Permaculture: Principles, Beliefs, and Values
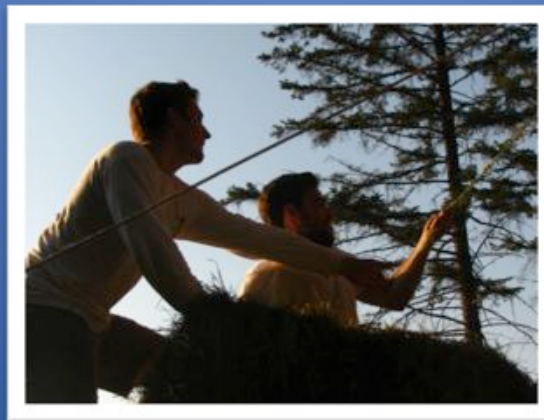
an Ethnographic study

Molly McCahan

B.A. Music Theory and EcoGastronomy

University of New Hampshire

Purpose

- To observe, experience, and analyze the Permaculture principles as they are demonstrated by people actively involved their application.
- To identify the values and beliefs that unify the Permaculture movement.

Research Design and Methods

- Participant observation/experiential learning
  - Achieve empirical learning and build relationships with participants
  - Take field notes
- Personal, Semi-structured interviews
  - Participants (women n=3; men n=3) who self-identify as actively applying Permaculture practices.
  - Recorded and transcribed interviews (30-60 mins)
  - Analyzed for emergent themes

Locations:

- Plymouth, NH
- Dorchester, NH
- Nottingham, NH
- Boscawen, NH
- Greenfield, MA
- Shutesbury, MA
- Middleborough, MA
- Moretown, VT
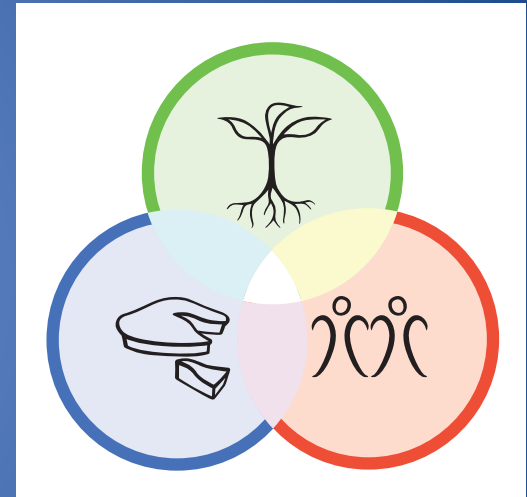- Johnson, VT
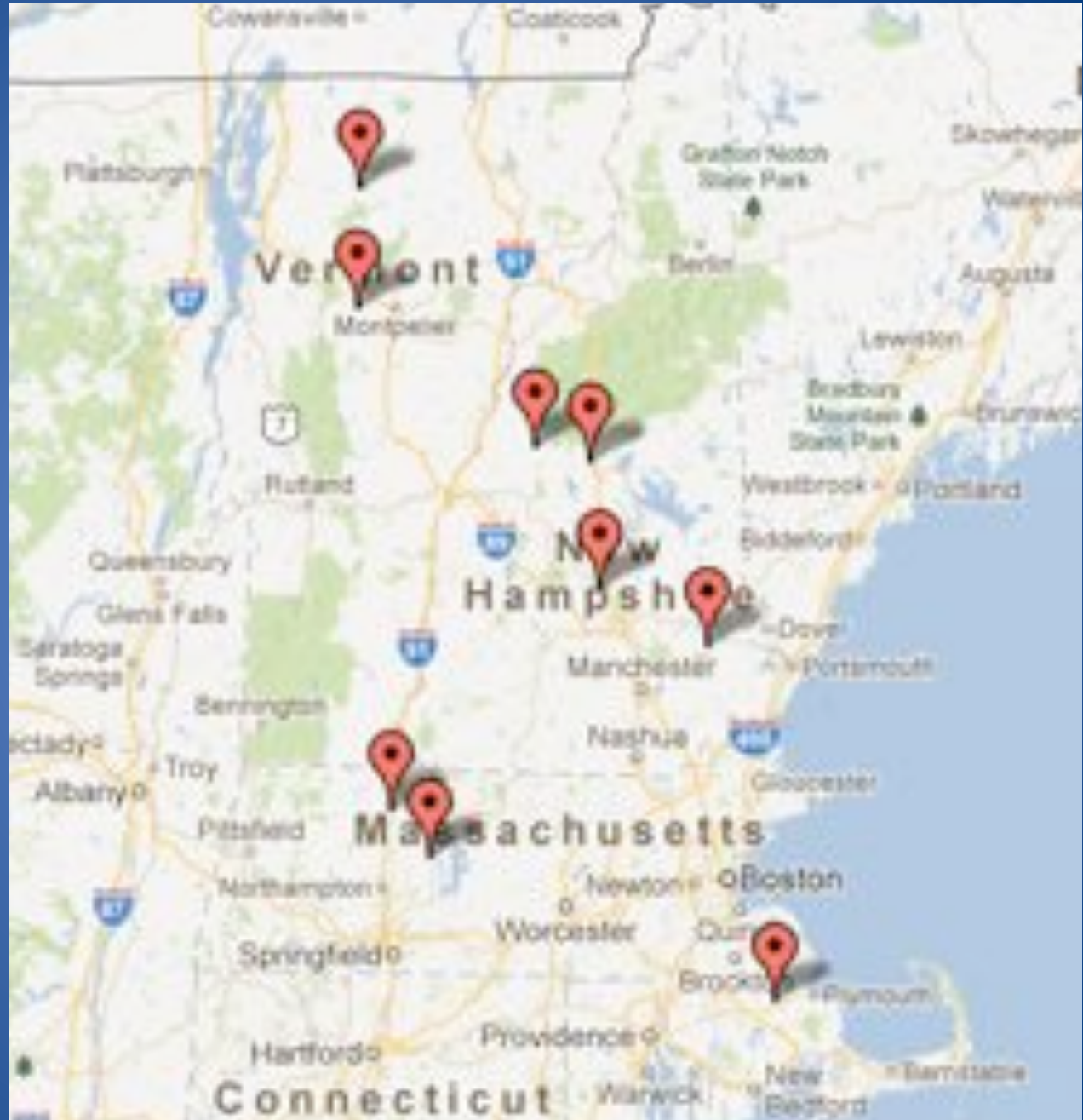
Experiential Learning Model
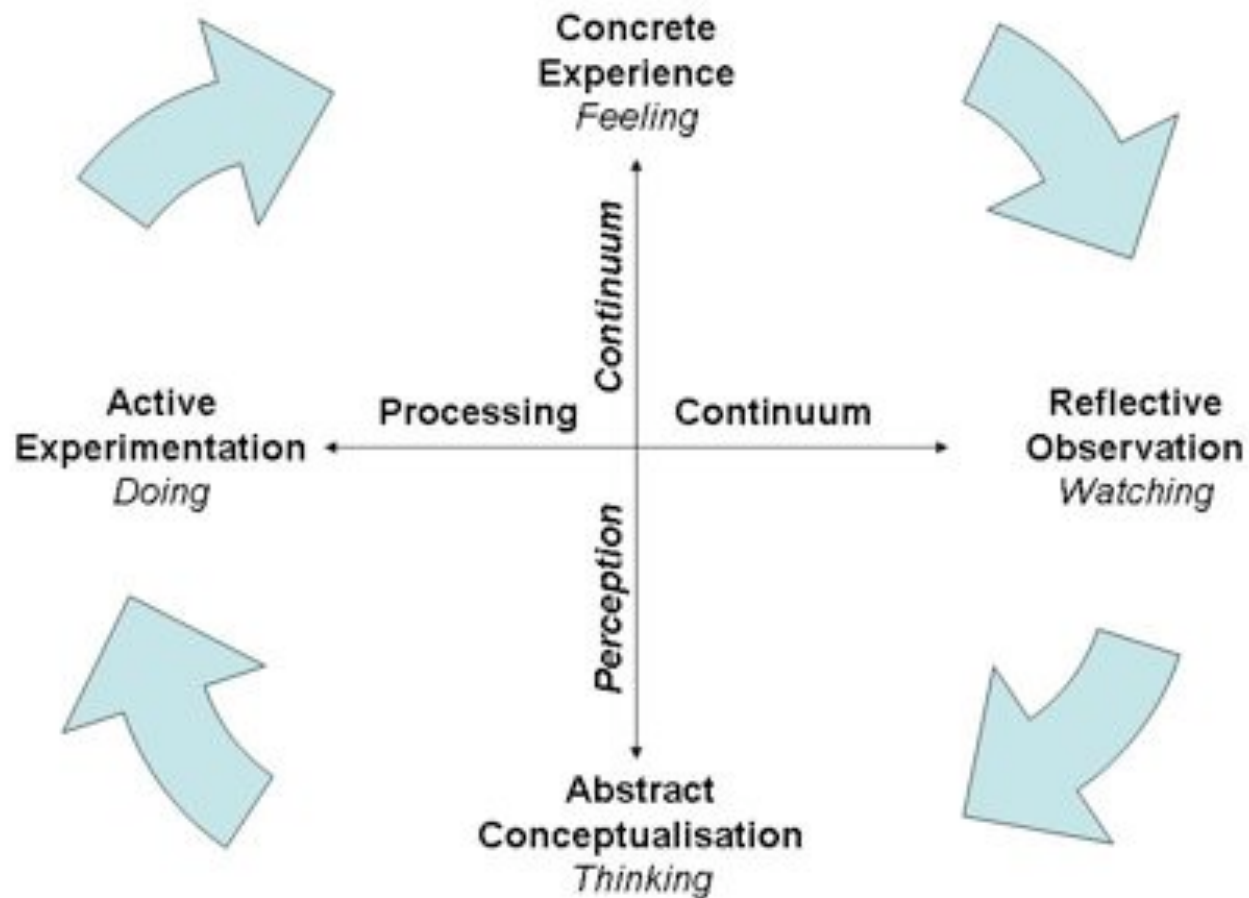
What is Permaculture?

- As defined by David Holmgren:

"The use of systems thinking and design principles that provide the organizing framework for implementing…a permanent (sustainable) culture."

Sustainable: conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources.

Emergent Themes: Beliefs

1. We are in crisis: change is necessary

2. Permaculture principles are driven by the "inner-landscape."

We are in crisis: change is necessary

"We as a people are going to have to be faced with the realities of our choices…that's going to have to hit us in the face before we can really try to understand why it is we're living in a different way."

"…I was…looking for different forms of trying to address the crisis of this era in a more positive and proactive way."

•"I think…that is the ill "
•Permaculture really came as a positive response to these crises…"
•"I want to see the change happen."
•"I'm giving it all to this because the world needs it."

Permaculture principles are driven by the "inner-landscape."

"[You need] a <u>sense of self</u> that will be able to answer the questions: Who am I? What do I need? What do I want to give back? What <u>is enough?</u>"

"The <u>inner landscape</u> is the DNA of the cell. It changes how you perceive. We see things not as they are. We see things as we are."

"As a permaculture designer, my work…is to <u>design cultures</u>."

- "It's a <u>different mentality</u>."
- "…permaculture practice and good permaculture education can help people feel more <u>connected to their context</u> and that it will help some of the <u>healing</u> occur in a big way."
- "…the design process <u>changes the way we see</u>, the way we think…"
- "[it's hard to realize] just how much you have <u>to change how you think</u> about things."
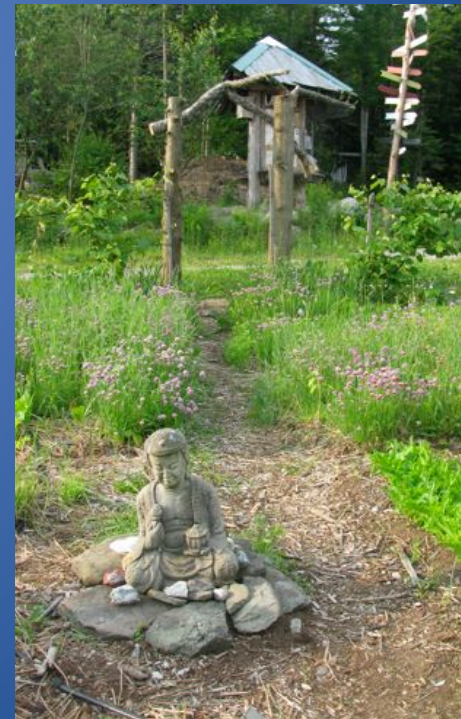
Emergent Themes: Values

1. Responsibility for self and community
   - Sense of Place
2. Engagement
   - Creation, Action, Experience, Awareness
3. Non-material Well-Being
   - Nourishment, Fulfillment, Simplicity

Responsibility for self and community

- "…how we <u>volunteer</u> our time and how committed and how we're <u>accountable</u> and <u>responsible</u>."

- <u>connection</u> to the <u>community</u> and connection to the public face. We are here to try to <u>share</u>, to <u>learn</u> from others, to teach others, to <u>educate</u> people."

- "…recognizing that human beings and the natural systems are not separate. And if they are not separate, that means we owe it to these systems and ourselves to <u>take responsibility</u> for our <u>creation</u> of them."

- "I value the <u>community</u> that I am now a part of because of Permaculture…the <u>community</u> and just having a sense of purpose."

- We all have specific pieces that we have to do in the <u>community</u> system. Different little <u>community</u> niches that we're going to fill."

"At some point in time you're going to have to transcend…<u>solitary</u> existence, patriarchal or dualistic existence, and find a way to <u>participate</u> <u>intergenerationally</u> in a formal way…"

"We need to remain <u>engaged</u> and <u>take ownership</u> for ourselves and take <u>responsibility</u>…"

"There's something very real about that, and that creates a sense of purpose and a <u>sense of place</u> that I think can be found [with] a rooted <u>connection to the land</u>."

Engagement

"I value the ability to <u>co-create</u> with nature."

"I wanted a life that reflected my thoughts on those topics… It was enough to know, but I wanted to <u>do</u> something."

"If I want to get that message across, what I need to do is continue to find ways to <u>epitomize</u> it and <u>live</u> it…"

"…there are a lot of ways that we can take ownership too and make the systems that we want to see, doing it in a <u>collaborative</u> way and in a <u>socially engaged</u> way rather than turning our back and hiding…"

- "It just convinced me that <u>action</u> was of the utmost importance…"

- "You need to <u>do</u> it."

- "I really believe we need to <u>make</u> our world here…I've really tried to <u>practice</u> that."

- "…what we are trying to do here is what I call <u>participatory</u> ecology…"

- "…rather than giving people information… to give people direct <u>experience</u> with the design process…"

- "I'm passing on this earth, I mean, this is like a blip in geologic time. I do not want my blip…to have that deep <u>ratification</u>."

Non-material well-being

> "I value simple things. I really value knowing what keeps me alive and healthy and supporting those things in my world."

> "I've chosen to get into agriculture thinking about health and wellness…"

> "…the most meaningful aspect would be to create a life that you feel really good about."

- "The more I got into Permaculture, the more I wanted to take care of myself.
- "Such diversity in activities, such fulfillment and so many projects and things we want to accomplish that the rest isn't important."
- "I'm living my life's purpose and that…the fulfillment of that is great."
- "I'm really trying to simplify my material possessions but also…my mental processes… simplifying the strata of my ego so that I [can] live a little quietly and a little more calmly, a little more steadily."
- "The values are nourishment rather than profit, fulfillment rather than power, sustainability instead of progress, and relationship rather than product."

Social-Ecological Model of Behavior Change

The Permaculture Flower
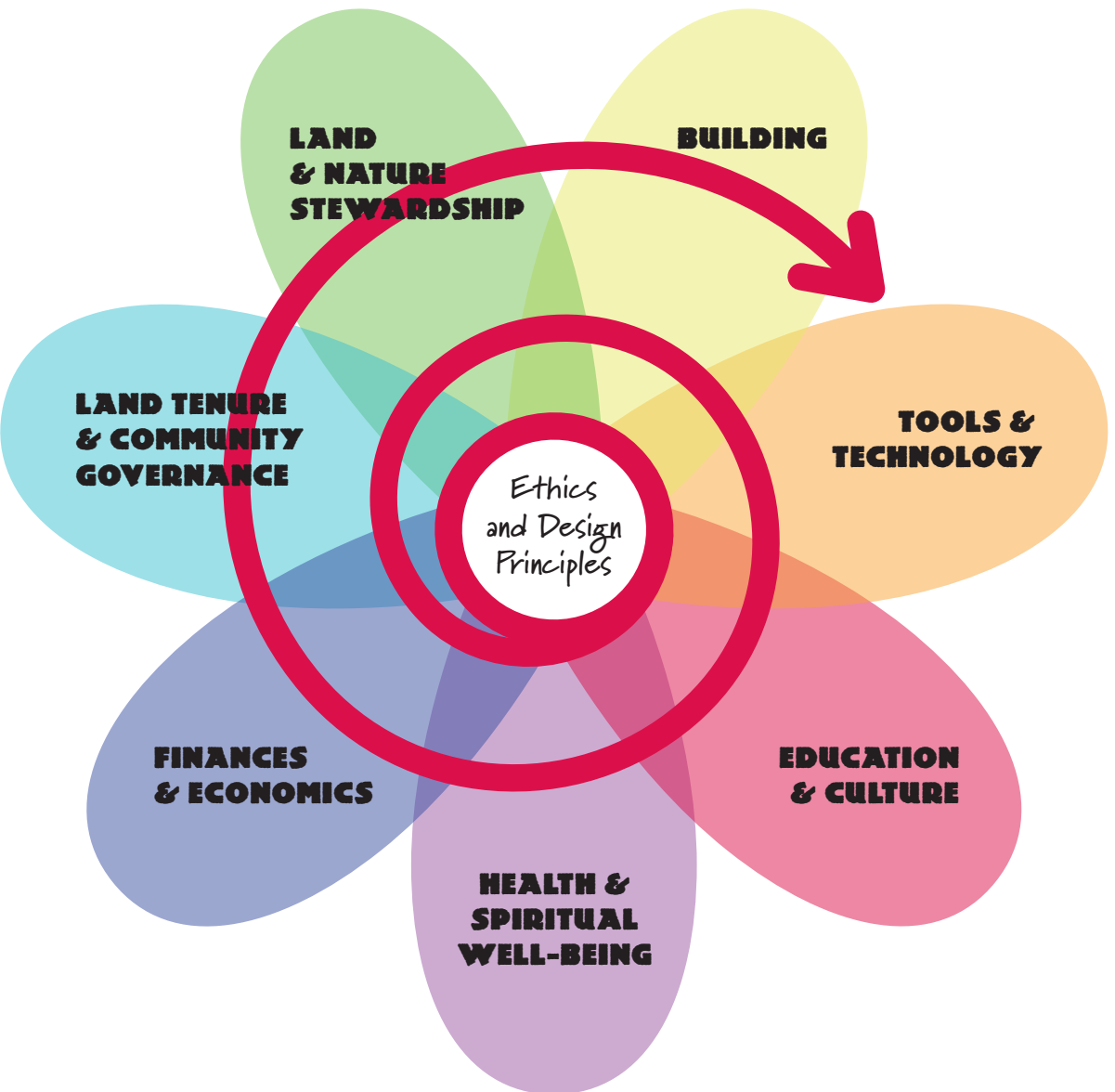
Implications and Applications

- What strategies might best encourage the cultural shift towards sustainable, or even restorative living?

- What are the "real-life" changes that would need to occur in order to implement this cultural shift?

- How would the shift affect our current human systems and what does that imply?