

## IN SEARCH OF SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES

### Notes from the Tampere dialogue II

Date: 17 May 2008, Tampere

Venue: Werstas Museum, Finnish Social Forum

First researcher **Jarna Pasanen** explained the focus of the session and the CED project on sustainable cultures.

Cultural activists, musician and illustrator **Jhikolabwino Manyika** from Tanzania explained the rasta understanding and way of life. The rasta try to live in harmony with nature. God, nature and people are one. If we harm the nature, we harm ourselves. Rasta see the Western technological system (Babylon) as evil, it is harming us all. Earlier rasta people who had been taken away from Africa would like to return to the homeland to leave the Babylon system. But now with the global warming there is no place to escape. Some brothers had come to settle in Kilimanjaro, but now the ice cap is there no more.

Rasta people are trying to get back to the nature. For some it means physical move from the West to Africa, for others a mental and spiritual move towards natural way of living. One aspect of this is to consume naturally produced vegetarian food – *ital* food in the rasta expression..

Activists and philosopher **Ville-Veikko Hirvelä** from Finland addressed some of the root causes of the destructive modern society. According to him, the modern way of life is the major source for destruction. The material consumption is not physically needed, so it is rather a social and cultural need. The prevailing society is actually a minority phenomenon, as most of the people live differently.

Why modern people feel they need things that are not really needed. Whole of our culture has been teaching us that we live by consuming meanings and significances that are available, rather than creating the meanings and significances. What is commonly shared can be commonly consumed. It is the social model that what we can easily perceive, like the material world. One has to get a clear grip of things, and the consume them.

If we think of the traditions that have lived more sustainably believe, that they are bringing some significance to the natural world, and giving something to the stones, rivers, forests. Modern scientific understanding is denying this idea, that we should rather add significance to the nature, not consume it.

If one has a relation with living and non-living nature that brings significance to them is not only rejected as an foolish idea but also considered unhealthy.

If we take samples from around the world, most modernly educated consume the most. And the ones with the least modern education live most sustainably. There is something strange in the

modern scientific thinking: the more sophisticated knowledge of biology, ecology etc one has, the more destructive way of living one leads.

For example in cultivation, the indigenous people tend to cultivate inside the forest, rather than clearing the forest. The former is part of the regeneration of the forest, the latter displaces the forest and the natural growth of plants.

Also in the modern societies, most of the expressions and words are from pre-modern times, and they do echo from the more sustainable past. However, the present scientific interpretations are suppressing those meanings.

Ville-Veikko has been trying to live with minimal environmental impact. This has meant sleeping in spaces that are heated but not used in nights such as offices, finding left-over food and keeping busy with activism so there is no time for consumerist culture. He finds it important that there is some significance in him that he wants to bring to the world. Therefore consuming will never give similar meaning as sharing. However, he admitted being part of this destructive machine also by flying to India and using a bus. Further, he said that he has not found a perfect solution.

Currently the modern people do not feel good with their lifestyles. They are very dependent on so many different things of the consumerist life. Giving up the consumption of goods and meanings can improve life. Now freedom is considered the ability to choose from given alternatives. This is a fake idea of freedom. Real freedom is to create your own meanings and significances.

**Kai Vaara**, centrally placed in the eco-village movement in Finland, explained the thinking among the eco-village / eco-community initiatives and movements. There is a pre-history with particular with particular spiritual and ideological tendencies. In Russia there is a new way of community movement that is combined with political demand for one hectare of land, the anastasia movement. That may have a wider impact also. In hundreds of cities in Russia people are gathering to form new communities in this line.

A member of Ananda Marga / Proutist Universal, **Dada Jyotirupananda** explained how more and more people are starting to see that all are interconnected neo-humanism. On Feminism, his spiritual teacher is saying that men and women are like the two wings of a bird. A balance and equal rights and opportunities have to be there.

There are many reasons to be vegetarian. For Jyotirupananda the moral reason is important. If half of the people would become vegetarian the world would have much better environmental balance. We need conscientious communities. There are responsibilities for those around us. The challenge is how to get these ideas of sustainability to the world at large.

**Vijay Pratap** from India and the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam network started by saying that in working out a sustainable future one should start with the realities of the ordinary people. Exceptional persons can be used as a reference point, but overemphasis on moral righteousness can be destructive also. The journey should be most participatory.

Vijay Pratap told that in India one would not form Friends of the Earth, but it would have to be called Sons and Daughters of the Earth. Similarly there was a question what the northern NGOs can do. He would welcome the Finnish groups to understand their journey from forest dwellers to destructive modern culture together with the Indian groups.

*The dialogue was organised in association with Vastedes and Democracy Forum Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Notes by Marko Ulvila.*