The Politics of Sustainability: Some Principles and Proposals

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1 Introduction

A quarter of a century has now passed since Gro Harlem Brundtland produced her landmark report on sustainable development, yet little progress has been made towards achieving the kinds of policy reform that might result in sustainable development being realised – especially in the humanistic rather than technocratic manner that she advocated.

The Brundtland Report suggested the only political strategy imaginable given the nature of the international system at the time: the pursuit of sustainability was essentially a matter to be decided by sovereign national governments (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). Since its problems transcended all national borders, their resolution required intergovernmental agreements that were global in scope and the United Nations offered the only framework for conducting such negotiations. Once member governments had signed the relevant treaties, they would ratify and faithfully execute them – with supplementary assistance from new and/or pre-existing UN specialized agencies. None of these assumptions was completely wrong, but we now know, after two decades of highly visible global conferences, multiple international declarations of good intention, and several intergovernmental treaties, that they collectively turned out to be insufficient. The world is not more sustainable than it was – quite the contrary – and it is hard to discern whether all of these efforts have made any appreciable positive difference. Brundtland was innovative in its analysis of problems, but conventional in its political strategy for solving them.

The failure of Brundtland results from a failure to spell out how sustainable development might be achieved *politically*. Brundtland largely assumed the

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continuation of existing political institutions, but it cannot be assumed that sustainable development – a fundamental reform to economic systems – can be achieved without fundamental reform of *political* institutions. There is, in short, an important lack in the attempts thus far to create a convincing humanistic narrative about sustainability, and it is the aim of this chapter to at least commence the filling of this gap.

To be convincing, a humanistic narrative about sustainability should contain three elements:

(1) It must explain *why* it is necessary to forego (tangible) present satisfactions for (uncertain) future benefits – benefits that will be enjoyed by everyone, even those who did not contribute to producing them;
(2) It has to provide compelling justifications *why* living, adult human beings should be so concerned with the 'life-world' of future generations – not part of their immediate family and even those not yet born – when they almost certainly will no longer be part of that world;
(3) It has to deal with the problem of 'agency', of *how* actors can intervene – some individually but most collectively – to bring about changes in private behaviour or public policy that will effectively produce the desired future effects at an acceptable cost in the present.

Numerous contributions that have addressed the first two of these elements, but our concern here is exclusively with Item (3). Let us just assume that persons and organizations in significant numbers and locations can be convinced *why* they should be more future-regarding and, therefore, desire to act differently. *How* should they accomplish this politically? How can they cooperate to a sufficient degree that they will be able to overcome the resistance of those not so convinced? How can they create institutions that will carry the message and sustain the policies from one generation to another? And, can this be accomplished voluntarily and peacefully? Or, will it be necessary to apply coercion and, even, physical force – hopefully, by legitimate authorities?

There have been many convincing 'humanist narratives' concerning sustainability. Perhaps, the most ambitious and comprehensive work with this intent is that of Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* (2008). Despite its sub-title, this is not a technocratic manual for developmental or ecological economists. It is eloquent about the failings of orthodox liberal economics and about the need for a 'new economics' with humanistic foundations and a 'deeper social understanding.' It addresses a wide range of issues related to sustainable development and does so in a way that should be accessible to a wider range of readers. In other words, it comes as close as one can imagine to fulfilling the *desiderata* in Items (1) and (2).

Unfortunately, it contributes virtually nothing to Item (3). Sachs' assumption seems to be that existing political institutions – presumably democratic (although the word 'democracy' does not figure at all in the index) – are adequate. The only specific 'reform' measure in the book was the suggestion that governments should create a 'Department of International Sustainable Development', hardly, an

inspiring or promising idea. His section on "New Forms of Governance" is only two pages long (Sachs 2008: 332–334). In it, he exhorts other world regions to follow the example of the European Union – without a single word on how they might do this. He also notes with approval the process of devolution of authority to regions within many 'Real Existing Democracies' or REDs (he calls it 'localization') and believes these sub-units have been 'the most dynamic in architectural(!) and cultural pursuits in recent years' (ibid.: 334). The reader is left to infer that this 'power to the regions' is good for sustainable development. If there is any strategic message in all this, it is that the necessary improvement in policies is 'the sum of many acts' (ibid.: 314) by individuals who will understand the message of the book, vote for correctly motivated political parties, participate in right-thinking social movements and, thereby, become 'the stakeholders of change' (ibid.: 314).[1]

It will take more than the rational enlightenment of individuals and their voluntary collective action to make 'sustainable development' politically sustainable. Sachs has no viable and enduring conception of agency to offer his reader. It is time to try *a new strategy*. Fortunately, world politics have changed dramatically in the 20 years since Brundtland. Features that were barely discernible in the mid-1980s have become major trends. A large number of autocratic governments have collapsed and been replaced by democratic ones. Non-state actors have grown in importance and now routinely transcend national confines; domestic publics have become aware of and are being mobilized around foreign issues as never before; large corporations have acquired resources superior to all but a few sovereign states and are operating simultaneously and autonomously in many of them; transnational scientific communities have formed around a multitude of specialized issues and are exerting more influence on policy-making at all levels of territory; the cost of international communication and transportation has fallen precipitously; massive flows of persons across national and continental boundaries have revealed how difficult it has become for governments to control even the most significant element of their sovereignty; an ideology of permissive *laissez-faire* and *laissez-passer* in goods and services (but not people) has proliferated far beyond its previous Anglo-American liberal heartland. Finally, the multiple and complex issues involving sustainable development have become more salient to mass publics – and better supported within and across scientific communities.

[1] If it is any comfort, Sachs at least makes an effort at dealing with the agency problem. The much publicized, *Growth Report. Strategies for Sustained Growth and Inclusive Development* (Center for Global Development 2008) makes none at all – despite its sub-title. The *Report* is utterly technocratic and seems to presume that, if politicians just accept the expert advice it contains, the politics involved in its implementation will take care of the rest. Moreover, the economic wisdom it proffers is amazingly 'pusillanimous.' Consider just the two following conclusions: 'Our model of developing economies is too primitive at this stage to make it wise to pre-define what governments should do' (Center for Global Development 2008: 30); 'Nonetheless, the commissioners have a keen sense of the policies that **probably** matter' (ibid.: 33, my emphasis). The reader will be pleased to learn that 'An international economy in a world of nation-states has no natural guardians. That is **perhaps** the biggest risk of all' (ibid.: 103 – again my emphasis).

In other words, the argument in Brundtland that sustainability should be considered an urgent concern that transcends existing national borders and overwhelms present state capacities has been won. What is needed is a common strategy that takes into account the complexity of the problem *and* the momentous political changes of the past 25 years. When proposing such a strategy, we should not be under the illusion that all will agree with it just because, ultimately, all will benefit from it. Achieving sustainable development in the future will be a struggle, if only because existing unsustainable development generates very unequal costs and benefits in the present and will continue to do so during any foreseeable transition period. And those who benefit the most are frequently those who are best entrenched in national and sub-national political units.

This paper sets out below some relatively modest institutional reforms and it is at least conceivable that existing institutions and configurations of power in REDs might adopt some of them, although not always for the ostensible purpose of sustainability. They will undoubtedly have other agendas and objectives in mind – getting themselves re-elected and their associates benefited – but if they were to implement them the effect would be to make both politicians and citizens more 'future-regarding' in their preferences, more involved in communicating with future generations and, just maybe, more likely to forego present satisfactions in favour of future benefits.

Our proposed strategy is composed of four principal dimensions. None of those listed below would suffice – not even all of them together – to guarantee sustainable development. They are 'points of departure', rather than 'points of arrival.' Given the manifest urgency, we have concentrated our attention on what can be accomplished within a predictable timeframe. We are convinced that policies based on the following strategies will produce some positive results by themselves, but more importantly they will set in motion processes of innovation and experimentation that will become increasingly encompassing and consequential in the future.

What is proposed is *not* an official, comprehensive, global and technically superior solution, but *just the opposite*. Without completely discarding the possibility that governments – driven by dire necessity – might at some time in the future agree on such a solution and endow a 'global governing instrument' with the powers to implement it, in the present – when the solutions to un-sustainability are largely in the hands of private producers, unevenly distributed across political units, variable according to industry and sector, and still in dispute between different technologies – the only viable political strategy is to proceed incrementally according to relatively simple principles. And, even then, this may require reforming political practices before and in order to choose and implement the necessary substantive policies.

2 Four Principles of Political Action

2.1 Governance Rather than Government

Governance works not through formal monopolistic institutions exercising ultimate authority over a specified territory, i.e. *states*, but through informal arrangements of actors exercising some degree of control over diverse functions, i.e. *networks*. Such arrangements are open to participation by different types of actors – public and private, profit and non-profit, national and trans-national, expert and amateur, producer and consumer, large and small – who have been identified and accepted each other as 'stakeholders.' What these actors have in common is an enhanced awareness of interdependence. They have conflicting objectives, but depend sufficiently upon each other so that no one can simply impose a solution on the other and all would lose if no solution were found. They know that their respective contributions are needed to varying degrees if some problem is to be solved or some public good is to be produced. Moreover, they also know that the solution cannot simply be bought in the market or commanded by the government. These other two mechanisms of distribution would normally be preferred on practical or ideological grounds, but thanks to either market failure or state failure (or both), the 'second best' governance solution becomes the best one.

It is precisely their informality in both composition and operation that makes them so much more appropriate as a starting point for tackling sustainability issues. They can be 'chartered' initially by virtually any level of government or even private institutions, but what is especially important is that membership in them is not contingent on the formal (and illusory) equality of inter-governmental organizations and decision-making proceeds by consensus – not by unanimity or voting. Moreover, actors in such arrangements can collectively set standards and set up monitoring systems without having to go through formal processes of ratification. Ideally, such arrangements should be 'self-enforcing', but in the real world their role is always circumscribed by both market and state mechanisms. In order to reach consensus in the first place, 'stakeholders' often depend on their mutual fear that, if markets were to distribute goods or states were to impose solutions, they would all be worse off. The implementation of choices made by governance may be even more problematic. Markets can offer powerful incentives to defect from them and, thereby, gain short-run competitive advantage. Lack of official support from governments can mean that monitoring devices will be weak and sanctions impossible to apply.

In other words, governance arrangements may fit better the political conditions of a world 'Post-Brundtland' that has lost its clear demarcations of national sovereignty, that has to cope with problems cutting across entrenched functional specializations, that has generated a wide variety of actors insisting on their right to participate and that has not yet produced a global system of government. They are not, however, the definitive response to the challenge of sustainable development. For the foreseeable future, such arrangements will still ultimately have to face the

test of market competition and rely on the legitimate coercion of state authorities. They cannot stand alone.

2.2 Partial Rather than Comprehensive

Sustainable development demands nothing if not comprehensiveness. It requires that multiple and relatively autonomous domains of human endeavour be coordinated. The problem is that governance arrangements work best when they are partial, i.e. when the stakeholders involved are relatively few in number and highly dependent upon each other. These arrangements may be useful in overcoming the 'intergovernmental' limits imposed by national sovereignty, but how effective can they be in bridging the differences in knowledge and interest embedded in distinct functional domains?

The simple answer is that we do not know. Only innovation and experimentation will inform us. Can stakeholders in one domain – owners, employees, experts, interest representatives and civil servants – learn from what others have accomplished? Will participants engaged in solving their problems of sustainability even perceive the positive and negative effects their efforts have upon others? Will entirely new scientific specialties emerge to deal with the interstices between different governance arrangements? Can one even imagine something like 'mergers and acquisitions' in the future in which initially separate governance arrangements combine to deal with more comprehensive issues?

History at the national level in most developed societies suggests this was possible. 'Spill-overs' routinely occurred across scientific specialities and administrative functions. Some policy arenas proved more strategically important than others and incorporated less innovative or weaker ones. What made an especially significant contribution to these processes of diffusion and expansion was the existence within each national state of something called 'civil society.' The participants in most governance arrangements have not been individuals but organizations. And these scientific societies, business and professional associations, trade unions, social movements, community organizations, and so forth have to relate to each other across levels and arenas. They often compete for member affiliation and financial support, and form alliances for broader purposes. One special peculiarity of this process at the national level, however, is virtually absent at the trans-national level – the existence of a system of competing political parties. With their ideological appeals, electoral campaigns and comprehensive role in forming governments, parties provided a powerful incentive for connecting the 'partialities' embedded in separate policy domains. Only in a very few trans-national regions does anything equivalent yet exist.

Our strategy of relying on governance to accomplish sustainable development is paradoxical: it proposes a partial instrument to reach a comprehensive objective. At best, it offers the promise that dispersed efforts at functional problem-solving by isolated groups of stakeholders will not interfere with each other, and will

eventually lead to a more encompassing approach. However, un-sustainability is increasing at rapid pace and something has to be done sooner rather than later. Of course, a more comprehensive system for assessing risks and allocating responses would be preferably. Alas, it will not be available in the foreseeable future.

2.3 Regional Rather than Global

Not only should sustainable development be comprehensive in functional substance, it should be global in territorial scope. Its most basic principle is that the world has become one. There exists only one ecosystem and an increasingly integrated economy. Awareness of this has grown, but the world is no closer to possessing a global political mechanism for identifying policy priorities, setting relevant standards, raising necessary resources, supporting collective efforts and, when all else fails, punishing defections from the common good. National states still try to do this and necessarily do so in a highly unequal and self-regarding way.

But they are no longer alone. One of the most significant changes since Brundtland has been the emergence of 'trans-national regions.' Between the global and the local in some parts of the world – and nowhere more so than in Europe – are complex 'multi-layered' political systems in which responsibility for using public authority is shared across different territorial levels and implementation of policies requires constant cooperation among them. Given the disappointing results of trying to reach global agreements and empower global intergovernmental organizations, this intermediate 'regional' level provides us with another 'second-best' strategic alternative.

The fact that the European Union is in the vanguard of such developments is especially encouraging. This region has the collective resources – material and human – to make a highly significant contribution on its own. The existence of a supra-national organization with a proven capacity to generate benefits for all of its members and a population more aware than most of the costs involved in 'un-sustainable development' are more than coincidental. The citizens of the EU uniquely expect their regional organization to address these risks. Another significant factor is that Europe – within and beyond the EU – already possesses the key elements of a continent-wide civil society that can play a crucial role in identifying priorities, diffusing best practices and pressuring for 'spill-overs' from one domain to another. Europe does not yet have a distinctive supra-national party system, but it could emerge in the near future and sustainability issues could well determine its configuration.

And Europe is not alone. Other regions have been making more timid efforts at cooperation and integration: NAFTA, MERCOSUR, APEC, ASEAN, AU, SADC, and so forth. Virtually all these look to the EU for inspiration and the EU has responded with various cooperation programs and some trade agreements. For decades now, the EU has been pursuing a very ambitious policy of political conditionality with regard to democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the

countries bordering or trying to join it. It could very creatively extend its influence to other world regions by insisting on respect for common principles of sustainable development as a condition for concluding further agreements – and by offering its own directives and regulations as models for such an effort. No doubt, this will be called 'European Imperialism' by some, but it is much less coercive and malevolent than the original version.

Students of international relations have long recognized that voluntary and peaceful change at this macro-level requires leadership. Someone has to take the initially greater risks and pay originally higher costs. Regional organizations are in a unique position to play this role constructively, precisely when they are not simply a façade covering domination by the most powerful national state, the largest private firm, the momentarily hegemonic political party or the best funded NGO. The EU has repeatedly demonstrated its independence from the hegemony of its largest member states and its capacity to exert influence outside its territorial sphere. No other trans-national regional organization can (yet) make that claim, which is why at this point the EU offers the world its best strategic alternative for advancing sustainable development.

2.4 Humanist Rather than Technocratic

Coping with threats to sustainability has been a perpetual and even a desirable feature of human existence. We have always wanted more than we have and, hence, been threatened with the prospect that we will outrun the 'carrying capacity' of the world that sustains us. Countless times in the past, profound thinkers have announced that these limits had been reached – only to be proven wrong.

The usual explanation for this error has been *innovation*. Humans constantly 'tinker' with the conditions surrounding them, but not all this tinkering has involved material technologies. Perhaps, even more important, have been the cultural and social innovations that have led to major transformations in the norms that give meaning to what we want and in the collective arrangements that we apply to get what we want.

Without denying the potential for technological innovation in production and distribution – especially when driven by competition within increasingly interdependent economic systems and diffusion among more open and interpenetrated communication systems – enduring sustainability will require major innovations in the norms and objectives of human beings and that can only be achieved by providing a narrative that offers them a more credible and desirable 'alternative life world.' As the slogan goes: 'Another World is Possible.'

A key element in such a scenario should be an attempt to shift the time-horizon for individual satisfaction and collective attainment such that human beings in the present come to attach greater value to future states of being and, therefore, be willing to forego immediate returns. Focusing on communication between

'generations' is an important place to start, especially with regard to political identities and expectations.

To put it more concretely, a set of reforms in the practice of 'real existing democracy' should be designed to: (1) Ensure the representation of future generations in decision-making by contemporary politicians; (2) Provide incentives to decision-makers so that they will be encouraged to take longer term effects of their actions into account; (3) Improve the scope and depth of accounting systems to include inter-generational and inter-level effects; (4) Provide for mechanisms of representation that transcend national borders in order to monitor for externalities produced by one system upon another; and (5) Impose obligatory contributions or compensatory actions on all unsustainable, resource depleting exchanges affecting future generations.

This goes against the contemporary emphasis upon injecting liberal models of economic rationality into the analysis of politics. In a world of 'Non-Tu-ism' where all actors are presumed to be strangers not caring about the welfare of each other and certainly not caring about the welfare of world as a whole after they have left it, it would seem utterly irrational to base one's actions in the present upon their projected impact upon future generations – even to persons in such generations to whom one is directly related by family, community or friendship. Nevertheless, if one's conception of human society is less strictly self-regarding and embraces notions of collective identification and solidarity, then, it becomes possible to imagine a rational and humanistic narrative that can make 'the anticipation of the future a motive for present concern.'[2]

3 From Four Principles to Many Practices

So much for the guiding *principles* of a revised approach to political sustainability. What specific reforms in political *practices* might serve to bring about this desirable goal? Can we identify concrete changes in how actors – individual and collective – conceive of their interests and interact to resolve the inevitable conflicts that emerge from pursing them that will enhance sustainability?

First, some 'realistic caveats'. We have to recognize the constraint that it will not be possible in the foreseeable future to convince all relevant actors to adopt a common 'other-regarding' and 'over-reaching' passion for sustainability. They will continue to define their objectives in a 'self-regarding' fashion and strive to satisfy them within 'real existing' political units – mostly formally sovereign and nominally national states. Reforms in practices may make these actors more sensitive to

[2] The political thinker who was most obsessed with the problem of the uncertainty of the future was Thomas Hobbes. Human beings, he observed, were the only animals capable of imagining different futures and acting rationally in anticipation in order to alter them. One does not have to accept his solution, devolution of absolute authority to a single sovereign, to appreciate the relevance of his thought.

the needs and preferences of others and more willing to compromise in pursuing their own needs and preferences, but it would be unrealistic to presume that they will be powerful enough to bring about a convergence of interests and to give everyone the same passion for a sustainable future. In short, the shift toward political sustainability will not be 'revolutionary.' Nor will it be 'revelatory.' To use the 'narrative' metaphor, the reforms discussed below will hopefully change the script and, maybe, some of the actors, but the underlying plot will remain the same – namely, that we will continue to live in a world populated by human beings that form their preferences in relatively autonomous social and political units and compete with each other under conditions of scarcity in order to satisfy these preferences with only a limited – 'momentary' or 'strategic' – capacity for altruism.

We will also have to accept the existing distribution of 'regime types.' No program for greater political sustainability will be compelling enough or backed by sufficient clout to ensure that all the units involved will be (or become) democratic – even in the restricted sense that is usually attached to those REDs that have reached a successful and lasting compromise between liberal-constitutional norms, representative institutions, and a capitalist economy. The number of these regimes has increased dramatically over the last 30 years or more, so that entire world regions are almost completely populated with them. This has opened up many new possibilities for reform since REDs are not only less likely to threaten each other with violence or subordination and to respect the maxim of *pacta sunt servanda*, but are much more likely to tolerate freedoms that allow their citizens to speak out, travel, collect funds, send and receive messages, and even to organize collectively across their borders. The presence of both a 'security community' among polities and an 'open society' within them are certainly pre-requisites for most sustainability enhancing improvements. No doubt, agreements between democracies and the remaining autocracies can be reached. Indeed, the latter are often better at ratifying international conventions than the former, but they are much less reliable when it comes to implementing them. Economists such as Mancur Olson have 'proven' axiomatically that only a dictator with indefinite tenure of office can be reliably expected to make credible 'future-regarding' commitments (see Olson 2000), but the proof of historical experience demonstrates precisely the contrary. Only REDs have had the capacity to reform their practices and policies in ways capable of legitimately binding future generations to follow sustainable policies. That these policies have often been difficult to adopt in the first place, excessively short-sighted in their objectives and subject to distortion by 'special interests' has no doubt been true, but when compared to the egregious failures of all types of autocratic regimes, these are but minor imperfections.

Fortunately (and certainly not accidentally), a substantial proportion of old (and some new) democracies are more economically developed than the remaining autocracies. This means they have a greater surplus of human and material resources and, hence, the capacity to pay a greater proportion of the 'first-mover' costs of establishing a better equilibrium. They also tend to dominate the intergovernmental global and regional institutions that should prove crucial in the dissemination of more sustainable norms and practices.

4 The 'Governance Rather than Government' Principle

Here, the most obvious implication is to shift from an exclusive focus upon national states and public institutions, and the formal agreements (laws and treaties) that they produce toward a more comprehensive view of relevant actors that embraces a wide variety of private or semi-public institutions and the informal arrangements (networks) they are constantly creating and revising. In other words, political sustainability will also (and, in some cases, only) depend on civil society organizations (CSOs) and their interactions with each other and existing state agencies. Particularly relevant (where they exist) will be those networks that cut across formal lines of political authority, either from one level to another within a national polity, or across national boundaries. Most issues involving sustainability – whether environmental, social or cultural – do not coincide with existing jurisdictions. They involve 'externalities' where costs or benefits transcend them or 'internalities' where their effect is concentrated upon specific constituencies.

But what can be done to enhance the probability that governance arrangements will emerge and transcend internal and external boundaries? The simple answer is to promote CSOs.[3] The problem with this solution is not just that we do not know how to promote organizations of such a variety, but also that deliberate attempts to do so can become counter-productive. Associations and movements that are subsidized, recognized and/or granted privileged status by public agencies or political officials have an embarrassing tendency to lose their most important property from the perspective of governance – their capacity to mobilize members and commit them to an agreed-upon course of action. Inversely, if CSOs are merely allowed to emerge spontaneously and on the basis of voluntary membership and contributions, their distribution will unavoidably be skewed to favor certain interests and passions. Moreover, their sheer multiplicity and specificity will make it difficult to negotiate the sort of comprehensive agreements across sectors, issues and countries that sustainability requires.

The orthodox answer from democratic theory would be to supplement CSOs with vigorous and disciplined political parties (PPs). The latter would have the responsibility to aggregate the biased and highly specialized demands generated by CSOs into comprehensive programs and then to compete among themselves to discover which program is preferred by the citizenry. On the one hand, since they are compelled by the competitive process to appeal to voters as citizens with equal rights and weights, this should – at least in principle – serve to even out the biases and influence differentials that are bound to exist in a purely voluntary civil society.

[3] In addition to the usual reference to 'advocacy groups' and 'new social movements,' I would stress the role of interest associations and private foundations. The civil society literature focuses much too much on such 'single issue groups,' at the expense of more permanent organizations representing class, sectoral and professional interests. The latter have a great deal to contribute to raising consciousness and reaching agreements with regard to matters of sustainability. And foundations have very often been at the origin of support for a wide range of CSOs.

On the other hand, PPs, given the territorial nature of their constituencies and elections, should be more limited in terms of their capacity to form trans-national relations than CSOs, but this may be compensated for by an internal articulation that should ensure some degree of coordination between different levels of authoritative decision-making within the national state.

If biased representation and issue fragmentation are the main weaknesses of CSOs from the perspective of sustainable decision-making, PPs are most likely to suffer from two quite different deficiencies: (1) they compete within constituencies that may not coincide with scope and scale of the problems to be addressed; and (2) they have emerged historically around patterns of cleavage that bear little or no relationship to the alternatives involved in issues of sustainable development. Indeed, the safest thing one can say about the party systems of well-established REDs in Europe and North America is that their members/followers/voters are bound to be internally divided on such issues due to their classic Left-Right configuration. There seems to be no *a priori* reason why citizens in either dominant or subordinate social classes will be especially sensitive to these issues. Age cohorts, ethical considerations and locational factors seem much more salient, but these are not the cleavages that are reflected in their party systems. The obvious response should be the formation of new political parties offering competing programs with regard to issues surrounding sustainable development, but thus far is that – with very few exceptions – this has proven difficult to accomplish. Either electoral laws are sufficiently well-designed to preserve the status of existing PPs or citizens have found it difficult to change their prevailing partisan identifications.

All of which implies that the best one can hope for in the immediate future will be 'transversal' alliances between factions within existing PPs, driven by issue specific mobilizations in civil society. These may also be accompanied by recourse to referendums or popular initiatives when party politicians unable to resolve disputes along lines of entrenched cleavage decide to throw the issue to the general public. Several European democracies witnessed this in the struggle over atomic energy during the 1980s and 1990s. The downside of this style of politics is its inability to cope with more comprehensive 'packages' of issues and, therefore, the inevitably episodic and probably incoherent nature of the policy responses.

Let us consider four reform proposals that might affect the probability and viability of governance arrangements, by empowering either actors that are most likely to engage in them or wider publics that might be expected to pressure for reaching and coordinating such agreements.

4.1 Reform Proposal #1: Vouchers for Funding CSOs

All liberal democracies in which membership and financial support of associations and movements is voluntary suffer from systematic under- and over-representation. Putting it bluntly, those small, compact and privileged groups with less need for collective representation get the most of it. Those large, diffuse and underprivileged

groups that most need public goods that only strong and well-funded collective action can ensure get much less of it. As E. E. Schattschneider, put it, the trouble with the interest group chorus is that it sings in an upper-class accent (Schattschneider 1960), and Europe is no exception – regardless of level or location. And issues of sustainability inevitably face a very loud 'upper-class chorus,' composed largely of major manufacturing and energy producing corporations.

One proposal is to provide an alternative source of funding for CSOs. This could be accomplished in a democratic manner through three, closely related, measures: first, the establishment of a *semi-public status* for interest associations and social movements; second, the financing of these associations through compulsory contributions; and third, the distribution of these funds by means of citizen vouchers.

This reform in the way CSOs are funded would deliberately avoid specification by political authorities of any fixed category of representation based on class, status, sector, profession or cause – unlike contemporary chamber or corporatist systems. It would leave the task of determining the organizations to be funded to the competition for vouchers from individual citizens. In many cases, the reform would be costless – provided governments could be persuaded to eliminate all existing subsidies distributed by administrative agencies and allow citizens to choose which associations and movements deserve financial support.

The central purpose behind the development of a semi-public status for associations and movements is to encourage them to become better 'citizens', that is to treat each other on the basis of greater equality and mutual respect, and to dedicate greater attention to the interests and passions of the public as a whole. Among the provision of public goods, aspects of sustainable development would occupy a prominent place. It would be naive to suppose that merely imposing certain rules would *eo ipso* make interest associations and social movements into more 'fact-regarding, other-regarding and future-regarding' actors. The legislation of most national democracies is strewn with unsuccessful attempts to regulate lobbies and pressure groups. What is distinctive about this approach is the coupling of respect for certain conditions of self-organization and management with quite concrete incentives for support and a competitive process of allocation.

This reform recommendation rests squarely on the need to develop a new method for financing civil society independent of the ability and willingness of individual citizens to pay – which means extracting resources involuntarily from all those who ultimately will benefit. The contribution should be collected equally from all persons resident in a given territory. Persons could also give voluntarily to various causes, but this would not exempt them from the general 'representative donation'. Note that, by tolerating such a freedom, small and compact 'privileged groups' would still be more likely to attract disproportionate resources, since their members would continue to have greater incentives to give voluntarily in addition to the general levy. Nevertheless, given the large numbers involved, a very considerable harmonization of resources across interest categories and passionate causes would be likely.

The most feasible manner for doing this would be to attach this obligation (and the voucher system) to the annual filing of the personal income tax – at least in those

countries where virtually all adult residents are required to file, if not to pay such taxes. Indeed, in the interest of equity, those who are tax exempt because of low revenue should be exempted from the representation levy, but they would still be empowered to distribute vouchers which would count towards determining which specific associations received money from the common fund. What is important is to retain the low level of individual payments in order not to scare away potential supporters of the reform, but to make the aggregate level of resources provided sufficient to compensate for persistent inequalities between interests. It would also be essential to convince the public that such an arrangement would constitute an important extension of democratic rights – analogous to the previous extension of the franchise.

Vouchers would, therefore, become a powerful mechanism for enforcing the accountability of existing associations and movements since if the behaviour of their leaders differs too remarkably from the preferences of those who spent their vouchers on them, citizens could presumably transfer their vouchers elsewhere. They would also make it relatively easy to bring forth previously latent groups unable to make it over the initial organizational threshold, instead of using vouchers to switch back and forth among existing rival conceptions of one's interests. And finally, vouchers offer a means of extending the principle of citizenship and the competitive core of democracy in a way that neither makes immediate and strong demands on individuals, nor directly threatens the entrenched position of elites.

4.2 Reform Proposal #2: A Foundation for the Future

'Foundations' have come to represent an increasingly important component among the various types of institutions in Western (and some Eastern) societies and they bear a particular responsibility for sustainability. The endowment principle upon which they are founded, plus the regulatory restrictions imposed by the national state in which they are registered, usually are enough to ensure that their resources will not be immediately dispersed for self-serving purposes. They are compelled to be 'future-regarding' institutions.

A Foundation for the Future would be analogous to the many 'Sovereign Funds' created in recent years in the generic sense that it would set aside funds that would otherwise be used for immediate personal consumption or productive investment and devote them to an accumulating, rotating fund that would be earmarked for the support of projects designed to improve future sustainability. Ideally, its funds should come from levies on persons or enterprises that contribute to unsustainable consumption or production in the present (e.g. 'Carbon Taxes') and its expenditures would not be used simply to compensate consumers for rising costs due to the exhaustion of natural resources or the deterioration of environmental conditions. Investments from the Fund hopefully will generate a return that will further expand its resources, but most of all they should be devoted to the research and development of more sustainable sources of energy, waste control, water management, etc.

4.3 Reform Proposal #3: Civic Service

Many countries have been gradually phasing out their systems of military conscription and some have provisions for an alternative civic service. There are good 'democratic' reasons why an alternative civic service would be a desirable replacement. It would provide a common experience for all young people regardless of social distinctions in the larger national community, introducing them to the value of working in political and community organizations and offering a unique period of exposure to civic practice and democratic equality. It would quickly become a major source of support for the organizations of civil society involved in the production and distribution of public goods.

Such a service would be compulsory for all citizens and all denizens (who have lived in the country for more than 3 years) between the ages of 17 and 23. It would last for a short period, to be followed by the possibility of a voluntary extension. Exceptions could be permitted for health- or family-related reasons, but the obligation should be as general and non-discriminatory as possible. The experience should, however, be as flexible and accommodating to individual needs as possible.

5 The 'Partial Rather than Comprehensive' Principle

Here we are faced with an unavoidable tradeoff. Sustainable development demands comprehensiveness; governance arrangements work best when they are partial, when the participants are relatively few in number and highly dependent upon each other. We are also aware that these arrangements have rarely been 'designed'. They have usually just 'emerged' pragmatically as actors – public and private – become aware that the usual hierarchical system of government has failed to provide accurate information for making decisions and sufficient commitment to ensure that these decisions will be implemented.

The participants in such arrangements are often referred to as '*stakeholders*,' i.e. some subset of actors who are supposed to be specially affected by some issue and can make a particular contribution to its resolution. In most contemporary settings, they are not individual persons, but spokespersons for non-profit, semi-public and, at least, semi-voluntary *organizations*, as well as relevant officials from public agencies and technical experts from appropriate disciplines. They interact not just once to solve a single common problem, but repeatedly and predictably over a period of time so that they learn more about each other's preferences, exchange favors, experience successive compromises, widen the range of their mutual concerns and develop a commitment to the process of governance itself. Such governance arrangements are supposed to contribute in three distinctive ways to improving the quality of decision-making: (1) they enhance the opportunities for *mutual accommodation* through exchanges of reasoned arguments; (2) they serve to generate higher levels of *trust* among those who participate and this, in turn,

(3) allows them to introduce a *longer time-horizon* into their calculations since sacrifices and losses in the present can be more reliably recuperated in future decisions. All of these are, putatively, of major importance in making innovation and sustainability compatible with each other.

If, in the preceding section, our reform objectives were to distribute more equitably the capacity for self-organization and to bring more effectively to bear the pressure of mass publics upon professional politicians, here they are to ensure that the decision-making process is not dominated by officials and experts and that some degree of accountability to the citizenry as a whole is maintained. Presumably, if REDs can be reformed through modest measures, their ability to coordinate different policy arenas and to ensure that aggregate costs do not exceed the public's willingness to pay will be improved.

The main political problem with our 'strategy of partiality' is the tendency for the formation of so-called 'guardian institutions' around functionally differentiated problem areas. These are composed of selective groups of stakeholders dominated by technical experts and specialized public officials ('epistemic communities' is the polite term), each with its surrounding clientele of organized interests dominated by private business associations or firms. Such 'Guardians' are much more effective at reaching consensus and at ensuring implementation on many issues surrounding sustainable development, but they can do so by passing on the costs to others and/or by distorting priorities simply because some epistemic communities are better organized and more in agreement than others. Unfortunately, these are not necessarily those that deserve the most attention or funds.

Formerly it was the function of political parties with their competing ideologies and platforms to set priorities, and the legislature was the site where resources were allocated according to the priorities set by the electoral winners. Parties' platforms have converged in most REDs and no longer offer distinctive alternatives to electors; with declining membership and voter volatility this 'cross-issue' aggregation function has lapsed. And, given the complexity of the issues at stake, legislatures have increasingly deferred to executive agencies in designing measures to deal with them.

The purpose of the following reform proposals is to compensate for the weakened mechanism of partisan competition and expose the work of guardian institutions to wider scrutiny, both by the legislature and by the public at large. Note that not all guardian institutions are directly concerned with issues of sustainable development (Central Banks are among the most prominent in contemporary REDs); not all advisory councils deal with environmental and related issues; and not all pieces of controversial legislation involve them. The practices sketched below are intended to improve the quality of REDs in general, although, since sustainability has become such a salient and growing concern of citizens, these reforms could have an especially significant impact on programs and projects related to it.

5.1 Reform Proposal #4: Guardians to Watch the Guardians

The purpose of establishing 'guardian' agencies is precisely to remove them from 'politics' and insure their specialized expertise can be brought to bear to solve problems without the 'costly' interference of partisan disputes. Unfortunately, this also serves to disconnect them from the circuits of democratic accountability. Elected representatives may have some say in their initial nomination, but little control beyond erratic legislative hearings once in office. All guardian institutions – central banks, general staffs of the military, regulatory agencies for a wide range of purposes, all sorts of autonomous boards and managerial public commissions – could be recognized as such and each be assigned a 'guardian' chosen by the parliamentary committee most relevant in their field of activity. This person would be a member of the permanent staff, paid by and responsible only to the parliament, and would have the same right to information and presence as a member of the directorate of the guardian institution. Their primary responsibility would be to report regularly on the performance of the respective agency or board and evaluate its compatibility with democratic principles – that is to say, a sort of permanent whistleblower with privileged access to internal documents and discussions. This should serve to strengthen the general role of parliament within the usual system of inter-agency checks and balances.

A potentially significant secondary responsibility would be to serve as a specialized ombudsman *vis-à-vis* the public at large and its exchanges with the guardian institution to which they are attached. General ombudsmen are frequently over-burdened and having a number of specialized ombudspersons covering the guardian institutions would diminish the burden on general ombudspersons and bring more specialized knowledge to bear.

5.2 Reform Proposal #5: Specialized Elected Councils

Modern European democracies are already surrounded by a multiplicity of advisory committees, 'functional assemblies' and consultative councils – many of which are intended to provide guaranteed access for organizations of civil society to state agencies and decision-making bodies. The expertise and information that they provide are an important complement to the deliberations of legislative assemblies, and essential for coping with the increasing complexities of public policy. Their democratic status, however, has often been questioned since they provide privileged access to those interests and passions that are best organized and not necessarily to those that are most concerned with the public interest. Usually, the participants in these councils are selected either by politicians or civil servants according to some principle such as 'the most representative association' or 'the most insistent movement'.

Governments at various levels – local, regional and national – could consider holding periodic, specialized elections for membership in councils that provide them with advice on matters affecting such social groups as young people, the elderly, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, people with disabilities, or foreign residents, with the winners of these elections could be paid a modest sum for their participation. In all likelihood, pre-existing associations, movements and parties will be more successful in these contests than newly created ones, but their legitimacy as representatives will be enhanced and they will be more inclined to develop broader programmes in order to attract wider support. Control over specific budgetary assets could be delegated to such councils. A compelling case can be made for the creation of a Council of Denizens, but the practice could be extended to cover other social groups – such as young people and the elderly – where appropriate conditions exist.

5.3 Reform Proposal #6: A Citizens' Assembly

This assembly would be composed of a randomly selected sample of the entire age-eligible citizenry – both registered and unregistered voters. Its number (initially) should be twice that of the present lower chamber of the legislature. The selection of 'Citizens' Deputies' (CDs) would be in accordance with the existing system of constituencies in the lower house (double the number of CDs as current representatives). The Citizens' Assembly should be considered as a 'committee of the whole' empowered by the normally elected assembly to assist it with legislative review – in other words, it should be regarded as a measure to strengthen not weaken the legitimacy of the regular parliament.

Each CD would be paid and assigned a legislative assistant responsible for ensuring that they receive all relevant documentation, respond to requests for further information and help in their interactions with the public. Adequate means for communication, for example online computers, photocopying facilities, franking privileges and so forth, should be put at the disposal of all CDs and special arrangements, such as setting-up websites, should be made to make it easy to contact them and protect their privacy. This assembly would meet once a year for 1 month to review and vote on one or at most two bills passed by the regular parliament during the previous year for which at least one-third of the deputies in the lower house have explicitly requested a stay of implementation. Only those drafts receiving a simple majority of the votes would be passed. No legislation rejected by the assembly could become the law of the land. If the regular legislature failed to assign any bills to the assembly, it would nevertheless meet to review the year's production of laws and issue a statement on their quality by majority vote with minorities expressing their dissent if necessary.

6 The 'Regional Rather than Global' Principle

Authority for dealing with sustainable development should be comprehensive in functional substance and global in territorial scope, but the center of contemporary political gravity rests firmly upon the 'sovereign national state' (SNS) – even if most SNSs are neither sovereign in their capacity for action nor national in their identity. Unfortunately, the venerable SNS is too small for many problems and too big for others – and this is especially the case for those related to sustainability.

One favourable feature of political evolution since Brundtland has been the gradual, largely peaceful shift in authority from national to sub-national units. Almost every RED has experienced some devolution of powers to component provinces, regions, districts, *Länder*, or municipalities during the last 30 years. Also, the break-up of the former Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Federation produced a large number of new and relatively small SNSs. To the extent that many of the negative effects of un-sustainability are due to particular combinations of local conditions and more directly experienced by the inhabitants of such units, there is some reason to expect that policy-makers will be more responsive to such threats and more effective in implementing their decisions. Inversely, one might think that smaller political units would be tempted to calculate that their size precludes taking independent action given the externalities produced by larger neighbours and, therefore, should wait until they could 'free-ride' on these presumably more resourceful actors. At least within Western Europe, the evidence seems that the former proposition prevails. Small countries have often been in the vanguard of adopting policies of sustainability – although not without exception.

The second political development of this period has been in the opposite direction – the gradual (if often fitful) expansion of the EU as an over-arching regional organization. It has taken on additional policy responsibilities and it has admitted new members. Even before it was formally granted *compétence* in matters related to sustainability, the EU drafted, agreed upon and ratified numerous decisions related to it, especially with regard to environmental issues. And, as these 'directives' were handed down to member states to be 'transposed' into national law, they also sensitized governments and political parties that had previously paid little attention to such subjects. In some cases, they were even coupled with national legislation that set even higher standards – something permitted by the Rome and other EU treaties. And, by the time it came to the most recent Eastern Enlargement, these regulations were already built into the *acquis communautaire* and, therefore, had to be accepted by all applicants – regardless of how well-equipped or financed they were. Admittedly, no one expects quick and thorough implementation, but at the very least precise, region-wide standards have been set – something no other supra-national arrangement can claim. Another encouraging development at the regional level has been the involvement of the European Parliament (EP). It has 'co-decision' responsibility for approving most of these directives, but it has gone far beyond this in providing a target and for a wide range of NGOs pressuring for higher and more comprehensive standards.

The recent experience of Europe is perhaps unique and, therefore, not reproducible. There have been devolutions and decentralizations elsewhere – for example, in South America during its democratization processes of the 1980s and 1990s. And some of these newly empowered *municípios* and *províncias* have taken innovative measures, especially with regard to pollution. Nevertheless, there and in the rest of the world, the authoritative capacity for dealing with sustainability issues still remains firmly at national level. The sheer number of trans-national regional organizations has exploded during the past three decades, but virtually all of them have no effective *compétences* to do anything without the unanimous approval of their members – much less take decisive measures with regard to sustainable development. It is by no means obvious why the amazingly complex 'multi-layered and polycentric' Euro-polity in which the responsibility for using public authority is shared across different territorial levels and the implementation of policies requires constant cooperation among them has played such a pioneering role in facing up to sustainability issues. Perhaps, it is because accountability to special interests and particular publics is diluted by exchanges between the various levels, or because politicians can avoid blame for unpopular decisions by placing it elsewhere, or because the abstruse practice of 'comitology' that is used to draft EU directives enhances the influence of independent experts and public officials and frees them to come up with longer-range solutions, or because the interaction between representatives of member states, professions and organized interests is genuinely 'deliberative' and encourages the emergence of rules of "best practice" that do not reflect the relative power of the participants.

Whatever, the European Union – now expanded to include 28 SNSs – has placed itself in the vanguard. And since so many neighbouring countries aspire to join it (and reluctantly accept its *acquis*) and so many further removed countries have or wish to have negotiated preferential trade treaties with it, the EU's role in the future is bound to increase. One potentially significant reform that it might ponder imposing would be to add a commitment to 'Sustainable Development' to the present list of basic requirements that all potential associate members have to fill: 'Democracy,' 'Rule of Law,' 'Respect for Human Rights.'

6.1 Reform Proposal #7: Reciprocal Representation

Under its auspices, SNSs would accord each other seats in their respective national legislatures. The number of seats – perhaps, two or three – could vary, depending on mutual perceptions of the degree of interdependence, as well as the total number of deputies in each legislature. Normally, these would be seats in the upper house, where it exists and especially where it has special responsibilities for foreign affairs as in the United States.

Under all circumstances, the reciprocal representatives would have the right to speak on the floor and insert material in the official record. They would have the same salaries, services and perquisites, serve on committees (except for those

dealing with sensitive security matters), and receive information on drafts and hearings just like any member of the legislature. It seems very unlikely that they would initially be permitted to vote, particularly in situations where the vote would be the decisive one. However, if the experience were to prove successful, eventual voting rights should not be excluded – again, on a reciprocal basis.

6.2 Reform Proposal #8: A 'Yellow Card' for National and Sub-national Legislatures

Representative bodies at the municipal, local and regional levels should be granted the power to issue 'yellow cards' – explicit warning notices – when they judge their formal rights or informal prerogatives are being infringed upon by drafts of prospective legislation coming from a higher level body. This would allow them to question such infringements without taking the more legalistic (and lengthy and uncertain) step of appealing to a higher court for a judgment on the matter after a decision has been made. Moreover, since in many cases the legal status of such an action is unclear, it would emphasize the strictly 'political' nature of many of these inter-level infringements. When given a yellow card, the alleged offending body would have to suspend further action on its initiative until it had provided additional justifications for its action, including a formal declaration of subsidiarity, that is why its objectives could not be better accomplished at a lower level of aggregation.

6.3 Reform Proposal #9: Framework Legislation

Where multiple levels of decision making exist and where each level has substantial autonomy within its own sphere, it is nonetheless common that more encompassing governments – national and supranational – pass laws requiring the active compliance of less encompassing ones. Moreover, as noted above, there been a drift in this direction due to the alleged necessity for comprehensive and unified responses to such challenges as globalization and insecurity. Historically, it was the imperative of national defence or offence in inter-state war that justified most of this impetus towards centralization.

Whatever the ostensible justification for centralized action, the principle of subsidiarity would require that any such legislation be of a 'framework' nature, that is to respect as much as possible the existing autonomy of lower-level units and leave to them the choice of methods and solutions adapted to their specific circumstances. At most, the central decision should fix the generic goals to be accomplished and the general guidelines for action, leaving the rest of the implementation process to existing local and regional authorities.

Especially destructive of more dispersed forms of state authority are so-called 'unfunded mandates', or requirements by central governments not only that lower level governments conform to invariant norms, but also that they fund this compliance themselves without any downward transfer of financial support. No democracy based on multi-level government should tolerate such mandates and, as far as is possible and compatible with the general objective of providing uniform access to public goods, each level should be empowered to raise sufficient "own" resources to produce the public goods that its citizens and their representatives deem adequate.

7 The 'Humanistic Rather than Technocratic' Principle

We now conclude with three reform proposals that should help ensure that the need we identified for the pursuit of sustainable development to be humanistic rather than technocratic in character.

7.1 Reform Proposal #10: Ecological or Environmental Citizenship

When T. H. Marshall outlined his history of the practice of citizenship in contemporary democracies, he stopped at the 'social', after passing through the stages of having attained 'legal' and 'political' equality. Presumably, once the basic principles of social equality had been institutionalized via the welfare state, Western societies reached the end of their evolutionary potential. Subsequent efforts to extend equal rights and entitlements into the realm of the firm, so-called 'industrial democracy,' were vigorously opposed by capitalists and only mildly supported by workers (Marshall 1964).

Perhaps, it is time to re-think this evolutionary perspective and introduce into the public sphere the notion that, in order to attain full citizenship, all persons living within a given territory (which today does not have to be 'national,' but could be 'trans-national') should enjoy equal rights and meet equal obligations with regard to their ecological setting. In principle, they should all contribute equally to sustaining that environment and, in so doing, should have the same 'imprint' upon it. Presumably, were this to be the case, they would all derive equal satisfaction from the resulting increase in quality of life.

The long-term objective of ecological citizenship should be to make it a transnational and, even a global condition, i.e. to move toward reducing the present variation in the net ecological imprint of persons and organizations not just within national states but across them and, at the same time, lowering negative contributions on a global scale.

7.2 Reform Proposal # 11: Universal Citizenship

This proposal would grant full rights of membership in the political community from the moment of birth to all persons born within its territory or all of its citizens living abroad, as well as to those children who are subsequently naturalised. Recognizing the manifest incapacity of children to exercise their formal rights directly and independently, this reform further proposes that the parents of each child be empowered to exercise the right to vote until such time as the child reaches the age of maturity established by national law. Each child would be issued a voting registration card or whatever device is already in use to identify legitimate voters and would be informed of his or her (deferred) right to vote. The decision as to exactly which parent would actually exercise this right for their children, prior to their reaching the age of 16 or 18, would be determined by agreement between the eligible parents. In the case of one parent or a guardian, that person would vote.

This reform should make the local, regional or national democracy more 'future-oriented'. Not only would allowing children the vote constitute a symbolic recognition that the polity has a responsibility for its future generations, but it should also provide a real incentive for the young to develop an early interest in politics and to do so through an awareness of the importance of whatever level of political aggregation granted them this right. Precisely because of this incentive, it is to be expected that children – once they become aware of the right that their parents are exercising in their name in parliamentary or presidential elections – will increasingly hold their parents accountable for the way in which they distribute their electoral preferences. This also suggests that the reform measure should increase various forms of inter-generational discussion about political issues and partisan orientations in general – strengthening channels of political socialization and improving the elements of citizen training within the family that seem to have considerably diminished in recent decades. It may even compensate for the prodigious decline in a sense of party identification and probably would exert pressure on politicians to lower the age of political maturity from 18 to 16, if not even younger.

7.3 Reform Proposal #12: An Ombudsman for Future Generations

The institution of ombudsman has proliferated across SNSs and even reached the level of the European Union. Moreover, there has been a recent tendency to establish ombudsmen to deal with specialized policy arenas: women, youth, the handicapped, foreign residents, medical patients, victims of police brutality, and so forth. An ombudsman should be assigned to the future, with the power to compel legislators, 'guardians' and administrators to specify the eventual consequences – material, cultural, financial – of all laws and regulations. This person would have access to all decision-making processes in these areas and, hence, to identify before

they became valid any ones that might involve a burden or commitment to be paid for by future generations. They could then require that agency formally to calculate these costs and their distribution across time and social groups, and provide an explicit justification for their existence. If the ombudsman so determined, the proposed measure would be suspended until a satisfactory compromise was reached, although the parliament through its regular procedures would always have the last word concerning ratification.

8 Conclusion

These 12 proposals for reform are intended to address a major deficiency of much of the literature on sustainable development, namely, its failure to consider how it might be attained within current political arrangements or (given that this seems unlikely) what reforms might be necessary if it is ever to be achieved.

The reforms presented here also hint at the extent of changes that will be needed. Achieving sustainable development demands that we rethink many of our political institutions and practices, and the effort will have to be not just substantial but also imaginative.

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