seem to be averse to technology since their objects look primitive and old-fashioned. This stems from the fact that each manufactured product has to be easily repairable. Their products are thus ecological since they are generally “sturdy, durable and self-fixable” (44). However, despite their apparent aversion to technology, the belief in science and high technology is central to Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*. Indeed, the Ecotopians are actually heavily reliant on an appropriate use of technology. For instance, they use “remarkably miniaturized electronic devices” (45) such as stereo sets and radiotelephones. Callenbach has even invented picturephones which considerably reduce travel since these devices enable the Ecotopians to make videoconferences. However, there is a contradiction between their promotion of picturephones and their prohibition of cameras. It is worth noting that the Ecotopians already had cable TV, which represents an innovation for the seventies. Moreover, they “seem to use TV, rather than letting it use them” (42), which suggests that they “have put [technology] at the service of mankind, instead of the other way round” (36). Indeed, they not only watch TV passively but they also actively participate in the TV programs. Likewise, the Ecotopians are encouraged not to be manipulated by the TV commercials because these consist of bland announcements which the Ecotopians are supposed to critically compare.

The problem with Callenbach’s future society is that it still heavily relies on technological inventions. Besides their electronic devices such as their picturephones, the Ecotopians also use electric taxis and all kinds of renewable forms of energy. For instance, the new thermal-gradient power plant illustrates their advanced technological achievements. Paradoxically, while the Ecotopians emphasize their use of renewable energy such as geothermal, solar and wind power, they still use atomic-fission plants and “big diesel trucks” (61) for the logging. Moreover, as already mentioned, even though the Ecotopians have invented biodegradable plastics, it might be shocking that the “Ecotopians have no hesitation about dropping (and stamping on) an empty beer container” (84). Therefore, the idea of throwing plastic bags on the street (because they will be used as natural fertilizer) does not correspond to what we would expect from an ecological utopia. There is thus a discrepancy between the way they act and their ecological ideals.

In what follows, I will try to answer these three questions. How do the Ecotopians produce their renewable energy, their bikes and their electric vehicle batteries? Where do they get the resources necessary for the creation of their technology from? How much does it pollute? What is not said in *Ecotopia* is that the use of renewable technology (which is

thought to be green and clean) is actually unsustainable. In his book entitled *La guerre des métaux rares* (which is also called “le livre noir des énergies vertes” (2018: 36)), Pitron questions the view that electric cars, wind turbines and solar panels are “clean” and eco-friendly. Surprisingly, he contends that “leur facture environnementale serait pire encore que celle du pétrole” (2018: 36). Pitron mentions that as westerners, we often see green energy as *the* solution to climate change since we only see the final product and since this renewable energy uses the sun, the wind and the sea. However, green technology requires the environmentally harmful extraction of rare minerals which pollutes the soil, air, forests, rivers and seas. Besides this negative environmental impact, “se soucie-t-on vraiment de la manière dont [les technologies vertes] sont fabriquées?” (Caron, 222). Indeed, many metals necessary for the creation of green technology come from Africa where the workers’ status is close to that of slaves. Afterwards, these metals are often transported to China in order to be assembled but the workers usually suffer from poor working conditions. Therefore, in addition to the heavy environmental cost, the Ecotopian way of life fails to take into account the ethical aspects of renewable energy production. In other words, Ecotopia lacks consistency since it claims to take all the costs into account whereas it actually fails to consider the indirect costs of renewable energy and other technological devices.

In Callenbach’s defence, the flaws related to the use of green technology were not really discovered at the time. However, these flaws now become increasingly known. Similarly, at first, the ecologists considered that recycling was highly ecological but now, they are more hesitant about recycling since very often, the more we recycle, the more we consume. As a result, the ecologists now prefer limiting their consumption to recycling. In addition, it should be stressed that some Ecotopians seem to be partly aware of the negative environmental impact of their technology because they try to reduce their use of minerals. Indeed, “aluminium and other nonferrous metals [have been] largely abandoned, except for a few applications where nothing else will serve” (23). The Ecotopians also do not use paint since it contains lead. Even though the Ecotopians attempt to curb their use of minerals, they still import a large amount of iron since it “seems a ‘natural’ metal” (23).

### **The misanthropic character of Ecotopia and its lack of individuality**

The Ecotopian policy on population might be questionable because the Ecotopians agree on the need for a dramatic population decline. As a result, just like the deep ecologists, the Ecotopians might be considered as misanthropic. The Ecotopians even hold the view that “additional children [are] more of a burden than an advantage” (62). This population decline is considered to be necessary in order to reduce the human pressure on the natural resources as well as on other species and to improve everyone’s standard of living. Many Ecotopians posit the view that “a proper population size would be the number of Indians who inhabited the territory before the Spaniards and Americans came” (69). As a result, the Ecotopian stand on population sharply contrasts with the American point of view which generally consists in believing that “only economic and population growth can lead to improvement in life” (67). As already mentioned, to achieve this population decline, the Ecotopian government has suggested a three-stage program which heavily relies on widespread abortion, birth-control devices, education and decentralisation. Moreover, their population decline and their decentralisation policy entail that “the existing cities will be gradually razed [and that] the signs of a once busy civilisation – streets, cars, service stations, supermarkets – [will be] entirely obliterated, as if they never existed” (30).

Besides the political pressure to reduce the Ecotopian population, the traditional nuclear family model has disappeared (69). Therefore, just like Huxley’s Mutual Adoption Clubs, Callenbach reconnects with alternative forms of families in which children are not always raised by their own parents but by an extended family living in communities. In other words, the Ecotopian children do not only belong to their biological parents but to the entire community. They thus have multiple informal godparents who can also love, advise and support them. This large family consists of a group which ranges from minimum five people to maximum twenty people. For instance, “Franklin’s Cove [is] a sort of press commune” (32) which is made up of journalists and writers. Weston finds that they are “extremely hospitable” (32) and he notices that they have a strong sense of community and solidarity since “people gather round and talk” (33). Moreover, these people support each other and do everything in groups so that they never experience a feeling of loneliness. Despite some advantages, living in these communal groups might generate several problems such as a severe lack of individuality, privacy, anonymity and freedom. Indeed, “individuals do not perhaps stand out as sharply as we do” (118). Consequently, this lack of individuality might hamper the



personal development of the characters. The disappearance of the nuclear family has also a direct effect on the marriages which are no longer perceived as being important.

## **Chapter 4: The significance of green utopias for the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

### **The valuable contribution of deep ecological utopias to the political debate**

In his article “Ecotopia, sustainability, and vision”, De Geus stresses the importance of deep ecological utopias in today’s world because they can stimulate “present-day social discussion on sustainable development” (2002: 187) and ignite a political debate on sustainability by suggesting inspiring and positive alternatives. De Geus’ view is supported by Mathisen who argues that “political theorists may certainly benefit by more systematically using green or other literary utopias as a source of inspiration and new ideas” (2001: 77). This entails that deep ecological utopias (and thereby literature) can make environmental issues more palpable and concrete in fictional forms. Therefore, to quote from Mathisen, it would be valuable to have “an increased dialogue between literary utopias and political theory” (2001: 77). However, it would be enriching that the political debate not only involves ecologists but also engaged citizens who could suggest concrete solutions for the future society. Caron supports this idea by highlighting the need to create a real democratic debate in which every concerned citizen has a chance to voice his opinion. By stressing the political implication of deep ecological utopias such as Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, De Geus makes clear that literature can have a real impact on decision-making. In addition, he levels criticism at governments because they tend to focus on short-term decisions and on technological innovation (2002: 194). Finally, the act of reading green utopias is a political activity (Mathisen, 2001: 74) since they suggest solutions to social and environmental issues.

The fact that ecological utopias can have a real impact on today’s politics and thereby, on concrete decision-making can be seen in Amsterdam where “the significance of ecological utopias [...] for the present-day social discussion on sustainable development has already been taken seriously” (De Geus, 2002: 187). In the Netherlands, the value of ecological utopias (such as Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, Robinson’s *Pacific Edge* or Hegland’s *Into the Forest*) has been recognized because they might enrich the political debate and bring some creativity. Therefore, it is clear that deep ecological utopias have the potential to engage with and contribute to sustainability debates. For instance, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* might provide

inspiration for answering the question “what kind of society Dutch citizens want to live in during the 21<sup>st</sup> century [?]” (De Geus, 2002: 193). The fact that ecological utopias (and thereby literature) make things more concrete, practical and palpable can be illustrated by the following question: “what insights and practical wisdom can be gained from [ecotopias]?” (De Geus, 2002: 195).

Our ability to envision a desirable and sustainable future society not only ignites and enriches the political debate but also fosters our critical thinking since ecotopias question the political debate. For instance, *Utopia XXI* criticizes today’s political debate on the grounds that it almost always revolves around “croissance, emploi, production, impôts, terrorisme, immigration” (90) whereas it does not focus on the essential, namely happiness and wellbeing. Caron argues that this lack of happiness generates “une société de consolmation” which can be defined as “une société de la consolation par la consommation” (89). In other words, we tend to constantly buy something new in order to compensate for our lack of happiness. Given that the society of “consolmation” has led to the Anthropocene<sup>38</sup>, it would be better if it could be replaced with « une société de modération” (Caron, 369). This “société de moderation” is similar to de Geus’ concept of “utopia of sufficiency” since it depicts a self-sufficient society in which “happiness is achieved by limited needs” (2002: 19). The Ecotopian society embodies Caron’s “société de modération” or De Geus’ “utopia of sufficiency”.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Ecotopia got rid of the old political structures by implementing a slow and gradual transition process from capitalism to green socialism instead of a sudden revolution. Although the transition period was hectic, many Ecotopians were excited about it (49). Indeed, several Ecotopians argue that this transition toward a more sustainable and ecological political system was “a unifying and reassuring force” (50). Moreover, despite some major dislocations, “no one suffered seriously from a lack of food, shelter, clothing or medical treatment” (49) because each citizen had what he really needed.

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<sup>38</sup> The Anthropocene refers to “the new epoch of geological time in which human activity is considered such a powerful influence on the environment, climate and ecology of the planet that it will leave a long-term signature in the strata record”

Macfarlane R. “Generation Anthropocene: How humans have altered the planet for ever.” *The Guardian*. 1 April 2014. 13/10/18. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocenealtered-planet-for-ever>>.

### ***Ecotopia's important contribution to social well-being, happiness and economy***

In addition to their valuable contribution to the political debate, green utopian fictions can also serve as an inspiration for the architecture, education and economy. They can thus have a direct impact on the social well-being and happiness of a society. As a result, the term “sustainability”, which obviously encompasses environmental ethics, also takes social, ethical, political and economic aspects into account. All these aspects are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In order to be really sustainable, a society has to respect each of those aspects. The fact that *Ecotopia* tries to take “all the costs” into account emphasizes that the concept of sustainability is very broad and multidimensional. In the subsequent section, we will mainly focus on the economic and social sustainability as the other dimensions have already been dealt with.

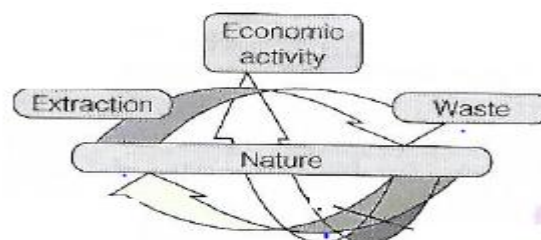
It might be hypothesized that Schumacher’s influential book *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (1973) has greatly inspired Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975). Indeed, besides an explicit reference to it on page 101, Schumacher’s view about the economy is highly similar to Callenbach’s opinion. For instance, they both emphasize that “the most sustainable scale of living is the local” (Hopkins, 2008: 69). Schumacher and Callenbach also both reject globalisation, capitalism and mass production because “such scale led to a dehumanisation of people and the economic systems”<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, Schumacher and Callenbach’s opinions challenge consumer capitalism because they favour small and human-scale companies instead of big corporations. In addition, instead of maximizing profitability, they advocate jobs which provide satisfaction, craft skills and quality of human relationships.

Callenbach also actively promotes a circular economy. In Doppelt’s book entitled *The Power of Sustainable Thinking*, the circular economy is defined as a “circular-borrow-use-return system” (2010: 33). Doppelt explains that the circular economy contrasts with our current linear economy which is a “take-make-waste economic system” (2016: 18). Moreover, the linear economy generates pollution, exploits and depletes the natural resources. Accordingly, in order to achieve a more sustainable economy like the one portrayed in *Ecotopia*, there has to be a shift from a linear economy to a circular economy in which the materials extracted from the natural resources are directly designed to be assembled into new products which could easily be recycled. When these products become waste, they either

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<sup>39</sup> Bunting M. “Small is beautiful – an economic idea that has sadly been forgotten.” *The Guardian*. 10 November 2011. 14/10/18. <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/10/small-is-beautiful-economic-idea>>.

come back to nature since they are not environmentally harmful or they are directly reused or recycled. The circular economy is thus a “renewable resource-based economy” (Cohen et al, 2016: 231). The following schema illustrates the circular economy.



(Doppelt, 2016: 34)

Instead of increasing the Gross National Product (GNP), Ecotopia seeks to maximize the collective happiness of the population. Callenbach argues that the gross domestic product and the economic growth should be replaced by “le Bonheur national brut” (Caron, 369) and by degrowth<sup>40</sup>. The circular economy put forward in *Ecotopia* is thus a limits-to-growth economy. Weston notices that for the Ecotopians “a catastrophic decline in the GNP [...] might prove politically useful” (48) since humans are not meant for production and consumption but for being happy and in tune with nature (47). Indeed, the GNP is of little value in the Ecotopian society since “social costs and benefits are the real measure” (McCutcheon, 2015: 155). As a result, the Ecotopian circular economy takes the “interconnectedness of the economic, social and natural systems” (Doppelt, 2016: 208) into account. This interconnectedness echoes deep ecology. To sum up, the Ecotopian economy is “a sound attempt to incorporate environmental ethics into an economic system which preserves long-run viability and stability at the expense [...] of short-run economic growth and resource consumption” (Tschachler, 1984: 304). However, as already mentioned, a possible flaw that can be directed against the Ecotopian economy is that it fails to provide enough details about how their economic system concretely works.

With regard to social sustainability, the Ecotopian society is based on cooperation and social interactions instead of exploitation. Indeed, the Ecotopians prefer to consider themselves as partners instead of employees. In addition, the benefits are equally divided among them because each Ecotopian is a shareholder of the company in which he works. As already explained, given that work is a pleasurable and fulfilling activity, the distinction between work and play is fuzzy. For instance, Weston even states that “you cannot [...] tell

<sup>40</sup> “By ‘degrowth’, we understand a form of society and economy which aims at the well-being of all and sustains the natural basis of life”.

“What is degrowth?” *Degrowth*. s.d. 16/03/19. < <https://www.degrowth.info/en/what-is-degrowth/> >.

when an Ecotopian is working, and when he is at leisure” (172). Callenbach makes a case for the reduction of the weekly work time since it not only increases the worker’s free time and well-being but it also doubles the number of jobs. This political measure was necessary after Ecotopia’s secession since many workers lost their jobs at that time.

In addition, *Ecotopia* is also socially sustainable since the gap between the rich and the poor has been considerably reduced. This stems from the fact that maximum wages are limited, no inheritance is permitted and a decent universal “minimal-guaranteed income” (174) is allocated. However, as already described in the section devoted to *Ecotopia*’s flaws, there are still some poor and rich although Ecotopia claims to have eliminated the income differences. Another inconsistency might be noticed in the fact that the “Ecotopian enterprises generally behave much like capitalists enterprises” (101). Indeed, a few Ecotopian companies compete with each other and try to boost their profits. Nonetheless, despite some similarities, the Ecotopian companies are not capitalistic since tax is only paid by the companies and since firms have to respect tough “ecological regulations” (101) as well as Schumacher’s socially sustainable principles.

The picture below portrays the Ecotopian work habits which are much more human-centred, respectful and decent for the workers. By way of example, the Ecotopians usually work in small groups or in workshops because they like to discuss, debate and exchange their ideas. As a result, they hate working in assembly lines because it entails a certain degree of dehumanization. Besides being pleasurable and human-scale, the work has to contribute to the workers’ well-being and quality of life.



In conclusion, the three basic conditions to achieve sustainability are globally met in *Ecotopia*. Firstly, the social sustainability is respected since everyone has access to education

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<sup>41</sup> EON – The Ecological Options Network: Media with a planetary perspective. “*Ecotopia* Then and Now.” YouTube. 1 May 2010. 13/10/18. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYc9myGMmTc>>.

and has a decent position in a well-organised society which promotes social well-being, happiness and personal fulfilment. However, the Ecotopian education is not completely free and the Ecotopians might lack individual freedom given the strict rules imposed by the government. Secondly, the Ecotopian economy is sustainable since it is circular and viable in the long-run. Nonetheless, we might wonder what Ecotopia does with those who disagree on its tough regulations with regard to company management. Finally, the environmental sustainability is achieved thanks to their increased ecological awareness and their stable-state which aims to regenerate natural resources. Nevertheless, the Ecotopians are heavily reliant on renewable energy which is actually environmentally harmful.

### **Callenbach's creative imagination and hope for the future**

As mentioned in Johns-Putra et al.'s *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, "literature probes the thorny question of what it might mean to live sustainably" (2017: 4). Given that literature is the site of imagination, it has the potential to help us to envision which type of future society might be sustainable. It thus enables us to imagine another world that helps us to move forward. This creative process of envisioning a new sustainable society is precisely at the core of Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. Likewise, Berry emphasizes the "value of ecotopian imaginaries in an age of ecological crisis" (2016: 5). In his article on "Utopianism and colonialism", Ashcroft also highlights the considerable significance of imagination by stating that "although not everything we imagine may be achievable, what is never imagined cannot be achieved" (2007: 24). Similarly, Hopkins (the founder of the Transition Movement and professor of permaculture) argues that "what look like an insurmountable challenge [...] [can] be tackled with a united effort and with great imagination" (2008: 115).

Considering that dreams and imagination are inextricably linked, Caron stresses the importance of utopian dreamers which "ont montré le chemin" (12). Indeed, much of our current social and scientific progress is due to their visionary and utopian ideas. For instance, the dreams of equal rights for women, blacks and gays were first thought by visionary people who then struggled to achieve their dreams. It is worth mentioning that the pursuit of a social dream that we should never abandon characterises utopianism. The struggle for a more sustainable society is best conveyed in literature since it is a crucial vehicle for the imagination, dreams and possible achievements. Similarly, Garforth argues that ecological utopias emphasize the good life since they "fortif[y] a dream and pit imagination against

impending catastrophe” (2005: 400). Given that the bulk of the governments have not committed themselves enough to implement sustainable changes, Berry holds the view that “it is up to [...] authors to imagine forwards new ways of being that respond to an issue so great it potentially threatens to compromise the ability of life to flourish on this planet” (2016: 1). This view is completely shared by Dion who states that: “nous avons besoin de changer d’imaginaire, de culture et, à chaque époque, cela a été de la responsabilité des artistes [...] de produire des livres, des films [...] qui décrivent ces mutations”<sup>42</sup>. Ecological utopias are thus of vital importance since they are based on creative imagination and dreams.

In the same vein, Hopkins puts the emphasis on “the concept of visioning [given] the power that a [positive] vision of the future can have” (2008: 79). The idea is thus to motivate people to act by portraying “a picture of the future so enticing that people instinctively feel drawn towards it” (2008: 79). In an interview called “*Ecotopia: Then and Now*”<sup>43</sup>, Callenbach mentions that his intention was to create a positive vision which would galvanize people. Hopkins’ *Transition Handbook* and Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (thanks to the video “*Ecotopia: Then and Now*”) even suggest concrete images of what the future sustainable society might look like. Thanks to these pictures, it can be seen that Callenbach’s portrayal of *Ecotopia* is similar to Hopkins’ depiction of a Transition Town. The picture above represents a low-carbon society which has achieved its transition from oil dependency to local resilience whereas the picture below (on the left) depicts the Ecotopian shared backyard in which vegetables are produced. This picture illustrates the Ecotopian attempt to keep agriculture in urban areas. It is worth mentioning that gardening is promoted in *Ecotopia* since it is a very healthy activity. On the right, there is a picture of a sustainable Ecotopian wooden house with solar panels and with a small wind turbine. In addition, the house is surrounded by trees since the Ecotopians love trees and heavily use tree agriculture.

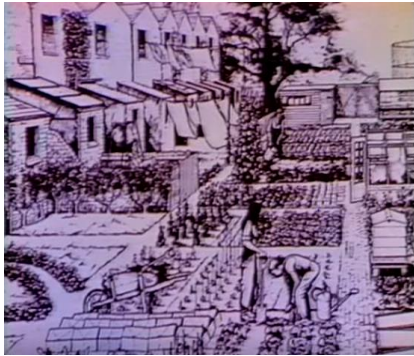
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<sup>42</sup> Dion C. & Laurent M. “Dossier pédagogique.” *Demain le film*. 2016. 07/03/18. <[https://www.demainlefilm.com/sites/default/files/assets/demain\\_dossier\\_pedagogique.pdf](https://www.demainlefilm.com/sites/default/files/assets/demain_dossier_pedagogique.pdf)>.

<sup>43</sup> EON. *op.cit.*



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The fact that ecotopias tend to be associated with dreams whereas ecodystopias tend to look like nightmares is confirmed by Marzano who states that the “Ecotopia[n] society [is] the dream of the 1970s” (2013: 2) which sharply contrasts with the “nightmares of contemporary dystopias” (2013: 4). On this basis, it may be inferred that *Ecotopia* embodies what Buhle calls a “green dream” (2001: 149). The term “green dream” refers to an imagined world in which utopian dreams intersect with ecological concerns. In keeping with this call for more dreams and imagination, Bloch had already mentioned that “people have always dreamed of [...] the better life that might be possible” (cited in Ashcroft’s article “Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures”: 2017: 7). Indeed, the power of the utopian thought stems from the fact that humans constantly hope and dream of a better future society. Given that everyone usually prefers to see their dreams come true (and not their nightmares), we could wonder why there is an overall tendency to portray nightmarish ecological visions. Here are some hypotheses which could explain the success of the ecodystopian literature. Firstly, a number of readers like suspense, fear and dreadful warnings about the future consequences of climate change. Secondly, the plot of ecodystopias is generally enthralling and intriguing while the plot of ecological utopias tends to be more descriptive and hence, boring. Finally, many readers like overcoming obstacles such as ecological catastrophes.

<sup>44</sup> “Recommended Reading: 'The Transition Handbook – From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience' by Rob Hopkins.” *Studio 425*. 4 January 2012. 14/10/18. <<http://studio425.blogspot.com/2012/01/recommended-reading-transition-handbook.html>>.

<sup>45</sup> EON. *op.cit.*



Unlike ecodystopias which are based on fear and which “try to engage people in action by painting apocalyptic visions of the future as a way of scaring them into action” (Hopkins, 2008: 79), green utopias rely on the element of hope which is, according to Bloch, “superior to fear”<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, the element of hope is, by definition, crucial in ecological utopias since a utopia is “the spirit of hope itself [and] the essence of desire for a better world” (Ashcroft, 2007: 411). This hope and desire for a better as well as more sustainable society can directly be related to Drennig’s article “Cities of desire” in which he argues that Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* embodies “a city of desire” (2010: 148). Indeed, he explains that the role of the ecotopian literature is to convey desires to live in a positive and inspiring sustainable society such as the one portrayed in *Ecotopia*. This idea of desire is also supported by Ashcroft who explains that utopias are “the essence of a desire for a better world” (2007: 411). In the same vein, Hopkins argues that green utopias “formulate what a desirable sustainable world might look like” (2008: 94).

Dion and Laurent’s *Demain*, Hopkins’ *Transition Handbook*, Dion’s *Après Demain* and Hawken’s *Drawdown* all stress the need for telling new inspiring and positive feel-good stories in which humans are able to find solutions to the current ecological problems. This is suggested by the following quote:

It’s fascinating how [...] we are brilliant at imagining our own extinction. We make films about whether we’ll all be wiped out by zombies or nuclear bombs or diseases or robots [...] But where are the films about us actually turning something round and... solving the problem? We do not really have those films... Human beings [are] so ingenious and so creative, we could do extraordinary things, but for that we need to tell ourselves those stories (Hopkins)<sup>47</sup>.

Dion goes on to say that « showing solutions, telling a feel-good story...this may be the best way to solve the ecological, economic and social crises »<sup>48</sup>. In an interview entitled “Toxique mondialisation: comment résister?”<sup>49</sup>, Dion makes clear that human societies were built on “récits” and on “des architectures qui conditionnent nos comportements”. He also maintains that today’s society needs to be given an ecological, solution-based and feel-good story in order to replace the current dominant consumerist, growth-oriented and hyper-technological

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<sup>46</sup> Bloch E. « The Principle of Hope Introduction. » *Marxists*. s.d. 14/10/18. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/introduction.htm>>.

<sup>47</sup> Hopkins R. « Demain ? » *Demain Le Film*. 2015. 13/10/18. <<https://www.demain-lefilm.com/en>>.

<sup>48</sup> Dion C. & Laurent M. « The Story. » *Demain Le Film*. 2015. 13/10/18. <<https://www.demain-lefilm.com/en/film>>.

<sup>49</sup> Laidi A. « Toxique mondialisation : comment résister ? » *France 24: Entretien de l’Intelligence Economique*. 27 June 2018. 13/10/18. <<https://www.france24.com/fr/20180626-entretien-intelligence-economique-dion-ecologie-mondialisation>>.

story. To support his argument, he cites Huston's concept of "L'espèce fabulatrice". According to her, we need to tell stories which give us hope and which unite as well as mobilise us. It is worth pointing out that storytelling is at the core of literature. However, it should be acknowledged that Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (which was published in the seventies) had a limited impact and did not manage to solve the environmental crisis. This failure might be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* was ahead of its time since people were not aware of climate change at the time. Secondly, this novel failed to be really successful because it was maybe too marginal, alternative and hippie-like. Despite this seeming failure, ecological utopias such as *Ecotopia* are now being rediscovered because they resonate with the current environmental urgency.

### **The power of positive thinking generated by *Ecotopia* and Weston's inward change**

Even though Buell maintains that "apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (cited in Garrard, 2012: 101), I will argue that deep ecological utopias are as powerful as (and maybe even more powerful than) ecological dystopias. In other words, just like apocalyptic thinking, positive and sustainable thinking can make the readers aware of their individual responsibility in terms of sustainability. Contrary to ecodystopias, green utopias are "inspirational, harness hope instead of guilt [as well as] optimism instead of fear" (Holden cited in Hopkins, 2008: 1). Green utopias therefore "harness the power of a positive vision" (2008: 94). Indeed, by suggesting engaging alternatives, *Ecotopia*, *Utopia XXI*, *Demain* and *Drawdown* all highlight the need for positive thinking in the context of sustainability. In her article on "Green Utopias", Garforth emphasizes the usefulness of ecological utopias since they enable us to "find routes out of the ecological crisis and map the possibilities of better, greener futures" (2005: 393). Similarly, Jameson recognizes the necessity of reading deep ecological utopias in the current environmental and socio-economic crisis since "we need utopias now more than ever" (cited in Kumar, 2010: 564).

In his article on "Ecotopia, Sustainability and vision", de Geus demonstrates that thanks to a change of perspective, some questions which might entail negative attitudes towards utopias (such as "is this utopia feasible in practice?" or "to what consequences could the introduction of this utopia lead?") can easily be turned into questions which involve positivity (such as "what can I learn from this utopia?" or "is this utopia a source of original ideas and does it indicate relevant ways for solving our modern social problems?") (2002:

195). In other words, given that *Ecotopia* is one of the first avant-garde and visionary ecological utopias, its exemplary environmental ethics might be a rich source of inspiration for today's environmental crisis. The following quote encapsulates the approach adopted by *Demain*, *Ecotopia* and *Utopia XXI*: “plutôt que de baisser les bras, ce livre veut nous aider à surmonter la peur, la confusion et l'apathie, pour passer à l'acte” (Hawken's *Drawdown*, back cover). Indeed, instead of frightening people with what could probably happen in the future, these books emphasize the concrete sustainable solutions which we can do to reverse climate change. This optimistic and solution-based approach embodies the power of positive thinking.

Interestingly, Hawken adopts a positive mindset about the ecological crisis because he views climate change as an opportunity which might prompt us to change and re-imagine our means of consumption and production. Similarly, given that Garforth argues that the “environmental crisis can prompt a reconceptualization of the good life for human societies”, she considers the ecological crisis as an “opportunity for enhancing and expanding human well-being” (2005: 393, 395). Hawken also explains that he views climate change as “une invitation à bâtir, à innover, à tout changer; [à] ouvr[ir] la voie de la créativité, de la compassion et du génie” (2017: 23). Accordingly, this highlights the power of positive thinking and the fact that, just like utopias, climate change is a question of perspective since the willingness to combat it might be stimulating and motivating.

In her article on “Green Utopias”, Garforth indicates that deep ecological utopias stress the significance of human's agency (2005: 397). Indeed, believing that the reader has the ability to change can help him/her to change positively towards sustainability. This is what Hopkins calls “the psychology of change” (2008: 84). This view is also shared by Jouret who, in his article “The power of positive thinking”, contends that “imagining the desired outcome will help deliver that result” (2010: 230). Therefore, ecotopias can engage people by showing them that they have the power to change and act in favour of sustainability because many solutions are within their reach. Building the reader's confidence and explaining that s/he is able to change are thus crucial. This was precisely Callenbach's original intention when he wrote *Ecotopia*:

My intention [...] was to push readers up against a wall of manifestly possible alternatives so they would have to ask themselves: ‘Well, we could do all these things – Why do not we?’ and also to confront that other ancient question: ‘If not now, when?’ (Callenbach cited in McCutcheon, 2015: 151)

Deep ecological utopias might also increase the reader's determination and motivation to adopt a sustainable behaviour since they are empowering, enthusiastic, hopeful and optimistic.

In what follows, I will outline how the power of positive thinking might contribute to sustainability. At the heart of Verdugo's article "The positive psychology of sustainability" lies the idea that showing positive and appealing images or emotions might be stronger and more efficient than showing negative images or feelings. His theory can easily be transferred to ecological utopias which portray positive images of a future society and to ecological dystopias which depict negative images of what could happen if we do not change our polluting practices. Verdugo also maintains that "positive psychological antecedents [...] as well as positive psychological consequences" (2012: 651) might give rise to sustainable behaviours. This is exactly what is done in *Ecotopia* as well as in *Demain*. Positive psychological antecedents refer to the empowerment of citizens by telling them that they have the ability to change. By contrast, positive psychological consequences are the psychological benefits of acting in favour of the environment such as happiness, well-being, personal growth, optimism and harmonious relationships with others as well as with the environment. These positive incentives might thus foster sustainable behaviours. In other words, the search for happiness as well as a high quality of life can lead to environmentally-friendly actions. Therefore, not only nature but also ourselves derive benefits from acting in favour of the environment. Similarly, by showing that the people who implement positive sustainable changes are happy, *Ecotopia* as well as *Demain* make the readers or viewers want to be happy and hence, part of this ecological, collective and solidary community.

In keeping with the idea of personal growth, Hopkins strongly believes that attention needs to be drawn to "the steps of change that happen inside people" (2008: 87). Indeed, the transition towards sustainability "requires particular inner resources" (Hopkins, 2008: 79). The idea that change comes from within stems from the fact that citizens gradually change their own thinking, lifestyle and behaviour towards more sustainability. This inward change is precisely what could reverse climate change since "to save the planet, [...] we need a radical change in our thinking and behaviour" (Trainer cited in Hopkins, 2008: 79). Mathisen shares the same view because she argues that people need to "change their minds and voluntarily abandon an unsustainable level of material consumption" (2001: 68). This inward change is also expressed in *Ecotopia* on the grounds that Weston gradually changes from the stereotypical American consumerist in the first part of the novel to the eco-friendly and hippie-like citizen

of Ecotopia at the end. He undergoes such a radical change that he decides to stay in Ecotopia since this nation becomes his new “home” (181). Indeed, in Ecotopia, he now feels that he is part of a welcoming, hospitable and sustainable community which endorses a green lifestyle in close contact with nature. However, Callenbach fails to make Weston’s inward change really credible. Indeed, his inward change is hard to believe because the reader never enters Weston’s mind. Moreover, Weston is not a round character as he is too rational and too descriptive.

## **Chapter 5: The considerable impact of Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* on the American West Coast**

*Ecotopia*’s success stems from the fact that it “became immediately absorbed into the popular culture”<sup>50</sup>. It might be hypothesized that *Ecotopia* has also partly influenced the counterculture since this novel was one of the first attempts to portray a sustainable society. Indeed, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* has concretely expressed what many hippies from the area of Berkeley had dreamt of. By helping people to envision sustainable alternatives, *Ecotopia* highlights the power of literature as it makes sustainable cities more palpable and concrete in fictional forms. Storytelling can thus engage its readers by portraying positive images of future ecological cities. Similarly, Drennig also stresses the significance of *Ecotopia* on the imaginary of the region because “the desires Callenbach articulates have shaped the narratives of this region” (Drennig, 2010: 148). As already mentioned, *Ecotopia* has also left a lasting legacy that has affected literature since Callenbach has “coined a name for the sub-genre dedicated to ecological utopias in which *Ecotopia* [...] is the major landmark” (Meinhold cited in Thompson & Kaplan, 2014: 548).

*Ecotopia* has immediately been a bestseller in the region portrayed by the novel (California, Washington and Oregon). It has even led to the creation of a journal called “Seriatim” (Downton, 2009: 103). The impact of the novel has been so large that “there are still people on America’s West Coast who refer to themselves as ‘ecotopians’ ” (Downton, 2009: 103). As already explained, the narrator’s name Weston alludes to the Westward Expansion which considers the American West as a dream and a good place. In his article entitled “Cities of desire: Ecotopia and the Mainstreet Cascadia Imaginary”, Drennig identifies the Mainstreet Cascadia as the region (from Portland via Seattle to Vancouver)

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<sup>50</sup> Timberg S. “The novel that predicted Portland.” *The New York Times*. 12 December 2008. 13/10/18. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/14/fashion/14ecotopia.html>>.

which has been the most influenced by Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. However, Drennig fails to mention *Ecotopia*'s great impact on Northern California and especially on San Francisco as well as on Santa Cruz. For instance, the Ecotopian environmental ethics with regard to waste and its stable-state might have contributed to the creation of the Zero Waste Movement in San Francisco.

Drennig goes on to explain that Portland, Vancouver and Seattle have strongly been influenced by Callenbach's *Ecotopia* because this novel portrays desirable green cities. Indeed, *Ecotopia* served as a "how-to-do guide for creating cities" and as an inspiring model of healthiness and sustainability (2010: 152). For instance, just like the Ecotopian cities, Portland, Vancouver and Seattle have a low carbon footprint since they foster public and non-polluting means of transport. In addition, Timberg (a journalist from The New York Times) claims that "much of Portland, Ore., with its public transport, slow-growth planning and eat-local restaurants can seem like Ecotopia made reality"<sup>51</sup>. As a result, Timberg argues that *Ecotopia* was the "1970s cult novel [...] that predicted Portland"<sup>52</sup>.

Moreover, these cities have been completely rethought in order to integrate their natural surroundings and to improve people's quality of life. Indeed, Drennig explains that "all three cities feature impressive natural scenery and access to the outdoors that in turn engenders the bodies that represent such quality-of-life" (2010: 150). Just like the Ecotopian cities, these cities have tried to respect their natural bioregion in order to minimize the human impact on nature. In addition, many city dwellers of Portland, Seattle and Vancouver are actively engaged in the protection of natural species and like hiking in the surrounding wilderness. Consequently, by rejecting the traditional opposition between city and nature, these cities have tried to reconcile the urban and the natural landscape. All these elements have led Drennig to consider "Mainstreet Cascadia as a utopian space" (2010: 151).

In order to compensate for the pollution which these cities still emit and to remain in touch with nature, Vancouver, Seattle and Portland have decided to preserve and to create additional wilderness areas, forests and parks. This political will reflects their ecological sensibility and aims to provide the urbanites with a higher quality of life thanks to great natural outdoors. The city dwellers tend to consider these outdoors as a playground and as a space of leisure for running, hiking and biking. However, as Drennig points out,

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Ecotopia [has been] built on ignorance of who has lived here or how anyone might, indeed make a living here. How effectively has the environmental movement reckoned with the lives of people who labor in the country, those who bring timber for our houses and meat and grain for our tables (2010: 151).

What this quote reveals is that there is a tension between the city dwellers who view the outdoors as a space of leisure and “those for whom the outdoors does not equal a space of leisure” (Drennig, 2010: 152). Many farmers or lumberjacks (who live sustainably and who contribute to social as well as economic sustainability) have been expropriated so that their land could be turned into parks for the urbanites. This conflict between the urban dwellers and those who work the land comes to the fore in the nineties in Portland where the lumber industry workers “took protest [against] their perceived enemies, the city-based environmentalists whose support of the Endangered Species Act seemed to value birds over working families and their way of life” (Drennig, 2010: 152). Even if Ecotopia seeks to incorporate nature in cities and to surround its green cities by wilderness areas for the well-being of its inhabitants, Ecotopia especially advocates decentralisation. Indeed, instead of expropriating those who work on a farm or in the forests, Ecotopia encourages the creation of minicities and the destruction of old city areas so that the land could be turned into parks or forests.

Moreover, Drennig explains that there is a striking difference between the mythical Mainstreet Cascadia and the “ ‘Real’ Mainstreet Cascadia” (2010: 151). This stems from the fact that “Vancouver may market itself as a model city; the reality, however, is full of ‘dirty little secrets’ ” (2010: 153). For instance, although Vancouver claims to be a clean, eco-friendly and healthy city, False Creek (the main watercourse of Vancouver) is full of toxic sediments (Drennig, 2010: 153). Furthermore, despite incentives to use bicycles, the number of cars has skyrocketed. Finally, Drennig deplores that economic forces often outweigh ecological issues. He takes the example of the shape of Seattle which has not been determined by “ecologically-aware governance, but [by] booming economic forces” (2010: 153).

Although *Ecotopia* was a bestseller in the seventies, it became forgotten in the eighties because it was then considered as “a dusty curio without much lasting impact”<sup>53</sup>. However, the novel is currently again successful since it is “now being rediscovered [and] speaks to our ecological present”<sup>54</sup>. Indeed, as already explained, utopias are resurfacing because they involve the rediscovery of inspiring models that make sense in today’s context. It is the reason

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

why this novel is now required reading in many universities such as the University of Berkley. Even if the novel *Ecotopia* has had a considerable impact (especially local), Callenbach as an author has not been very well known and *Ecotopia*'s success has been limited. This might be explained by the fact that *Ecotopia* was too visionary, alternative and hippie-like. Indeed, Timberg states that "the book was ahead of his time"<sup>55</sup>.

It is worth noting that the impact of *Ecotopia* was not limited to the local region where it was first published because the novel "has now sold nearly one million copies and been translated in more than twelve languages"<sup>56</sup>. For instance, *Ecotopia* has been translated in French for the eco-friendly population of Quebec. The novel was also a bestseller in Germany in the seventies because it was published at the time of the creation of the influential German Green Movement. Even though the original region of Ecotopia is privileged in terms of its natural resources and climate, Callenbach asserts in the interview "*Ecotopia: Then and Now*" that "there could be an Ecotopia anywhere". The only condition for an area to be considered as an Ecotopia is the willingness to achieve a stable-state in which people have "a lifestyle suitable to the bioregion" (Kato, 2014: 38). Indeed, what really matters is having a vision and a political will. Callenbach takes the example of New England which shares more and more features with Ecotopia since New England has been largely reforested, for instance. In addition, as already mentioned, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* has also had a large impact on the Dutch politics since this novel has contributed to ignite a political debate on sustainability by suggesting inspiring and positive alternatives.

Surprisingly, *Ecotopia* has also had a considerable impact on Japan thanks to its translation in Japanese. Although *Ecotopia* especially advocates the model of self-sufficient and decentralised minicities, *Ecotopia* demonstrates that major cities such as San Francisco can become sustainable. This has led Kato (author of the article: "A Study on the Restoration of Urban Ecology: Focus on the Concept of Home Place in Callenbach's *Ecotopia*") to analyse whether this Ecotopian template could serve as an inspiration for Tokyo. Although it is a "challenge to achieve sustainability in urban regions" (Kato, 2014: 36), a citizen movement called "Preserve Motomachi Park Movement" has coalesced to protect this municipal park against the construction of a skyscraper. Even though this citizen movement was relatively small, it is an "inspiring example that Ecotopian principles can emerge and

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Hevesi D. "Ernest Callenbach, Author of 'Ecotopia', Dies at 83." *The New York Times*. 27 April 2012. 14/10/18. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/books/ernest-callenbach-author-of-ecotopia-dies-at-83.html>>.



thrive even within the context of large cities such as Tokyo” (Kato, 2014: 35). Finally, the park was fortunately saved, which shows that besides empowering local communities, grassroots activism can also have a great impact on the public decision-making.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it is now possible to state that Callenbach's *Ecotopia* can be considered as a deep ecological utopia. Indeed, Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, which is one of the first attempts to portray a sustainable society, embodies many deep ecological principles. *Ecotopia* espouses a holistic environmental philosophy which views nature as a continuum in which all living beings are interconnected with each other and have the same intrinsic worth. *Ecotopia* thus embraces nature-centred values and rejects anthropocentrism. In addition, the Ecotopian stable-state is based on circularity and epitomizes their deep ecological thinking. This can be explained by the fact that waste is considered as a useful resource which contributes to an infinite food cycle in which waste is used as fertilizer. The Ecotopian stable-state pervades every aspect of their daily life but it especially comes to the fore in their agriculture which bears a resemblance to permaculture. It can be defined as a sustainable, self-reliant and resilient agricultural system which pays attention to the natural patterns and which uses renewable energy. In keeping with their sustainable approach to waste, the Ecotopians prefer to recycle and fix objects. Therefore, capitalism and especially consumerism are called into question since the Ecotopians considerably reduce their consumption and hence, their pollution. Rather than focussing on material possessions, the Ecotopians prefer to promote other values such as solidarity, spirituality and a sense of community. Moreover, given that overpopulation reduces people's quality of life, increases pressure on natural resources and generates waste, Ecotopia advocates reducing its population size, which might seem misanthropic.

Just like the deep ecologists, the Ecotopians deeply value and protect their wilderness as well as their forests. The inhabitants of Ecotopia also posit the view that the best management consists in the least human interference with the ecosystems. Therefore, the Ecotopians practice an ecologically responsible forestry which is based on permaculture and bioregionalism. Moreover, the Ecotopians tend to worship trees, which is reminiscent of Native American cultures. Indeed, given that the Native Americans highly respect and live in harmony with nature, they are a constant source of inspiration for the Ecotopians. Although the Ecotopians have developed green cities such as San Francisco, they actually advocate the creation of decentralised minicities or ecovillages. These minicities are perfectly adapted to their natural bioregion and are resilient since the Ecotopians also practise urban farming. Besides, these decentralised minicities are highly sustainable because they are heavily reliant

on renewable energy. In addition to embodying the ideal mix between the urban and the rural, these eco-friendly minicities illustrate the Ecotopian grassroots activism on the grounds that they are decentralised and run from the bottom-up. All these deep ecological values are transmitted to future generations thanks to education which is one of the pillars of the Ecotopian society.

Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is also a deep ecological utopia since it fulfils each dimension of the multidimensional concept of sustainability. Although Callenbach especially emphasizes the environmental sustainability, the Ecotopian society is also socially and economically sustainable. Interestingly, just like deep ecology, each component of the concept of sustainability is intertwined with each other.

Firstly, the Ecotopian society is socially sustainable because besides having access to education, each Ecotopian has a decent job in a well-organised society which advocates happiness, personal fulfilment and well-being. Moreover, the Ecotopian political system is highly democratic and each citizen is given the opportunity to take part in and to contribute to the political debate. However, *Ecotopia* fails to be a complete hospitable and welcoming utopia since it portrays an isolated and protectionist society which endorses a homogenous and white population. It should be noted that *Ecotopia* still remains a hospitable and open utopia to some extent because it tolerates all minority groups. Moreover, although *Ecotopia* claims to have achieved gender equality, it actually often reinforces gender stereotypes and conveys patriarchal values.

Secondly, the Ecotopian economy is really sustainable because it is circular, small-scale, human-centred and viable in the long term. Therefore, according to the Ecotopians, environmental issues always have to outweigh economic growth. However, although this society seems to be free and loose, it actually imposes strict rules as to property, inheritance and company management which might reduce the individual freedom and agency of its citizens. On this basis, it may be inferred that *Ecotopia* bears a resemblance to an ecototalitarian society. In addition, it is worth wondering what *Ecotopia* does with those who disagree on its stringent ecological regulations such as the hard-working business people.

Finally, the environmental sustainability is obviously respected thanks to their heightened ecological awareness and their stable-state which minimizes waste and which involves the regeneration of the earth's resources. Indeed, the Ecotopians strive to take all the costs into consideration in order to minimize their environmental impact on their natural bioregion.

Nonetheless, the Ecotopian way of life fails to completely take into account the negative environmental and ethical aspects of renewable energy production.

Accordingly, despite the fact that Callenbach's seemingly perfect ecological society conveys revolutionary and inspiring ideas as to environmental, social and economic sustainability, I have tried to demonstrate that this ecological utopia should never be implemented as such for two main reasons. Firstly, a utopia should always remain a dynamic and ongoing process. Secondly, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* contains too many failures, paradoxes and hidden aspects which might turn this ecological utopia in a dystopia.

It has also been shown that today's green utopian resurgence is in dialogue with the seventies' ecological utopias. As a result, re-reading Callenbach's *Ecotopia* from today's perspective makes sense because it involves the rediscovery of inspiring and sustainable models. Similarly, reading deep ecological utopias (such as Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, Robinson's *Pacific Edge*, Hegland's *Into the Forest* and Caron's *Utopia XXI*) is crucial for the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis because they provide us with a positive and sustainable vision of the future society that can directly inspire us. Indeed, green utopias suggest engaging as well as enticing sustainable alternatives and manage to make environmental issues more palpable and concrete in fictional forms. Moreover, the importance of green utopian fictions for the 21<sup>st</sup> has also been stressed because by increasing our ecological consciousness, they might engage with and contribute to trigger an informed political debate on sustainability. Therefore, given the possible political implications of deep ecological utopias, literature or storytelling can have a real impact on concrete decision-making. Literature might also help us to implement a more sustainable behaviour because it contains a number of elements which can bring about a gradual and inward change. Thereby, by sparking our imagination and creativity, green utopias enable us to consider viable, desirable and hopeful alternatives for the future. Similarly, green utopias emphasize the need for telling inspiring, positive and feel-good stories in which humans are empowered and able to find concrete solutions to the current environmental issues. In addition, the power of positive thinking might also contribute to sustainability because people might realise that they can derive benefits from acting in favour of the environment such as an increased well-being, happiness, sense of collectivity and quality of life.

To conclude, it would be recommended that further research be undertaken in order to explain why Callenbach's *Ecotopia* has relatively quickly been forgotten despite its

significant impact. Hypothetically, this might stem from the fact that Callenbach's *Ecotopia* lacks nuances and is too visionary, rational, simplistic as well as descriptive. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to compare *Ecotopia* with its prequel entitled *Ecotopia Emerging* in order to analyse the precise events that led to the secession of Ecotopia from the USA. Even if the reader does not know Ecotopia's detailed political organisation, what matters is that Ecotopia is an ongoing, open and grassroots process in which everyone is actively involved in his/her local bioregion on a daily basis. In addition, just like Weston, the reader could wonder "where is Ecotopia going in the future?" (163). Weston doubts whether Ecotopia will still exist in the future on the grounds that it is threatened by "minorities [...] who desire a greater autonomy" (164). Besides, it would be interesting to know whether more bottom-up and alternative eco-communities such as the ZAD (which are based on a heightened sense of solidarity, equality and sharing) will emerge in the future. Finally, by portraying a positive vision of a desirable sustainable society, literature can act as a driving force behind change because "action without vision just passes the time; vision with action can change the world" (Barker cited in Hopkins, 2008: 131).

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## Abstract

After the 20<sup>th</sup> century (which has often been called the dystopian century), many green utopias influenced by the sixties and the seventies now seem to resurface in several forms. Indeed, green utopian fictions involve the rediscovery of inspiring models which make sense in the 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental crisis. One of them is Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) which has recently been republished and translated into French and Chinese. Given that almost no study has drawn a parallel between Callenbach's *Ecotopia* and Naess' deep ecology (which is an environmental philosophy which dismantles a world centred on human values), the present work investigates why Callenbach's *Ecotopia* can be considered as a deep ecological utopia. Indeed, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* embodies several principles of deep ecology. For instance, *Ecotopia*'s holistic environmental philosophy advocates nature-centred values, circularity and the natural regeneration of the ecosystems. Besides, *Ecotopia* promotes small-scale self-sufficient minicities which are in tune with their bioregion and which embody the ideal mix between the urban and the rural.

But Callenbach's *Ecotopia* also foregrounds a number of social, political, technological and environmental solutions. Therefore, I re-read this novel from today's ecocritical perspective adopting a positive solution-based approach since the significance of *Ecotopia* for the 21<sup>st</sup> environmental issues has not been stressed yet. Indeed, as the present study shows, green utopias (such as Huxley's *Island*, Callenbach's *Ecotopia*, Robinson's *Pacific Edge*, Hegland's *Into the Forest* and Caron's *Utopia XXI*) suggest positive, inspiring and sustainable alternatives which manage to make environmental issues more palpable and concrete in fictional forms. Consequently, Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (and thereby literature) not only raises environmental consciousness, but also has the potential to engage with and contribute to the sustainability debate. However, although Callenbach's seemingly perfect ecological society conveys ground-breaking and inspiring ideas as to environmental, social and economic sustainability, *Ecotopia* should never be implemented as such since a utopia is a dynamic process and since it involves an array of paradoxes, failures and hidden aspects. For example, *Ecotopia* involuntarily reinforces gender stereotypes and its political system is too informal as well as too personal. Finally, it is worth mentioning that Callenbach was a visionary since he invented videoconferencing and even anticipated climate change to some extent.

**Key words:** Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, (deep) ecology, utopia, ecological crisis, ecocriticism, sustainability, resilience, permaculture, bioregionalism, grassroots, environmental ethics, minicities, failures, paradoxes.

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