

Sustainability, development and cultural transitions

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Population growth and development

- ▶ Population growth is a central development issue because population growth today occurs mainly in the South. Growth rates have now stabilized and will reach a level approximately 10 billion people in this century. **Population, natural resources and opportunities for development are very unevenly distributed around the world.**
- ▶ Only a few authors, i.e. Bierbaum et al (2007), have proposed targeted policies for population planning as part of the climate policies and sustainability. Migrations, cultural transitions and other population flows such as refugees and tourism may change the global distribution of goods and opportunities.
- ▶ At present, population policies are driven by their desirability for managing population growth for development rather than by their intrinsic links to climate change and environmental sustainability.



Climate change and development as separate policy concerns

- ▶ The Kyoto Protocol and other agreements separate climate policy and development as two different processes. It is more cost effective to re-orient the growth process in the developing world towards de-carbonization than to reconstruct the existing infrastructure in the OECD countries.
- ▶ A comprehensive approach is needed, linking responsibility and funding from the location of investment. **Elaborating a new development perspective is urgent, focusing on de-carbonizing the economy without endangering the growth process.**



Sustainable Development: only one process.

- ▶ The new perception of economic development as a global responsibility has now been recognized in climate agreements.
- ▶ Article 2 of the UNFCCC explicitly aims at achieving:
“...stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations ... within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change,... and **to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.**”



Why do Civilizations collapse?

- ▶ History provides many examples of great civilizations that collapsed or gradually disappeared (Diamond, 2009). In many cases, civilizations collapse because the elite, or the supporting classes do not recognize the danger of given situations, or **are unable to change the political and economic interactions in their societies so as to prevent or stop** .
- ▶ **Such interactions are frequently related to the ecological basis of survival of that society. (Maya, Easter Island)**



The New Frontiers of Being Human

- ▶ Culture, language, feelings and understanding of experience are shared by humans, animals, plants and other living beings.
- ▶ “Sentient” beings have capacities to create languages, communicate in collective groups, forecast events, transmit and produce learning and exchanging feelings with other sentient beings.
- ▶ Meaning is the basic process through which all sentient beings satisfy their needs and those of others.
- ▶ Communication of needs and wants is possible among all sentient beings of their own groups but of other groups as well.



Uneven Transitions

- ▶ Sustainability is a transition consisting of very many uneven, local and global events. Cultural globalization proceeds in the same manner, shaped by political choices, social relations, cultural allegiances and the information and communication technologies.
- ▶ Increased communications are opening up extraordinary possibilities but also new risks for creating, exchanging and disseminating knowledge as well as for learning.



Tranforming Anthropogenic Activities

- ▶ Transforming anthropogenic activities in the context of the environment is not just a question of culture but of the systemic characteristics of cultural belonging, reciprocity and responsibility that human beings need to make sense of their lives.
- ▶ These integrative social practices cannot be reintroduced into society through fragmentary economic and political strategies.



Descola: A world of relations

- ▶ That which exists outside our bodies and in interface with it presents us with a finite ensemble of qualities and relations which we humans may or may not choose to activate.
- ▶ Different cultural systems thus direct local practices of relations to others, human and non-human, which give a distinctive style as to the claim of reciprocity, predatory appropriation, disinterested gifts, protection, production and so on.



Convergence of knowledge

- ▶ Human beings must now recognize themselves not as external observers or stewards of a natural world but as part of the open journey of that natural world itself.
- ▶ The pathways of a transition to sustainability, cannot be defined fully in advance; they have to be produced at an uneven pace, at many scales and in different geospatial localities.



Building Compatible Systems

- ▶ The parallel with the ancient knowledge of many non-Western cultures, of contemporary Oriental religions and of shamanistic practices is increasingly being acknowledged.
- ▶ Not all cultural transitions are compatible. It is necessary to identify the nature of their eco-social systems, to establish typologies of such systems and to build new adaptive forms of acknowledging rights and responsibilities.



Convivability

- ▶ **A new “worlding” is in process:**
 - To recast the nature of being human.
 - To redefine the qualities of living beings.
 - To rebuild the relations between them.
 - To establish meta-cultural rules and goals.

