Societal Paradigm Shift and Community

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1 Introduction

Thomas Kuhn (1970) observed that science does not progress linearly through a gradual extension of knowledge within one framework; his proposition was a progression through periodic revolutionary upheavals which he called paradigm shifts. He suggested that the discovery of irreconcilable shortcomings in an established framework produces a crisis that may lead to overturning the paradigm and ushering in a new one. Revolutions are never an easy experience and most of us prefer to engage in evolution, where changes happen gradually, often unnoticed, and no-one is unsettled.

Sometimes, revolutions are needed. For years now, we have been responding to the discovery of the profoundly disturbing evolutionary consequences of climate change. It is clear that collective behavioural change is needed, yet little has changed in popular behaviours. Many of us have been made efforts to be more sustainable. Some of us have forgone our cars for bicycles, some installed photovoltaic panels, most now sort our waste for recycling; however, all of this together has a relatively small impact on our environment and we recognise that we need to do something more substantive and soon. But how do we identify substantive actions that will bring the larger public to embrace such change and result in a societal paradigm shift?

The change must start with a gripping idea. We must find inspirational ideas that allow us to dream about better future and not be paralysed by doom and gloom. Renzo Piano noted in an interview with Peter Buchanan:

What architecture and planning suffer from is a desperate lack of imagination. We need to think about more alternatives and where we might be going, and of new paradigms. We have all sorts of possibilities open to us, and we don't have the imagination to conceive of and use them. What we need now is brainstorm and dream: to stop trashing the world we need culture that is more deeply satisfying. […] There's terrible dearth of real imagination in thinking about the environment. Most ideas are not exciting. And we are not going to stop people trashing the world unless they are exciting about the alternative. That's the problem. People are not dreaming up sufficiently exciting alternatives." (Piano, 2001 pp 71-72)

Profound societal change *has* happened in recent history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when the effects of the Industrial Revolution were choking cities and the solution was identified of encouraging people to move out of cities, into the new idea of suburbs, London Underground came up with series of posters advertising all the advantages of suburban life. Ebenezer Howard's Hampstead Garden Suburb offered people the luxury of dreaming about better futures away from pollution of the industrial city. Railways offered a means to move easily back and forth from suburb to workplace. Yet the public had to be introduced to the idea and convinced of its benefit. This was not easy at all. The railway lines and the areas around them were not places associated with dreams or desires. Most of the population saw them as evil distractions, bringing pollution and degradation.

Advertising too was not perceived positively. While we might use advertising today to sell an idea, then advertising was novel and considered vulgar and distractive. It was far from easy, therefore, to sell the idea of something that was unknown and untested. Howard idea's proposition ran counter to many prejudices and preconceptions about city and rural life, about railways, including stations and lines, and about advertising itself. Ultimately, though, it was advertising that made Garden Cities an object of desire.

2 Advertising

Advertising can be defined as a form of communication, primarily used today for marketing purposes. The word comes from Latin *ad vertere*, which means, "to turn the mind towards". Advertising persuades, manipulates and drives consumer behavior, or ideological beliefs and can be broadly categorized into two types: commercial and non commercial, where commercial advertising will be focused on increasing of consumption of advertised product or services, and non commercial advertising could include promotion of a point of view by political parties, religious organizations, or driving changes towards more sustainable living.

Advertising existed long before the Industrial Revolution. While commercial messages and records of political campaigns have been found in the ruins of Pompeii, it is generally agreed that first formal advertising started together with first newspapers. The first newspaper advertisements began in France in the early seventeenth century. Theophraste Renaudot, Louis XIII's official physician, placed notices offering jobs and goods for sale on the office notice board on Ile de la Cite, but in order to promote these notices to the bigger audience, he create La Gazette, in 1631, which became the first French newspaper. However there was no real need for advertising goods since all goods were hand made and sellers knew each other personally. Packaging and branding were unknown and unnecessary. The Industrial Revolution broke the personal links between seller and buyer, mass production required mass consumption. Manufacturers then needed to explain their new products to their new customers. Competition between different manufacturers introduced brand loyalty and thus branding. It was not good enough to promote a new product, you need to make sure that customers will understand the difference between your product and product offered by your competitor. The same applied to the selling of a "better life quality" in suburban houses. Cheap labor, cheap land prices, and cheap materials, made it possible to create cheaper housing on the periphery. Cheaper housing became another commodity that needed to be sold and therefore to be advertised.

This paper looks at successes and failures of advertising of housing and identifies the factors that motivate people to aspire towards types of residential accommodation, examining the role of communications in persuading people of the benefits of sustainable living.

We suggest that the campaign to sell the idea of suburban living, as exemplified by Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement, is one of the most successful advertising campaigns of the twentieth century. The idea remains today an "the object of desire". Yet, we know today that Ebenezer's ideas need to be rethought and adapted to the twenty first century. This form of suburban living cannot be considered sustainable, but neither is the high-rise tower. Therefore the question that we need now to ask is what alternative we can offer to allow people to dream again but now to dream about sustainable living?

To do this requires an understanding of current impediments to sustainable living. While we are aware that many people have positive attitudes towards the environment, these are rarely translated into behavioural change. This is often attributed to the lack of information, and choice for consumers in sustainable living alternatives. Indeed we are not short of ideas, but we are unsuccessful at communicating them to achieve broad public commitment. It is these exciting alternatives that this paper will try to identify and work to communicate.

3 How Garden Cities Became "Objects of Desire"

The Industrial Revolution made cities as desirable places to be. People were eager to move from rural areas to the city because life outside the city was seen as worse. Poverty, hunger and lack of employment or social mobility encouraged significant numbers to move to the city. This is the same scenario observed today in Asia and Africa where urban populations are growing significantly. In many cases there was no choice, the city offered the only possibility to survive. But life in the city was far from being desirable. As early as the 18 century William Hogarth portrayed London's city life in "Gin Lane and "Beer Lane". Where the

latter depicts a happy and prosperous community, nourished by the native English Beer, the evils of consumption of foreign gin in the former is seem to lead to starvation, decay, madness and suicide. But the prosperity of Beer Lane, which thrived on the consequences of industry, is the cause of misery found in Gin Lane (Fig.1).

Figure 1: Beer Lane by William Hogarth, 1751

The allegory applies to all industrial cities; their wealth and expansion had significant social consequences. the Charles Dickens provides clear descriptions in “Oliver Twist” (1838),and “Hard Times” (1854). In Oliver twist we find this powerful description of life in London during the Industrial Revolution:

“So they established the rule that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they) of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the waterworks to lay on an unlimited supply of water, and with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal, and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays. They made a great many other wise and humane regulations . . . kindly undertook to divorce poor married people . . . instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor! There is no saying how many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might have started up in all classes of society, if it had not been coupled with the workhouse; but the board were long-headed men, and had provided for this difficulty. The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel, and that frightened people.” (Dickens, 1838)

“Hard Times” (1854), set in a mythical Coketown, can be identified with Manchester or Preston, and illustrates the dangers of allowing humans to become like machines, suggesting that without compassion and imagination, life would be unbearable.

Nevertheless, new technologies of the time were thought to hold solutions to social problems. The provision of infrastructure, such as sewage, electricity and gas, offered hope of a better future. Misery could be suffered if there was hope for a better future and better quality of life. Although the Victorian city of slums was polluted, overcrowded, and unhealthy, it offered social and economic opportunities to the poorest. Most had escaped rural areas and unemployment in search of opportunities offered in industrial cities. For these, Howard’s

vision of a peaceful life in the country site did not have much appeal; the countryside was not full of promise of clean air, nature, and peace, it was rather wrought by economic depression, without work and wages, and with inadequate social life, it was a place to be avoided, not desired.

3.1 The opportunity

Ebenezer's idea was also premised on new technologies and infrastructures and, although the infrastructure enabled city expansion, sprawl and commuting, Howard's ideas looked beyond that. He was promoting was a sustainable way of life not in the suburbs but in discrete and separate Garden Cities. Garden Cities consisted of short distances, employment, entertainment and a range of services accessible by foot. The railway allowed for easy access to a nearby city center and other Garden Cities, but commuters were always pedestrians at both ends of their journey. The land surrounding Garden Cities feed the inhabitants and provided the employment. These principles are recognized today as those of sustainable communities. These principles included return to the community of any land value increases. All residents would pay a modest rate-rent for their accommodation, factories or farms. The rate-rent was calculated to be sufficient enough to repay interest on money originally borrowed. As debt was reduced, more of the income was directed to support community needs and to provide welfare, where needed. Howard's ideas were not as much concerned with physical planning as they were focused on reconstruction of capitalist society into co-operative commonwealths. Howard was more interested in social processes than physical forms of development. These rural communities were conceived to address urban sprawl by creating self-sufficient developments interconnected and connected to big metropolis. In 1884 the economist Alfred Marshall interpreted Ebenezer's ideas:

The general plan would be for a committee, whether specifically formed for the purpose or not, to interest themselves in formation of colony in some place well beyond the range of London smoke. After seeing their way to buying or building suitable cottages there, they would enter into communication with some of the employees of low-wages labor" (Marshal, 1884, p.224)

Eight month after the book was published, in June 1899, the garden City Association was established. At first it was a small group of six friends, which included Alexander Payne, Treasurer of Land Nationalization Society. The aim of the society was to promote Howard's ideas, and to set in motion plans to create the first Garden City. Letchworth, and later Welwyn, demonstrated the practical application of principles described in Ebenezer Howard's "Garden cities of To-morrow". Letchworth was built in the area of severely depressed agriculture land, 34 miles away from London. Howard's idea was to create a garden city with population of no more than 32,000, living on 1,000 acres of land and surrounded by further 5,000 acres of land designated to farms and urban institutions such as reformatories, convalesces homes, hospitals, etc, which could benefit from such settings. If the number of residents reached the limit of 32,000, another city will be created near by and connect to it.

In practice what Ebenezer Howard was proposing was a formation of a trust to purchase and maintain on behalf of the community the land and the buildings. The freehold was to be retained by the trust in order to make sure that community would be able to enjoy benefits resulting from increase in land value and rental values. All of this required capital sufficient enough to be able to purchase the land and buildings. The first Garden City Company was established and registered on 1st September 1903. It took the company over a year to raise 148, 000 Pound Sterling towards the cost of site purchase. The company needed to wait until 1912 for its first profit. Although Letchworth was initially designed to accommodate 32,000 inhabitants, only 1,000 moved in in the first two years. First inhabitants were mostly middle class idealists and artists. It proved difficult to attract industry to the area; nearly ten years passed before the first industry, a printing and binding works, provided employment.

3.2 The challenge

The promise in Letchworth was a better quality of life, better accommodation away from overcrowding, congestion, noise and pollution. It offered life closer to nature and it offered opportunities for people to get out of landlord tenant relationships and being able to become owners of their own homes. Nevertheless it was still extremely hard to attract people to move to garden cities. By assumption, life outside the city was the sub-urban, that is, not as good as urban/ Memories of the poverty and hardship of the life in the countryside and therefore, the idea of rural life was something to be avoided by all costs.

Beyond this initial assumption, however, there were problems associated with railways. Railway for the very long time was being seen as destructive element, not only to the urban structure and the countryside but also as destruction of communities, social structures and culture.

Without any doubt the railway was the most profound transformative innovation of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. Some believe that the

"…railway tracks marked the divide between old, rural, small-town, slow-moving Britain and the modern industrial nation of great towns and cities, factories, and constant rapid travel and communication" (Harrington,1877)

But railway lines also destroyed the stability, the tradition and permanence, of the British countryside and replace it with uncertainty, based on innovation and a transience of life. Nothing like that was seen before and nothing caused the same degree of disturbance and disruption. Installing the infrastructure involved the demolition of neighborhoods and communities through land acquisition. In the 1860s, railway development started to have a significant impact on the pattern of development in cities. Railways needed large areas of space for tracks, stations and storage. The railway tracks often divided old neighborhoods and reduced access across the line caused congestion in places where access was provided. It also caused severe congestions around the stations.

In 1861, railways employed around 23,000people and by 1891 this figure was almost 70,000. In addition to this, another 48,000 people were employed in ancillary transport industries. If one adds to it families and dependents the total number of people benefiting and depending on railways could have been as much as 250,000. But although there were obvious benefits from railways developments there were also endless problems associated with it.

The terminal station buildings were very imposing and located at the beginning at the edge of the city. They housed hotels, restaurants and other services related to the station and although they provided luxury, they were also surrounded by rundown and undesirable development. This was a consequence of the railway's dependence on steam engines, rendering areas around stations and tracks sooty from the engine emissions and the location of frequent fires from burning embers. Therefore the poorest population often inhabited the land around stations and railways tracks.

At the same time, housing prices in London kept increasing. Most of the population lived in rental accommodation without control. Constant population increases and a lack of inexpensive housing generated demand for affordable housing outside London. New transport infrastructure facilitated the trend but perceptions of the undesirability of land adjacent to the infrastructure strengthened. Dickens captures progression in "Dombley and Son", published in 1848, only 18 years later, after the first railway construction has begun in London. He describes the construction of the railway through Camden Town and portrays the railway as a transforming force, able to provoke dramatic changes, even improvement but, in the process, creating significant disruption and depravation. Thousands of people were evicted or made homeless; 37,000 people were displaced in London between 1859 and 1867, the period of railway boom; through this, railway construction contributed greatly to increased overcrowding, poverty and misery. John Ruskin also portrays railway as a new

barbarian invasion, destroying the great-civilized European culture. In 1849 he wrote about the destruction of European cities:

"…the railroad and the iron wheel have done their work, and characters of Venice, Florence, and Rouen are yielding day by day to lifeless extension of those of Paris and Birmingham" (Ruskin, 1849)

With the undesirable proximity to rails, the arches and viaducts of railway lines attracted the poorest and the most venerable in society. Alcoholics, prostitutes, criminals, and homeless were drawn to these areas and railway lines and arches became symbol of human degradation. Ruskin observed, in 1876, of the *"… deterioration of moral character in the inhabitants of every district penetrated by railway"* (Ruskin, 1876)

This perception was widely held. In George Eliot's "Middlemarch", we find a description of the alarm and anxiety of residents of the town when the construction of the railway lines begins.

"…woman both young and old regarded travelling by steam as presumptuous and dangerous" (Eliot, 1870)

3.3 The role of advertising

The difference between those in the trains traversing the arches and those resident below was symbolic and perhaps contributed to the perception of railways as desirable way of transport to escape squalor. Proximity to railway lines and stations was to be avoided and rural life had only recently been left behind. How then could the promoters lure people into suburbs in adequate numbers?

It is therefore not surprising that the railway companies were fighting for survival and that the first proposal by Howard for Letchworth Garden City was not a great success initially. The railway companies promoting these new suburban or exurban life styles were driven to try something new, to employ an advertising campaign to promote their product and products associated with it, but advertising itself was a novel and not broadly accepted medium Gissing (1894) describes King's Cross underground station polluted by advertisements.

"..the visual hubbub, which they create acting as an appropriate counterpart to the noise of trains and people, which fills the station, and echoing the chaos and turmoil of the city streets above."

His description continues, describing the station not as progress but rather as regression to an era of formless chaos:

"…high and low, on every available yard of wall, advertisements clamored to the eye: theatres, journals, soaps, medicines, concerts, furniture, wines, prayer-meetings-all the produce and refuse of civilization announced in staring letters, in daubed effigies, base, paltry, grotesque. A battle-ground of advertisements, fitly chosen amid the subterranean din and reek; symbol to the gaze of relentless warfare, which ceases not, night and day, in the world above". (Gissing, 1894)

The most famous advert in this campaign for suburban lifestyles comes from 1908 and depicts Golders Green (Fig.2). The artist of the poster is unknown, but the poster was published by the Underground Electric Company Ltd, and printed by Johnson Riddle and Company. The poster represents the aspirations of an alternative life, with people taking walks along tree lined roads, a family enjoying the tranquility of nature in the back garden, with the wife looking after children, relaxing in the deckchair while engaged in domestic reward by mending clothing. In the distance, we can see a railway station and, beyond, the smoke of the city ("the big smoke"). The label underneath aptly promotes: "A Place of Delightful Prospects".

Figure 2: Golders Green, Underground Electric Railways Company, 1908

Middle classes saw this image, and many of us still do, as an advertisement for a Garden City but this poster, as many others in the campaign, was promoting not a Garden City but a Garden Suburb, borrowing from the efforts of Howard to define a new urban paradigm. It was part of a railway advertising campaign to encourage regular, daily rail usage, but it was not the railway that this campaign was promoting. If you look carefully at the image, you can see the railway station, but the station was not central to this message. The underground rail company was selling a dream, not a service, by encouraging people to dream about a better quality of life previously only accessible to the upper classes.

The campaign worked well; home owners and renters soon started to move to the suburbs in significant numbers. Slowly, the fear of the railways was dissipated and replaced with a form of snobbery. Those on the train were those who could afford it, secure in their employment and, not harnessed to unreasonable employers, blessed with the time to spend on the train travelling along ever longer railway lines. With industrialization, salaries increased, the working day became shorter and spare funds made available to purchase the cheaper products of industrialization.

The impact of railways was extensive. Family lives were scheduled according to train timetables. The gender division was reinforced. Railway stations and train carriages became the domain of suburban male; women stayed in secure houses with gates and walls, protected from the evil of the city centers. Owning a house with a garden had three symbolic values: it could have been seen as a miniature of country house, as a homestead or smallholding, or as a domestic sanctuary in the Garden of Eden. All these were previously available only to the upper classes. Until 1880s, commuting was available only to people who could afford horse-drawn carriages, later, horse-drawn omnibuses and second homes in villas outside the city. The affluent had houses and cottages in the country to which they could retreat on weekends, when on holiday or in retirement. To the newly created middle class, the idea of living a portion of an upper class life style was desirable and therefore powerful advertising technique.

3.4 The villa redux

Railway lines and underground produced posters promoting the speed and efficiency of the train, comparing them with walking speed, speed of horse-drawn carriage or omnibus. Efficiency was succinctly illustrated in a poster from 1912 where egg timers showed how

much time commuters saved on a single journey and how much in one week. Other posters communicated the investment made in the interests of the commuters: “What does it takes to move one passenger: 234,000 tons of coal, 71,000 of oil, 10,000 of staff, 6,000 tons of steel and iron, 200 tons of tickets, 184,000 Pound Sterling of taxes”. At the bottom of the poster, a short sentence has been added: “306, 000 000 travelled in 1923”. Other posters promoted travelling during off peak hours and on Sundays: “Book to Perivale, Sudbury or Harrow, for field, path, rambles in old fashioned country”. Garden suburbs were advertised in posters promoting “health of the country and comforts of the town”. Slogans such as: “Sunshine is the Brightest where it Falls on Your Own House”, or “380 feet above the Thames, therefore out of valley fogs”, lured people into the suburbs. The paradise could be found d at the outer edge of the city where the air was clean and healthy lives awaited people away from polluted slums, away from overcrowding, and socially undesirable environments.

The posters portrayed idyllic life in the suburbs and productive employment in the city. In support of this, they guaranteed rail passengers service at least during peak hours cheap fares and “special train services on Sunday”. Perhaps off message, one poster from 1915 is particularly disturbing:: “why bother about German invading the country? Invade it yourself by underground or motor bus”. Advertising used all messages to encourage people to move out of the city to their own paradise on earth.

In the London Transport Museum, we can find 27 posters advertising Golders Green. Some project images of a natural landscape and parks, an idyllic life with children relaxing by the water. Others deploy plans to show the extent of the greenery. There also pictures advertising low cost of tickets and ease of access to events and activities that take place in the area. There is even a poster suggesting time can be saved when travel by train. None of the other 26 posters had the same impact as that of the villa in a garden. The dream was sold not by the nature, peaceful life, time or money saved on public transport that attracted people to the suburbs, but the possibility to dream of a better life, one approximating life of the upper class.

Look again at the poster for Golders Green above, the most successful and often repeated of the images, for closer inspection is revealing. The paradise villa, apparently in the Garden of Eden, is nothing but a typical semi-detached house, the typology very popular in the British Isles but nowhere else in the world. Showing only half of the semi-detached house implied that you would be living in detached villa surrounded by garden. A scaled down version of a manor house in the countryside, this was a perfect image to persuade new middle class that the villas in the countryside were no longer accessible only to the upper classes; they could be affordable for many. Something that previously was impossible dream could now become reality, but it could only become reality with the development of railways.

There was a clear class distinction implicit in the dwelling type and therefore it was not surprising that, when depicting ideal living, the artist of the Golders Green poster has chosen not to show the other half of the structure. The ideal house with the ideal family is carefully depicted as implicitly living in a detached dwelling. While the fiscal reality was a need to share a party wall, the aspiration was of isolation.

3.5 Paradise tarnished

The stations and the train became proxy social centers for suburban males. The value of the traditional city was presented as depleted, even problematic, and needed to be exchange for new values now promoted by railways companies as a way to enable people to increase their quality of life, by separating work from domestic life, bread winners from home makers, children from busy streets of cities into secure backyards. The isolation of women inside the home and away from full participation in the society was seen by many as stabilization of society as the whole (Beecher, 1849). Suburbs for a long time were associated predominantly with the middle class but, over time, allowed for a distancing between the upper middle class and the lower middle class with their own suburbs. Places like Surbiton, Ealing or Sidcup were at the top of the social order. In these suburbs the roads were lined

with trees and houses had substantial gardens. Lower middle classes were located in suburbs such as Bowes Park, Palmers Green, Wood Green, or New Southgate. All were safely distant from the city-locked working classes.

Whether upper middle or lower middle class, suburbs shared characteristics of isolation, difficult access to services, schools, hospitals, or even basic provision of shops or more local employment, although the promise of paradise dominated the message. Not everyone was lured by the suburbs. Early on, alternative views were presented of life in the suburbs such as by Arnold Bennett in "Hilda Lessways"(1911) where Hilda offered the following description of her journey from Central London to suburban "paradise" of Hornsey:

"…the train almost empty, waited forlornly in forlorn and empty part of the huge, resounding ochreish station. Then, without warning or signal, it slipped off, as though casually towards an undetermined goal. Often it ran level with the roofs of vague, far stretching acres of houses-houses vile and frowsy, and smoking like pyres in the dank air. And always it travelled on a platform of brick arches. Now and then the walled road received a tributary that rounded subtly into it, and this tributary could be seen curving away, on innumerable brick arches, through chimneypots, and loosing itself in a dim horizon of gloom. At intervals a large, lifeless station brought the train to a halt for a moment, and the march was resumed. A clock on the station said a quarter to two." (Quoted in Railways and Victorian Imagination, Bennett, 2004)

Figure 3: Golders Green interpretation, 2013

This book presciently describes the emerging truth of suburban sprawl as manifested in the monotonous landscape seen from the railway. As the middle classes were escaping from inner suburbs in search of better quality of life, the poorer population was moving in to areas left over. New suburbs did not really deliver that which they promised. Stations were deserted except during rush hours. The passage reiterates the dictate of the train schedule in the life of the suburb, governed by the clock. But if the life in the suburbs in 1911 could have already showed some reason to be concerned, the real problem came evident in the late 1930s. Private car ownership in 1919 in England was 109,000; the majority of the population still used public transport to commute and the majority of housing in suburbs was located within walking distance to the station. By 1939, car ownership had increased to 2,000,000 and the location of suburban housing was freed from the constraints of public transportation. With the move to commuting by car came a new set of challenges. but the promise of a "paradise" in suburbia continued to be promoted. Created on the principles and promises of

Garden Cities, Garden Suburbs and suburban living transformed into a reality that has little to do with sustainable living and the aspirations of the Garden City movement.

With this understanding, the question posed here is whether we can once again run an advertising campaign for sustainability as successful as the one that promoted Golders Green.

4 Advertising objects of desire

Today advertising once again has a bad name. Sustainability advertising has taken a turn to promote a message by scaring us, painting terrifying or unsettling futures. The message is one of a pervasive gloom. Polar bears are losing their habitat, the desert is encroaching many of our cities, the water level is rising, aquifers are falling, and some of our cities are going to disappear under water. All in all, there is very little to make us happy today, little to help us imagine a better quality of life. We are so scared that we cannot be scared any more by messages portraying yet another disaster.

Sustainability has lost its image as an object of desire. Recalling the strategy of the Underground Electric Company in 1908, we need a message that calls us to a sense of purpose and hope in taking action. It is time for something new, innovated, exciting and very desirable, an object of desire of “sustainable living”.

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