

Chapter 1

From Conventional Worlds to a New Sustainability Paradigm (NSP): Raskin's Model Scenarios in the Light of Current Trends

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Abstract The “New Sustainability Paradigm” is considered the most innovative, democratic, and sustainable one of six different scenario classes (Market Forces and Policy Reform as conventional scenarios, Breakdown and Fortress World as Barbarization scenarios, and Eco-Communalism and the New Sustainability Paradigm as Great Transition scenarios) developed by the Global Scenario Group (GSG) of the Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI) to depict possible future real life scenarios and further elaborated in Raskin's *Great Transition* essay from 2002. Civil Society will be the key player in a “New Sustainability Paradigm” in which the search for a liberating, humanistic, and ecological reform changes the character of global civilization, leading to global solidarity, mutual cultural enrichment, and economic ties. As shown in this chapter, an important precondition for this development is a clear definition of Sustainable Development, a term consisting of two elements: One element depicting stability and another element depicting a process of change. Thus, “Sustainable Development” is a development which manages to preserve existing essential items, systems, and values while adapting to new conditions in a flexible way.

Keywords Conventional Worlds • Market Forces • Policy Reform • Barbarization • Breakdown • Fortress World • Great Transition • Eco-Communalism • New Sustainability Paradigm • Civil Society

“Sustainable Development is a development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987).

Finding a precise and suitable definition for the term “Sustainable Development” is an important precondition for the understanding of the “New Sustainability

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Paradigm” (NSP). Brundtland's definition from the report “Our Common Future” aka “Brundtland Report” (Brundtland 1987) is possibly the most widely known definition of “Sustainable Development”, but neither the first nor the most precise definition of this complex term.

The term “Sustainable Economy” was coined by the German forestry of the 18th century (Schwarz-Herion 2005, with further references) and meant that within a legally regulated area not more trees were allowed to be cut than were able to grow back within a certain cycle of regeneration (Schwarz-Herion 2005, with further references). In the nineteenth century, the term “Sustainability” was adopted by Great Britain and the USA and extended to other lines of business, e.g., in fishing. After 1800, the term “Sustainability” started to include also aesthetic and ecological aspects (Schwarz-Herion 2005, with further references).

Although “Sustainable Development” has become a widely used buzz word all over the globe since the new millennium, a clear definition of “Sustainable Development”, criticized as a “consensus creating empty phrase” (Schwarz-Herion 2005, with further references), is still missing, so that the term “Sustainable Development” is abused by all kind of people for different agendas.

According to the verbal meaning of “Sustainable Development”, the word “sustainable” is derived from the Latin word “sustinere” (=to sustain, to keep up), whereas the term “development” depicts a process of change – usually a change towards innovation and progress. So, the term “Sustainable Development” consists of two different verbal elements: One element depicting stability and another element depicting a process of change. Thus, “Sustainable Development” is an innovative change, which manages to preserve existing essential items, systems, and values.

The majority of scholars agree that Sustainable Development consists of at least three pillars: The ecological pillar, the economic pillar, and the socio-political pillar (Schwarz-Herion 2005, with further references). A truly “Sustainable Development” provides stable ecological systems, socio-political fairness and stability, as well as economic stability. Sustainable ecological systems require clean air, fertile ground, water security, food security, energy security, as well as the preservation of the atmosphere including measures to avoid anthropogenic (man-made) climate change and the protection of the existing biosphere including humans, animals, and plants.

Sustainable socio-political systems would optimize equality between people regardless of national, social, or ethnical origin, gender, age, or religious and ideological affiliation and would foster tolerance between individuals and groups (e.g., between the young and the elderly as well as between Christians and Muslims). Furthermore, sustainable socio-political systems would strive for political empowerment of citizens and for peace by mutual agreements between individuals or entities (rather than by quasi-fascist global legislation or by military intervention to manufacture artificial peace by suppressing dissidents).

Sustainable economic systems would avoid existence-threatening debts on all levels (e.g., debts of states and cities, banks, companies, families, individuals). Beyond that, sustainable systems would ideally seek ways to offer every person on the globe all items and services which are needed to secure the physical and mental health of humans.

In 2002, the Global Scenario Group (GSG) of the Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI) published their essay “Great Transition. The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead” (Raskin et al. 2002) as the third in a trilogy by the GSG, building on the two previous essays “Branch Points” and “Bending the Curve” (Raskin et al. 2002, with further references). In their 2002 essay, the authors analyzed the long-term risks and prospects for sustainability by their three uniquely descriptive classes of socio-political scenarios (“Conventional Worlds”, “Barbarization”, and “Great Transition”) and their impact on the different pillars of Sustainability.

“Conventional worlds” describe scenarios which are neither ideal nor totally unpleasant, whereas “Barbarization” describes rather pessimistic scenarios as opposed to “Great Transition” scenarios as the most optimistic ones. Each of these scenario classes consists of two variants. The scenario class “Conventional Worlds” is divided into the two variants “Market Forces” and “Policy Reform”. In the “Market Forces” variant, global competitive market forces determine the global development and supersede environmental and social problems which rank only in the second place. In the “Policy Reform”-variant, the eradication of poverty and the implementation of sustainability require comprehensive and coordinated government action (Raskin et al. 2002).

“Barbarization” consists of the variants “Breakdown” and “Fortress World”: In the “Breakdown” variant, a no longer controllable spiral of conflicts and crises ultimately leads to the collapse of institutions. In the “Fortress World”, the “Barbarization” variant is curtailed by authority leading to the emergence of a global apartheid with an elite in protected enclaves and an impoverished majority outside these prosperous castles (Raskin et al. 2002).

The “Great Transition” scenario is divided into the variants “Eco-communalism” and “New Sustainability Paradigm” (NSP). In “Eco-Communalism”, bio-regionalism, localism, grassroots democracy, and economic self-sufficiency determine events. In the “New Sustainability Paradigm” (NSP), the search for a liberating, humanistic, and ecological reform changes the character of the global civilization, leading to global solidarity, mutual cultural enrichment, and economic ties. The key player in this scenario which is based on the assumption of a planetary society is the civil society. The latter scenario variant is considered the most sustainable, democratic, and desirable one by Raskin et al. (2002).

According to some scholars, a planetary society requires a process of global cooperation on the basis of local initiatives, enabling humans to exist as independent individuals. These authors (e.g., Habermas) point out that the model scenario of a planetary civil society was not only desirable with view to equality of all humans, but also that it was already “five to twelve” because states were only doing planetary politics in inner affairs with view to the financial markets. They stress that the huge gap between North and South made humans sacrifice their life to intrude into the “Fortress Europe” or over the Mexican border to intrude into the USA (NN 2008). This problem was already diagnosed back in 2005 with view to Raskin’s “Fortress World” scenario coming true (Schwarz-Herion 2005).

Nevertheless, it falls short to consider only the North-South divide regarding poverty and equality issues. Actually, it is more realistic to take equally a look at

the social differences within nations including the so-called “rich countries”. This concerns especially the USA with more than 46 million people (15 % of USA’s population) living at Third World level (Ritter 2013). Similarly, in Europe, millions of people do not have enough money to buy food. Since 2010, the number of those who are dependent on food supply increased in 22 European countries by 75 %. 43 million people in Europe cannot afford any food anymore; 120 million are at risk of poverty. In Greece, the youth unemployment rate has risen from 22.1 % (2008) to 55.3 % (2012). Even in seemingly affluent countries like Germany where 45 % of the employment contracts concluded since 2008 are mini jobs 5.5 million people lost their status as members of the middle-class and are now among the lowest owners as a consequence of the financial crisis (Deutsche Wirtschaftsnachrichten 2013). In Spain, the youth unemployment rate reached a peak of 56.1 % in 2013 (Burgen 2013), forcing even highly qualified young people into mini jobs (El Mundo 2013).

In contrast, 1 % of the world population owns about 50 % of the entire world’s wealth according to a study published by the British humanitarian and development organization Oxfam on January 21, 2014 (Roth 2014). Beyond that, the World’s 15 biggest private landowners hold 21 % of the world’s total land mass consisting of 36.8 billion acres of inhabitable land (McEnery 2011).

This shows that considering only the social differences between North and South is antiquated and unrealistic. Instead, the obvious socio-economic disparities between the different classes of society across the globe have to be accounted for and need to be removed to approach the NSP.

According to Ziegler, a planetary civil society should secure the global exchange of interests, requesting a return to a “principle of generosity” with a “normative world view” in which the economy works for and not against humans. Ziegler sees some progress in, e.g., the Movement of the Landless, the Via Campesina (global peasant club), and international NGOs like ATTAC and their connection in the annual World Social Forum (NN 2008). Actually, both the economy and environmental protection should work for and not against humans in the NSP scenario instead of serving elitist circles as a pretext to suppress and exploit people on a global base.

The global financial crisis shows that the global economy is anything but sustainable. Debts on a global scale and the externalization of internal costs in the economic, social, and ecological sector contradict the NSP scenario. Another problem is the increasing erosion of the existing middle-class because a large and stable middle-class would be an essential guarantor for equality, social stability, and a sound standard of living in a planetary society.

The NSP scenario is only feasible if the socio-political framework facilitates the empowerment and political participation of citizens as basis for the optimization of peace within and outside state borders since wars regularly have an extremely negative impact on Sustainable Development – at least on its ecological and social pillar (Westing 2012). Although wars are sometimes supposed to offer new chances for self-made men and self-made women, very few individuals and institutions actually ever reaped economic benefits from wars. Wars and revolutions fought with modern

weapon systems might lead to irreparable damage on nature, property, and human society. Nowadays, nuclear weapons in combination with even more innovative and destructive weapon systems, such as the hostile use of environmental modification technologies, have the capability to destroy the whole planet and all life on earth, thus leading to a final global breakdown instead of facilitating the NSP scenario. Therefore, the first part of the book will put a strong focus on political and social problems which might help to avoid such a scenario.

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