

Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

Report USA Tour

My experience on my first US tour for the Economy for the Common Good was a nice surprise and changed my perception of the USA and, especially, of its people. I had moving encounters during these ten enriching days: from highly skilled people working in renowned organizations to extremely helpful and kind people on the street who helped me out every time I needed assistance.

I did, however, confirm my notion of a country of extreme inequality, poor public infrastructure and widespread ignorance towards the state of the planet and the ecological impact of capitalism. The USA is, objectively, one of the world's wealthiest countries but has one of the highest poverty rates and a huge population dependent upon food stamps. Nevertheless, capitalism still seems to “work” for far too many people. But the tide has started to turn and the desire for system change is shared by more and more citizens. Equally, the number of initiatives that strive for the next system is growing, and maybe it is only a question of time before the next movement will be broad and powerful enough to make it happen. By then the Economy for the Common Good will have entered the stage and will be more deeply rooted in some places of this huge and amazing country.



Christian Felber

Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

I. Dallas – “nice reception”

When I first landed in Dallas, searching for the gate, electricity and Wi-Fi, people were attentive, helpful, and extremely friendly. I did not expect this, and this attitude – openness, helpfulness, friendliness – repeated itself throughout the whole journey and in all places. Although this might just be a superficial way of people getting along and avoiding problems, it was a positive and surprising experience which I appreciate very much. I give a deep bow to the US people.

I was also impressed by the clear design and clean utilities at the Dallas airport where I first touched US ground, a bit like in a film studio, but real. When I moved one terminal to another, that was a long journey – and Dallas is not the airport with the most intense traffic. At one point I heard another passenger in the shuttle saying to his friend: “This is America: Everything is built as if there was endless space.”



Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

II. San Francisco and masses of homeless

In San Francisco, the first stop on the tour, I took the public train from the airport to downtown. The train reminded me of India, and it made such a loud noise that I was unable to read a text. I emerged from the underground between sky- scratching bank towers that caused a feeling of intimidation, disproportion and uneasiness. At the same time, an endless number of homeless people flooded the streets, with a completely lost future, no perspectives, and experiencing the real „American nightmare“. None of them had a „flower in their hair“, which, nonetheless, I could not stop humming.

Local residents told me that other cities buy homeless people a one-way ticket to San Francisco. The climate is mild and allows them to survive the winters. “Free markets” make rents and housing prices skyrocket. It is simply impossible for thousands to pay for a roof over their head – one of the basic human rights.

Passing through Palo Alto and visiting Stanford University in the heart of the world famous Silicon Valley, I thought to myself: Why don't all these people here use their creative and innovative potential to resolve the problem of inequality, homelessness and public infrastructure? What is the role of the elite universities in this respect? Do they consider themselves part of the local democratic community or just highly skilled cracks in ivory towers without any connection to real life right next door? Or do they see themselves just as competitors in a global, but not local environment?

I would love to hear a top scientist or a billionaire speak about the shameful appearance of the public infrastructure and about poverty in the San Francisco Bay Area.

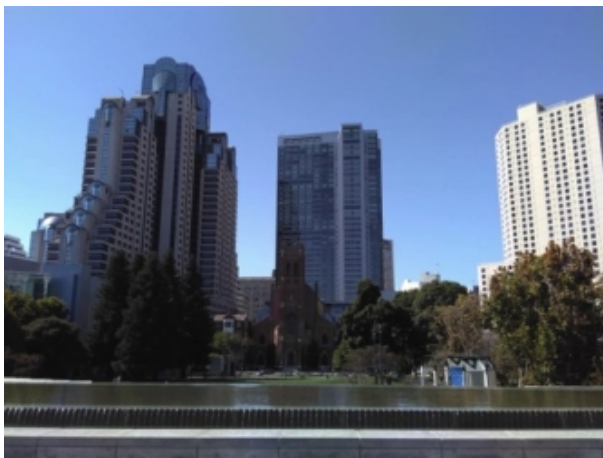
Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

We know that Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg spend billions for new medication (and their foundations make billions as shareholders of pharmaceutical companies), but I have not heard that they have invested in San Francisco's public transportation which is worse than in some developing countries.

By the way, on every second corner there was a Wells Fargo tower, until recently the biggest bank of the world. It was praised for having survived the crisis better than the other "too-big-to-fail" banks because it was not involved as deeply in speculative practices. Now it is sinking ever deeper in scandal number seventeen or so. The bank recently illegally opened more than two million accounts for their customers without their knowledge or consent. Newspapers are full with the scandal. While bank employees are being fired, the number of homeless does not change.



Change Everything US Tour 2016

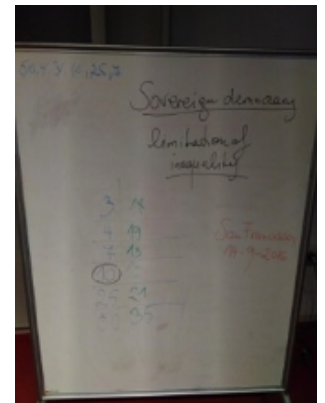


September 14th – 22nd

SPUR, Peace Center & Intuit

In San Francisco there are, luckily, already two ECG activists preparing the first U.S. local chapter of the ECG. Nitin from India and Janet from Peru have both become US citizens. They are equally concerned about the state of the world and helped organize the three events in the Bay Area and are happy to see more people interested in joining the local chapter (minimum: five active members). After the three events, we are sure that we will achieve this goal.

The first event at SPUR was in a center for adult education, community development and social innovation – a perfect framework for the „premiere“ of the US tour. The event was full of like-minded people.



The second event was at the headquarters of Intuit, an accountancy software company with 8000 employees situated in the Bay Area. The sustainability team was very interested in the model and the balance sheet. Keep your fingers crossed that they become an ECG pioneer company. The third event was at Mt. Diablo Peace Center, with a small but highly qualified group inl met, amongst others, the translator of Margrit Kennedy's book „Occupy money“.

Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

III. Montana

The second part of my journey was on both sides of the Rocky Mountains. I flew via Salt Lake City, Utah to Missoula, Montana.

There, I was invited by the University of Montana for a lecture. The university has an impressive vegetable garden with which they are trying to become self-sufficient. I was told that Montana is different from other US states and that few tourists find their way there. I did not expect, though, that in my “inequality survey” the students in the audience would vote for the factor 3 between the legal maximum and the minimum income as their preference. Remember that in the US it is factor of 360,000, meaning is the person with the highest income earns 360,000 times as much as minimum wage. (Yes, the highest income is 360,000 dollars every 10 minutes or 5 billion dollars per year.)

From Missoula, Bob Quinn, a farmer on the east side of the Rocky Mountains picked me up and drove me to his 4000 acres property (the regional average is 3000 acres). He said that the population density is 1% that of Germany. „Imagine Germany with only 1 of every 100 houses and you can get a picture of what its like here.“ The Great Plains are endless. Only that the buffalos aren’t there any more. Now it is organic Kamut, in the case of Bob. He inspired 250 other farmers in Montana alone to become organic Kamut growers. He began back in the 1980s.



Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

Last year, Bob was invited for the first time by a conventional farmer's association, many of them fans of Monsanto. Or slaves. He was only able to argue for organic farming by explaining the financial advantages. The chemicals are so expensive that the profit is higher if a farmer does not use them. Nevertheless, the propaganda is so intense that only 1% of farmers dare to go organic.

Monsanto has a quasi-monopoly in GMO seeds. Farmers have to buy every year from the corporation that has developed a refined strategy to create dependency and restrict the farmer's freedom. For that aim, it has an army of lawyers who pursue legal litigation for the company. Percy Schmeiser is a neighbor of Bob Quinn (they both live near to the Canadian border and only separated by a 7 hour drive). He was sued by Monsanto even though, as a non GMO farmer, he does not even purchase seed from the shareholder company. But the wind carried seeds or pollen from GMO fields on to Percy's fields which Monsanto spies discovered. The GMO corporation found its enemy: an innocent farmer. Percy Schmeiser became an icon of the struggle against corporate power and takeover.



Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

Vandana Shiva from India, who was our guest at the five-year anniversary of the ECG movement in Vienna this year, initiated a lawsuit against Monsanto due to its many crimes. Unfortunately, the gigantic German pharmaceutical company Bayer just purchased Monsanto. Walter Eucken warned: „It is not about fighting excesses of economic power. Economic power is a problem in itself and should be limited.“ His words will not be forgotten.

I hope very much that Bob will be the first farmer in the USA that completes the common good balance sheet. And, hopefully, one day all farmer have to do such an ethics-oriented report and that their use of agrochemicals and terminator seeds and purchases from criminal corporations will become public knowledge. I hope that this is the seed I could leave behind in the earth of the Great Plains. My friend, the Missouri River, inspired me: „Just follow the flow.“ I literally did.



Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

IV. ECG New York

From the vast rural scenarios of Montana, I proceeded directly to Manhattan and its impressive skyline. It was an intense day which started with a meeting with B Labs and the American Sustainable Business Council (ASBC) before going directly to Wall Street 14 for an interview with „The Street“. We will see if the common good has a chance amongst all the financial news from the bank towers. Maybe the best event of the tour was at Fordham University in New York City.



Professor Michael Pirson who I already knew from the Global Ethos Institute in Tübingen, Germany and from an OECD conference in Paris about alternative ways to understand and measure wellbeing, invited me to present and discuss the ECG at his university. Others attending the event were Hunter Lovins (“Natural Capitalism”), David Levine (CEO of ASBC) and Brent Martini, founder of a Fortune 50 company. The lecture hall was overcrowded and the entire floor full of curious listeners. The large hall was not big enough and we unfortunately had to turn some away.

The panel discussion was on the border between cooperation and competition between different alternative approaches, and what exactly „improving capitalism“ means. My final suggestion was to reflect on it like a homework assignment – and of course to join the movement. At the dinner with a dozen invited guests, amongst them the speakers, we advanced the idea to start an ECG chapter in New York. Sanford Hinden is one of the persons interested in raising the group and also aims at affiliating the ECG to the UNO.

Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

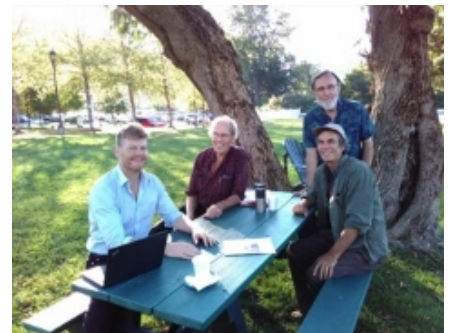
Close to midnight I met Gloria Benedikt who is another Austrian dancing economist. She was performing a dance-science piece on the integration of the SDGs at the 'concert for a sustainable planet' at Carnegie Hall on September 21st – when I was already off to Boston. Her host was Jeffrey Sachs who I will meet soon at Tübingen, Germany at a conference with together with Michael Pirson, Hunter Lovins and Claus Dierksmeier.



V. Vermont

Next destination after the Big Apple was Vermont Law School, a small private establishment in the breathtakingly beautiful landscape of Vermont. Its rivers taste like paradise, and the endless deciduous woodlands made me forget for a moment that there is pollution and extreme environmental troubles on this planet.

Before the lecture at the law school, I met three members of **BALLE (Business Alliance for Local Living Economies)** who are part of the network of Helena Norberg-Hodge, the director of „Economics of Happiness“ and her „International Alliance for Localisation“ (IAL). They informed me that Vermont has long since been a paradise for hippies and system changers of all types. Amongst others, Vermont was the first US state to pass a law to protect B corporations – an ecological pioneer state, which is represented in the Senate by Bernie Sanders.



Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

The lecture was embedded in an organic supper reception, the audience was very attentive and I had the feeling that nothing I talked about was new to them.

After the talk, I met Gus Speth who is one of the founders of the Next System Project (NSP). NSP is closely associated with the Democracy Collaborative, a Washington-based NGO with 25 employees. Gus Hagelberg and I wrote a long-form essay for NSP which will be published shortly. Gus Speth is an author as well and works on the „New Economy“. Professor Melissa Scanlan invited me to the law school and we brainstormed about a possible collaboration on the online formation of „holistic (financial & ethical) auditors“.



VI. From Boston Tea Party to Boston Consulting Group

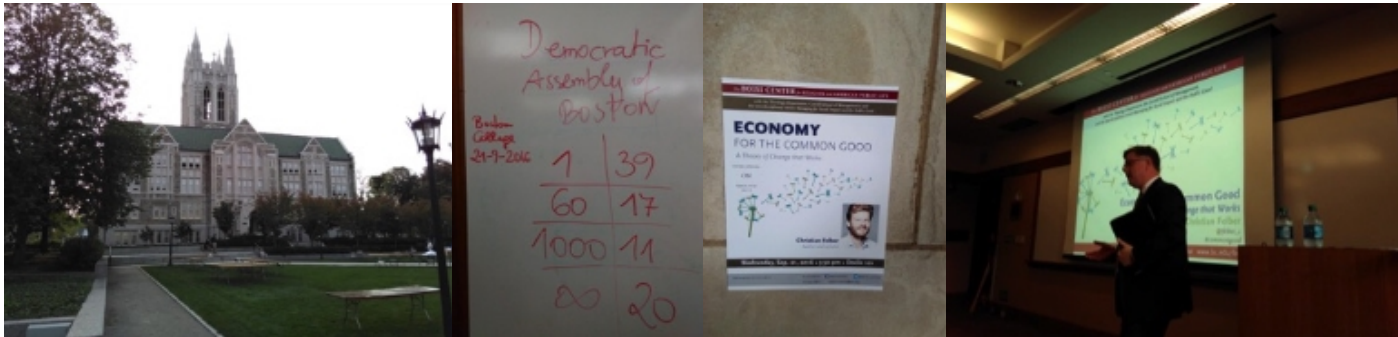
„Just a bus ride away“ from Hanover (there are plenty of them in the US) lies Boston, with the famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where the ECG ambassador Otto Scharmer teaches. Nearby is also Harvard University, where Erik Maskin is an Adams University Professor of Economics. Erik wrote the foreword of my book „Change Everything“. I was invited to speak at Boston College, a private, faith-based institution. After the winning factor of 3 at the public University of Montana, the most popular vote on the income inequality at this private school was the factor of 1000 – one of the highest results I have ever experienced.

Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

In Boston, I also met Sharon Bially, the founder of BookSavvy, the PR agency that helped to promote my book and ECG movement in the US media – with a very positive result. I added a few published articles and opinion pieces at the end.



VII. Washington D.C.

The capital of the US was my last station, and the meetings became progressively political. My main hosts were the already mentioned „Democracy Collaborative“ which has a smart office in the 12th floor where I happened to listen to an expert talk on the Community Reinvestment Act which mandates some banks to lend a part of their savings out to local enterprises and households, in order to promote the local common good.

From the Democracy Collaborative I went to the office of the American Sustainable Business Council (ASBC) where I met the US representative of Mondragon, the world's biggest compound of cooperatives.

Change Everything US Tour 2016



September 14th – 22nd

He is deeply involved in the cooperatives movement (there are more than 30,000 coops in the USA) and an expert on workers-owned companies. I will try to get these movements to the conference New Economy and Social Innovation (NESI) 2017 in Málaga, Spain, organized by the [Global Hub for the Common Good](#), together with the City and the Province of Málaga. Many initiatives of the New Economy Movement have already signed up.

The Democracy Collaborative also organized the book presentation at Potter's House in Washington, D.C. which was the final event of this tour. The book is one of the anchors of the ECG movement, and the presentation in Washington, was a nice finish that rounded up the picture. What comes next? Who knows!



Change Everything US Tour 2016



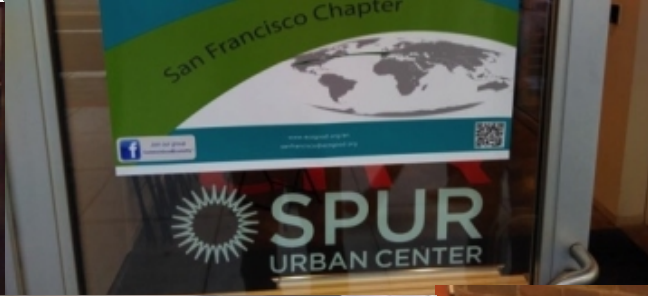
September 14th – 22nd

Recent English Articles

- The most prominent media placement was a long article on the [CNBC](#) website.
- An opinion piece was published at the [Huffington Post](#), where I am a blogger now.
- Another piece on trade policy ran at [The Entrepreneur](#).
- The [Gratitude Gourmet](#) about ECG and the tour.
- A long story was published at [Impact&Alpha](#).
- Finally, the [Havre Daily News](#) published a long story on the ECG and organic farmer Bob Quinn.
- And together with ECG US coordinator Gus Hagelberg, we contributed a long piece about the ECG at [Tikkun Magazin](#).

Economy for the Common Good contacts:

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Thanks to everybody involved for having made this trip possible: organizers, donors, collaborators and especially the **growing international ECG movement!**

This trip helped set very relevant transoceanic partnerships and helped plant the first seeds of the **Economy for the Common Good** in the **US**.

There will surely be more US tours in a near future to further spread the message and strengthen the bonds between organizations that strive for a **new economic system**.

