

Newly Restored: E.F. Schumacher on Film (1977)

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Newsletters

Is our gigantic and immensely expensive technology conducive to democratic freedom? The answer is: no, it is not. It is conducive to the development of great concentrations of economic power.

At the height of his public writing and speaking, E.F. Schumacher made two tours through the United States. The first, organized in 1974 by a group including



E.F. Schumacher on a conference panel at the University of Chicago, Illinois (1977).

Schumacher Center

Co-Founder [Robert Swann](#), introduced the unconventional economist's [Small is Beautiful](#) ethos to many Americans for the first time. By the second tour in 1977, his vision had captivated environmental activists, labor organizers, community development practitioners and counter-cultural seekers across the

country. Schumacher was welcomed among these circles as savant, and a meeting was arranged with President Jimmy Carter.

Across a flurry of lectures, interviews and panels, Schumacher articulated a vision of an ecologically-sane, community-oriented economics “where people actually matter.” Unfortunately, few recordings from that period remain, with technical quality and risk of degradation as persistent issues.

This spring, three such rare recordings of E.F. Schumacher speaking in 1977 were restored and digitized from original reels and tapes housed in the Schumacher Center media archive. This effort preserves Schumacher’s voice into the future, enabling us to present these recordings to the public on our [YouTube channel](#).

The three sessions were recorded during a conference at the University of Illinois, Chicago in March of '77. The topic around which they were organized was Schumacher’s guiding concept of [appropriate technology](#): that, counter to prevailing practice, the means of production should be smaller-scale and economic activity more locally-oriented.

Q: “Will small be politically liberating as well as beautiful?”

A: “Surely any degree of self-sufficiency will be liberating, whether it is done on a small basis or a

big basis. That's the point..."

In the [first video](#), Schumacher talks alongside regionalist Sid Wright and agronomist Sylvan Wittwer on **the role of appropriate technologies** (such as natural farming and passive solar) **in easing fossil fuel dependence**.

Next, Schumacher participates in a wider [panel discussion](#) with a set of organizers and practitioners. He addresses **relocalized production, the concentration of economic power, and the ecological limits of modern economic growth**.

Finally, Schumacher is joined by Mildred Gillingham, [addressing the questions](#) of a group of **young people anxious about the environment and economic system of their future**.

The resonance of Schumacher's ideas in our own time remains striking. Many of Schumacher's notions of sustainability were informed by concerns around "peak oil" in the mid-1970s. While the end of cheap oil did not unfold immediately as predicted, global warming and climate change now bring his warnings and precepts back to the foreground of our awareness.

Forty-five years later, it is still remarkable to see Schumacher respond to questions with his brilliant mix of precision and wit.

We are happy to share these restored memories with you.

