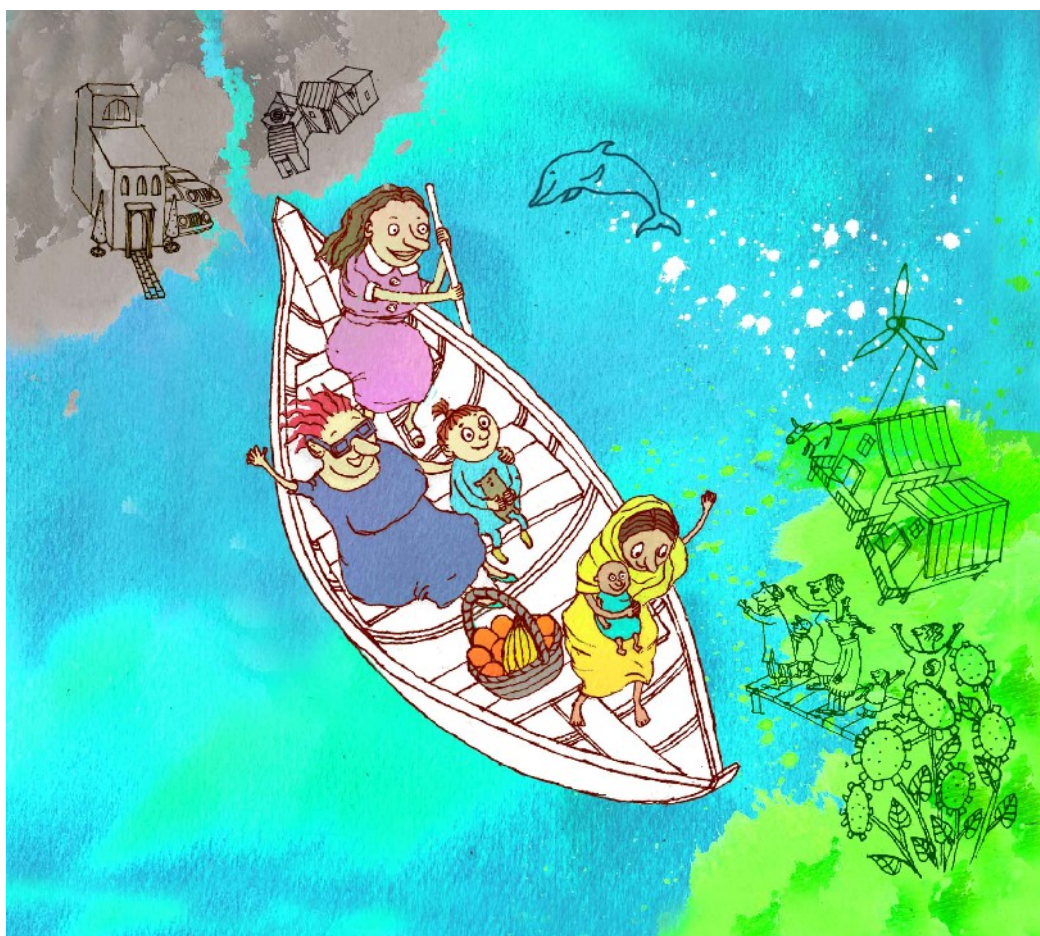


# TRANSFORMATIONS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Combined Responses to the Interconnected  
Crisis of Ecology and Economy



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## Abstract

This paper summarises the main findings from a study conducted by Coalition for Environment and Development for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland on culture and sustainability. The study arranged dialogues in Finland, Sweden, Tanzania, Kenya, India and Nepal with intellectuals and activists, and procured twenty background papers relating to sustainable futures. Complex environmental problems such as climate disruption, impoverishment of ecosystems and toxification are threatening the future of humanity more than ever before. Therefore a transformation to sustainable cultures is needed – a culture that incorporates environmental sustainability and human dignity for all.

By using the definition of sustainable culture, three cultural classes are outlined globally: the over-consuming class, the sustainable class and the struggling class. Roughly one third of humanity belongs to each of these classes. Economic growth as measured in the Gross Domestic Product should be urgently replaced as a societal objective with sustainable economics. If this is done, the future scenario for the over-consuming class would be degrowth, for the sustainable class steady-state economics and for the struggling class empowerment.

Domination through power hierarchies causes alienation of the elite on the top from the basic rules of nature and rules of humanity, and leads to unsustainability. Paths to egalitarian relations are presented to five such relations: gender, ethnic traits, economy, knowledge and nature. It is considered necessary for the relations to be equalised on all these fronts, as they form a coherent structure of the society. Deepening democracy is the overall strategy for horizontal relations and sustainability. For the project material and the complete report of the study, *Sustainable Futures – From Growth Imperative and Hierarchies to Sustainable Ways*, visit [www.sustainablefutures.fi](http://www.sustainablefutures.fi).

## 1. Introduction



The point of departure for this paper is a search for sustainable cultures in the era of growing crisis. For us sustainable culture is one that combines the elements of environmental sustainability and human dignity for all. When both these elements are present, the positive notion of sustainable culture can be applied. Culture we understand in a broad sense to incorporate all patterns of behaviour, i.e., thought, expression, action, institution and artefacts.

Environmental sustainability has been most famously defined by the World Commission on Sustainable Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, as “development, that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.<sup>1</sup>

Human dignity is a more elusive concept, yet very useful for the purpose of our study. Human dignity would have to do with being able to respect one's self with the qualities one has, and getting such respect from others as

1 WCSD 1987, p. 42.

well. We find it important to operate with a concept that intuitively makes sense to all people around the world, even if they cannot be measured by modern sciences and administrations.

## *The Backdrop*

Since the Limits to Growth report of the Club of Rome in 1972 and the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Stockholm the same year, there has been a lively debate about the sustainability of the modern industrial culture. Especially the work of the Brundtland Commission in the 1980s that paved the way to the Earth Summit in 1992, invigorated the discussions and led to important new multilateral environmental agreements. Climate change and biodiversity became household names.

The scientific findings about the environmental unsustainability of the present culture have increased year by year. The latest assessment report by the rather cautious Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change states that the resilience of many ecosystems is likely to be exceeded this century by an unprecedented combination of climate change, associated disturbances and other global change drivers.<sup>2</sup> The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is more straightforward by stating that the past gains for humanity have been achieved at growing costs in the form of the degradation of many ecosystem services and the aggravation of poverty. Furthermore, these problems, unless addressed, will substantially diminish the benefits that future generations can obtain from ecosystems and become a barrier to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>3</sup>

## *The Study*

This paper is an outcome of a study carried out by an activist research group Coalition for Environment and Development (CED)<sup>4</sup>. The primary objective of the study was to work out definitions of sustainable culture, find living examples of them and propose transformation agendas for the unsustainable ones. Secondly, the choice for the method was to go for dialogues among various actors in three continents for direct inputs from the ground and balanced representation of different realities.

For the study, eleven dialogues on sustainable futures were conducted in six countries: Finland, India, Kenya, Nepal, Sweden and Tanzania. Their purpose was to get inputs from the rich oral system of communication and knowledge that exists particularly in the Global South. In each dialogue ten to fifty people came together to discuss the topic, initiated by invited speakers. The participants came mainly from the civil society sphere. Besides the dialogues, twenty background papers were commissioned from the same countries to feed into the process of reflection. Conventional desk work with published texts was also part of the process.

## **2. Class Perspective on Sustainability of Cultures**

For the purpose of this study, we have identified sustainable culture as a combination of environmental sustainability and human dignity. In this section, we will make an attempt to illustrate the various cultural combinations that follow from our definition by applying the environmental sustainability principle and the human dignity principle.

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2 IPCC 2007, p. 26. The conference of core of IPCC members in Copenhagen March 2009 concluded that “worst-case IPCC scenario trajectories (or even worse) are being realised”. See. Climate Congress 2009.

3 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005, p. 15.

4 The study was commissioned by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland in the context of development co-operation. The full report and related papers can be obtained from <http://www.sustainablefutures.fi/>



With the environmental sustainability principle, our focus is on pollution and resource use in industrial scale. The justification for this is that in the context of climate change, the emissions from using land for food production and firewood for cooking are in important ways different from the burning of fossil fuels.

For the human dignity principle, we look at the fulfilment of basic material human needs such as food, shelter and health, and we consider also the human socio-cultural needs such as respect, freedom and meaning. When both these aspects are met, the human dignity can be realised. When either one is missing, human dignity in the concerned culture is questionable.

By using the two principles we have identified three cultural classes: over-consuming, sustainable and struggling.

### *Three Cultural Classes: Over-Consuming, Sustainable and Struggling*

The starting point for our definition and calculation of the cultural classes is the work of Matthew Bentley in defining a member of the consumer class as a person who has an annual income exceeding 7,000 USD in terms of purchasing power parity.<sup>5</sup> This is a group that we call over-consuming class.

The numbers of the over-consuming class in selected major countries are indicated in Table 1. An important element to note there, is the sizeable over-consuming in populous countries such as China and India. On the global-scale, nearly an equal number of over-consumers are located in the developed and developing groups.

Table 1: Over-Consumers in Selected Countries and Regions 2002

Selected Countries	Over-Consumers (Millions)	Share of Population
United States	243	84 %
China	240	19 %
India	122	12 %
Japan	121	95 %
Germany	76	92 %
Brazil	58	33 %
WORLD	1,728	28%
Of which :		
- In industrial countries	912	
- In developing countries	816	

Source: Worldwatch 2004.

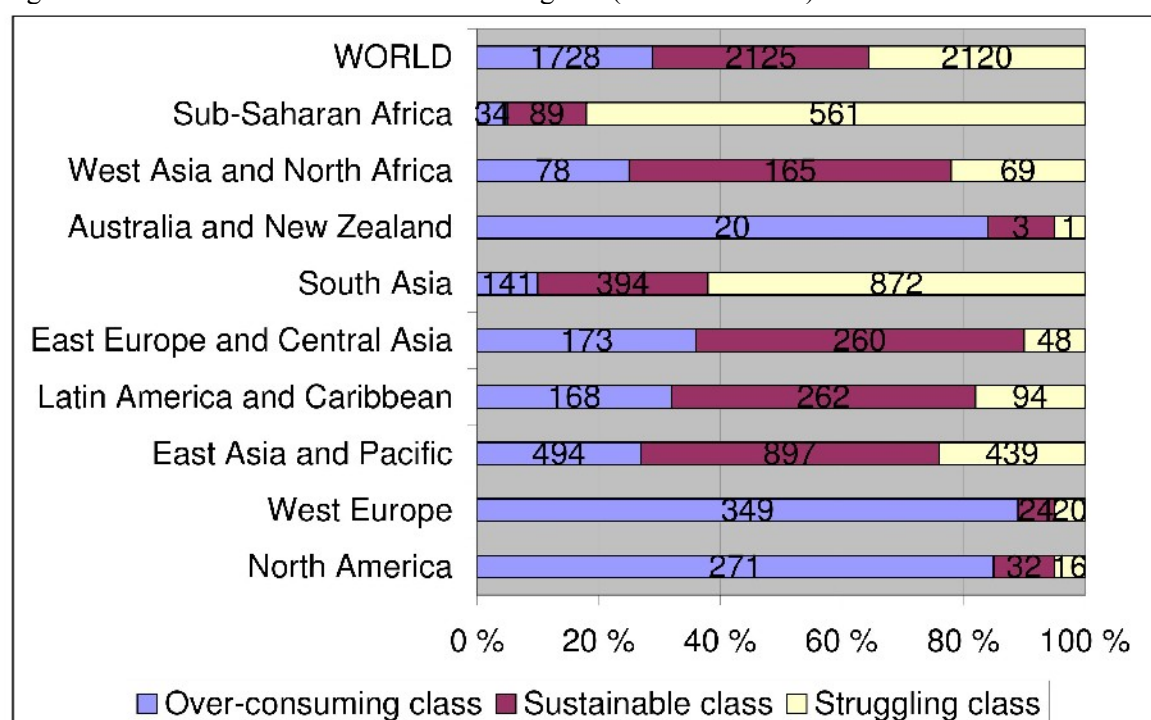
<sup>5</sup> Worldwatch 2004, pp. 6-7.

The second set of data is for the group that we call the struggling class. It is roughly the people who try to survive with less than USD 2 per day.<sup>6</sup> For the industrialised regions, we have included a minimum five per cent to the struggling class, as homelessness, unemployment and inadequate access to health care deny dignified life for at least this kind of share also in the high income societies.

What is left between these two groups, we have named the sustainable class. The members of the sustainable class have their basic needs met by livelihoods that do not cause excessive industrial greenhouse gas emissions. And they lead ways of life that are not consuming excessive amount of energy or non-renewable resources. By discovering this sizeable class between annual per capita incomes of around USD 750 and 7,000 we hope to bring optimism to the gloomy picture about the future: one-third of the humanity has made it, and it should be very much possible also for the rest! In reality, this class faces constant challenges with the appeal of the 'consumer paradise' on the one hand and precarious existence in the lower ladders of power structures on the other hand.

The number of people belonging to these classes and their relative share in the World and its regions is indicated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Cultural Class Formation Across Regions (Million in 2002)



Looking at the figures we can see that Western Europe and North America are dominated by the over-consuming class, while the sustainable class has the largest share in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, West Asia, North Africa and East Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have members of the struggling class as the most dominant group.

## Gender and Cultural Classes

The presentation of the three classes below did not pay attention gender, as the income statistics used did not readily have gender specific data. As that is difficult to find, we go ahead discussing the gender aspects of the sustainable culture and classes with some rough estimates.

In Table 2 below, we present a scheme for the gender division of the three classes. Our estimate is that

<sup>6</sup> World Bank 2007.



two out of three members of the over-consuming class are male, and similarly two out of three members of the struggling class are female. The sustainable class would have equal share of both genders.

Table 2: A Schematic Estimate of the Gender Division Among the Cultural Classes

	Male	Female
Over-consuming class	2/3	1/3
Sustainable class	1/2	1/2
Struggling class	1/3	2/3

The purpose of this scheme is to point to the fact that the consumption patterns in classes differ considerably in gender terms. This has to be kept in mind when thinking about the transformation agendas and sustainable futures.

The male-dominated over-consumption is creating significant hardship among the women of the struggling classes. It is the poor women in developing countries who bear the heaviest burden of environmental degradation. These women typically lack access to essential resources but at the same time they are responsible for food, fuel and safe water supply. Environmental loss and degradation considerably increase women's workloads in obtaining these essential resources.<sup>7</sup>

Gerd Johnsson-Latham has studied the issue of gender and consumption and made pertinent observations. Even though family is often taken as a single socio-economic unit, she observes that it seldom represents a balanced distribution unit and the differing access to resources and consumption is most pronounced in poor families. She concludes, "If women's consumption levels were to be the norm, both emissions and climate change would be significantly less than today."<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Sustainable Economy



According to Wikipedia, "an economy is a set of human and social activities and institutions related to the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods and services".<sup>9</sup> However, most of the time when economy is discussed, it covers only that part of the economy, which is measured in the national accounts as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This partial and fragmented way of dealing with economy is the first reason why economic growth is a questionable societal objective.

Elements that are not included in the GDP economy include household gift economy production for own use, gift economy and barter exchange beyond the household, sharing and exchanging products and services with neighbours, relatives, friends, community

<sup>7</sup> Hemmati & Gardiner 2002, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Johnsson-Latham 2007, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy>

members, and legal non-recorded monetary exchange of goods and services. Also nature's free services as excluded from the GDP, as well as material and cultural commons. Naturally, black economy is also not included.

All these excluded parts together can be called informal economy. The official GDP-measured economy together with informal economy, we call the complete economy. For human welfare and for future of the life in the planet, it is essential what actually happens to the global complete economy. There is rich empirical evidence and conceptual links showing that growth of GDP-economy is connected with shrinking and damage of the informal economy, so that the net result is actually negative<sup>10</sup>.

## *Principles of Sustainable Economics*

Liberation from the narrow and growth-oriented understanding of economy is an urgent task. The first step towards a sustainable economy would be to construct a holistic understanding of the complete economy instead of focusing only on the monetized formal economy. Moving towards the complete economy means major transformation of both the study and management of economy as we know them now.<sup>11</sup>

The second step would be to apply the principles of human dignity for all and environmental sustainability as primary objectives of economy. In the case of human dignity, the criteria for successful economic theory or practice would be how it benefits the weakest members of the society. Such last-person-first idea has been proposed by M.K. Gandhi referring to the best moral teachings of various religions and thinkers.

In the case of environmental sustainability, we would go by the definition worked out by the UK Sustainable Development Commission, that a sustainable economy should be regarded as the means to reaching the more fundamental goal of a strong, healthy and just society that is living within environmental limits.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, we propose three scenarios for the three classes indicated earlier: contraction of the economy for the over-consuming classes (degrowth), steady-state or an economy of permanence for the sustainable classes and empowerment for the struggling classes.

## *Degrowth for the Over-Consuming Classes*

For the overgrown over-consuming societies, following the principles of sustainable economy would lead to contraction of the monetary wealth/income as measured in the GDP. Such degrowth scenario is being welcomed by an increasing number of scholars and actors. Degrowth, *decroissance* in French, is defined as “a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory and ecologically sustainable society”.<sup>13</sup>

Proponents of degrowth argue that current economic growth is not sustainable over the long term because it depletes natural resources and destroys the environment, and because it fails to help populations improve their welfare significantly. The challenge is work out degrowth politics that would be just and bring about the changes in a democratic and incremental manner, rather than through collapse and unfair burden on the least powerful.

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10 For overviews of the problems with growth imperative, see for example Lamba 2005, Shiva 2008 and Meadows, Randers and Meadows 2005.

11 For critiques of the mainstream economics, see for example Bakshi 2007 and Marglin 2008.

12 Jackson 2009, 108.

13 Flipo & Schneider (eds.) 2008.

According to Fabrice Flipo, degrowth is coming together of several sources which cross today without even being convergent. Of such sources, the dominant one is environmental with the tradition of limits to growth debates. Another related one is bio-economics, as established by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen. The other three are culturalist sources led by Serge Latouche, democratic source in the spirit of Ivan Illich and a crisis of direction in modern societies, as noted already by M.K. Gandhi.<sup>14</sup>

### *Steady-State Economy for the Sustainable Classes*

For the sustainable classes, a steady-state economy scenario of economics of permanence would be the natural one. Such communities and societies would continue to change and evolve, but within the current level of environmental impact and further improvement in human dignity for all.

The phrase steady-state economy originates from ecological economics, most notably the work of Herman Daly.<sup>15</sup> The idea connotes constant populations of people and constant stocks of capital. It also has a constant rate of throughput; i.e., energy and materials used to produce goods and services. Constancy does imply stagnation. In the short run mild fluctuations in population and throughput are normal, with the aim of stable equilibrium in the long run.<sup>16</sup>

### *Empowerment for the Struggling Classes*

For the struggling classes the case would be primarily an empowerment scenario. Current poverty of the struggling classes is clearly a symptom of powerlessness. Successful transformation would mean a situation where the poor people would have the right to natural resources that they depend on, right to have basic needs met by their own effort whenever possible, right to equal say in matters that affect their life through a political process. When all these positive changes happen and someone finds there economic growth using the GDP formula, the growth should not be a problem.

The last-person-first economics would be of primary importance for the empowerment of the struggling classes. Current planning and understanding is too much focused on national or regional averages, leaving the conditions of the weakest sections of the society in the dark. The leading principle for the last-person-first economics is in the maxim of Gandhi that the condition of a culture can be determined by the way it treats its weakest members. This way societies would strive not for the growth on national GNP or its per capita average, but for the well-being of the last-person, for example, the lowest ten percent. In this, allocating resources from the top to the bottom and thereby reducing inequalities would be the natural process.

Since the members of the struggling classes are predominantly women, the role of women's movements are of central importance. One of the demands of such movements is to get recognition and respect to the productive work by women in the informal sector, that is currently ignored in the GDP accounts.

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<sup>14</sup> Flipo 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Daly 1977.

<sup>16</sup> See Czech & Tietenberg 2007, Goldsmith 1992, 193-194.



## 4. From Hierarchies to Equality



Hierarchic structures present in modern societies lead to environmental unsustainability and human indignity. The reason for this is the way powerful elites on the top inevitably become alienated from the laws of nature and laws of humanity. A set of five hierarchies are discussed here: gender, ethnic traits, economic class, knowledge-technology and nature

### *Gender: Building on the Positive Trend*

There has been a positive trend in women's rights over the past centuries. The basic economic and political rights of women have been realised in most of the countries in the world. Also many of the practices have changed and women can participate in economic activities and political processes to a varying degree.

The change has been driven forward by the feminist movements. In the context of the West, the suffragettes were among the first demanding right to vote and take part in the elections. Gradually the focus has shifted to issues such as reproductive rights, access to higher education, property rights, and lesbian and gay rights.

However, in no culture or country do we find a perfect equality. It often makes one assume that as women can reach even the highest posts, they already have the same opportunities as men. In this thinking it is claimed that it is only a weakness of an individual woman, her personal failure if she is not equal to men, and thus inequality is not a larger social problem that needs to be solved together.

In many cases and places there is still severe domination by men over women and even the basic women's rights, such as the right to education or property, are still only a dream. It is crucial to support the demands of the feminist grassroots movements especially in the Global South, as their actions touch the lives of the marginalised majorities, such as the World March of Women.

Since the over-consuming class is predominantly male, the transformation places greater responsibility with men. There is clear need to come up with new roles and aspirations particularly for boys and men. Becoming more caring, empathetic and responsible should not be a negative scenario. Instead of driving fast with a new and big cars, men will find other ways to express themselves.

It is important to remember that for men the gender equality does not mean giving up their gained status, but actually equality serves them better. Breaking the hierarchic gender system means more freedom for men also.

### *Ethnic Traits: Pursuing the Positive Trends and Meeting Further Challenges*

Since the 19th century, some of the extreme hierarchies or binary oppositions regarding ethnic traits

dominant in many cultures around the world have been somewhat successfully challenged by various popular movements. The ideas of the French Revolution echoed all the way in Haiti where the black slaves rebelled against racial oppression and eventually built an independent state. Other spearheading movements include the anti-slavery movement in the West and the struggles for abolishing untouchability in South Asia. The United Nations Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights and international agreements and UN resolutions are examples of the achievements of the movements.

Despite the positive trend, racism and other systems of oppression based on ethnic traits still plague the cultures across the world. Even in case when laws have changed, the social, cultural and economic practices may continue. Therefore, we see intense struggles against racial discrimination and caste oppression around the world demanding equal rights and possibilities irrespective of colour, religion or language.

### *Economy: Reversing the Trend by Limiting the Size of Economic Institutions*

In the case of economic institutions and relations, however, the trend is clearly different. Increasingly hierarchic economic system, commonly referred to as capitalism, has constantly expanded and captured more and more communities, people, resources and spheres of life under its influence. The gift and barter exchanges of households and cultivation economies have been increasingly replaced by monetary exchanges dominated by industrial forces.

Accumulation of capital in big corporations, especially in the finance sector, has created hierarchic institutions of unimaginable size. Many such corporations have a turnover larger than the government budgets of some populous low-income countries. As a result, the income differences have increased to historical levels, environmental destruction worsened and symptoms of absolute deprivation of power and resources, such as hunger, have stayed constant or even increased.<sup>17</sup>

One of the features of the current corporate capitalist economy is that through ever-growing size of the corporations and their evermore diffused ownership through stock funds, hierarchies become stronger and alienation starker. Due to their size, the corporations have been able to influence political processes through lobbying, election financing and other anti-democratic means and thereby enforcing the process of accumulation and consolidation.

Since market economy is a popular way to organise economic exchanges, the most acceptable solution to the problems caused by concentrated corporate power is - limiting the size and ownership of economic institutions. A maximum size limit would be set on economic institutions on either number in terms of employment or turnover, and their ownership would be limited to individuals. And the number of ownership of companies would be limited also. For example, any person could own two companies, and each company would have maximum 1,000 employees or a turnover of USD 50 million. In this way, a direct personal ownership - a direct chain of responsibility, would be established for the owner, and accumulation of power and wealth and huge hierarchies would be prevented. This would create a market-economy that encourages private enterprise without the risks and dysfunctional elements of corporate capitalism.

Obviously also the traditional agendas of empowerment of workers vis-a-vis capital, democratic control over the means of production and reducing income disparities are as timely as ever.<sup>18</sup> However, in the current state of discourse we have felt it useful to emphasise the issue of scale and size in regard to economic democracy.

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<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Kempf 2008.

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis how small income differences contribute to societal well being, see Wilkinson & Pickett 2009.

## ***Knowledge and Technology: Reversing the Trend by Institutionalising Principles of Precaution, Liability and Sharing***

Another sphere where growing hierarchies have developed over the past centuries is knowledge, more precisely scientific knowledge and technology that help turning labour and natural resources into evermore useful forms for the generation of monetary wealth. The problem is that typically technological development is primarily geared to short-sighted profit-making by large corporations, not for the benefit of the people and planet.

The globalised intellectual property regimes have enabled oligopolies and monopolies to be established around knowledge intensive high-tech products and services particularly in areas such as information technology and health care. One outcome of such hierarchic knowledge and technology structures is that drug development is geared towards diseases caused by over-consumption among the wealthy classes and the poor do not get access to life-saving medicine because of the pricing by patent holding pharmaceutical companies.

The present technology regime can hardly provide answers to the pressing environmental problems, because new technology is patented by profit making institutions that do not have an economic incentive to make it widely available for the struggling classes where it could make the most difference.

The experience with technologically induced change is that it is very unpredictable. We do anticipate positive outcomes and may be aware of negative ones also. However, there is always a whole range of unanticipated negative outcomes that we will realise only later.

For example, the combustion engine has been hailed as a great innovation but is now a major contribution to climate chaos that may threaten the very basis of human life on the Earth. Technological development directed from the top of the power hierarchy is very likely to produce negative consequences to the people in the lower strata of the hierarchy.

Currently the innovators and the companies that bring new products in the market hardly take any responsibility for the unanticipated negative outcome of their work. As a response to this, precautionary principle and polluter-pays principle need to be enforced strictly for extended period of time. It is not enough that the producers pass the present day requirements set up by government since unknown problems often emerge later. A producer's liability system has to be there for, say, seven generations. Whoever wants to introduce a new product should have an adequate insurance scheme or other system for dealing with the potential future problems caused by the application of new technology.

Another set of problems in the sphere of knowledge is related to the innovation system. The dominant model is based on profit making for the top class in the knowledge hierarchy through patents, copyrights and other tools of the present intellectual property regimes.

We think that new technologies can be a partial solution to the environmental problems only if they are implemented in an innovation system based on freedom and sharing and aiming at common good. There are models of public library, open source software and public domain academic publishing that should be followed. Otherwise, a lot of public research and development spending goes to technologies to be patented by private entities, in practice blocking their wide dissemination.

## ***Nature: Reversing the Trend by Relating with Other Species with Care and Respect***

The third sphere where the hierarchies have increased over time is the relation with other species. One clear sign of this is the increasing extinction of species caused by human activity. The way elites are

selfishly transforming ecosystems, be they local or planetary, diminishes the space for other species to the extent that they keep disappearing. The recent expression of this extreme hierarchy is the way scientists and corporations have started manipulating the genome of living organisms. The evermore exploitative and machine-like attitude towards animals in industrial agriculture is another expression of the hierarchy.

Humans are portrayed as the highest outcome of billions of years of evolution, fundamentally different from any other animals and in a natural position to exploit rest of the nature as one pleases. However, during the past decades, dissident voices and movements have come up against this notion. The animal rights movement is the most notable example of this.

In animal rights thinking, the basic idea is that the most basic interests of animals should be given the same consideration as the similar interests of human beings. Animals have an intrinsic value and are worthy of moral consideration, and they have the right to be free from human cruelty and exploitation. Animal rights advocates approach the issue from different philosophical positions, but they agree that animals should no longer be regarded as property, or used as food, clothing, research subjects, or entertainment.<sup>19</sup>

## 5. Democratising democracy



The process for undoing hierarchies can also be called democratisation. In this, democracy is understood as rule by the people in all spheres of life. Our sense is that freedom from oppression is a basic human aspiration, and therefore democracy has a universal appeal. It is well captured by Wangari Maathai in her writing, that “Democracy does not solve problems. It does not automatically combat poverty or stop deforestation. However, without it, the ability for people to solve problems or become less poor or respect their environment is, I believe, impossible”<sup>20</sup>

The idea of people as the sovereign power has had huge support across the world during the past centuries. In different contexts it has had different emphasis, liberal democracy in the West, people’s democracy in China. However, in no place it has been anywhere near perfection<sup>21</sup>. In liberal democratic governance the sphere of economy has been left primarily outside people’s control, in communist variation the political organising of people has been restricted.

The new idea and practice of democracy would have to be quite different from what we know now. Currently there are rich debates and experiments on new forms of democratic governance that go beyond the representative democracy over the polity. The various streams of thinking have added qualitative words before democracy to elaborate this direction.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Singer, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Maathai 2008, 289.

<sup>21</sup> About the limitations of current systems of democracy, see Lummis 2005.

<sup>22</sup> The descriptions below are to a great extent based on the Wikipedia <http://www.wikipedia.org/>

Direct democracy, also termed as pure democracy, comprises a form of democracy and theory where sovereignty is lodged in the assembly of all citizens who choose to participate. Depending on the particular system, this assembly might pass executive motions, make laws, elect and dismiss officials, and conduct trials. Many countries, such as Switzerland, that are representative democracies, allow for three forms of political action that provide tools of direct democracy: initiative, referendum and recall.

Participatory democracy is a process emphasising the broad participation of constituents in the direction and operation of political systems. The idea strives to create opportunities for all members of a political group to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities.

Deliberative democracy refers to a system of political decision-making based on a combination of direct democracy and representative democracy that relies on citizen deliberation to make a sound policy. In contrast to the traditional theory of democracy, which emphasises voting as the central democratic institution of democracy, deliberative democracy theorists argue that legitimate lawmaking can only arise from the public deliberation of the citizenry. Some of the new constitutions in Latin America have moved in this direction.

Grassroots democracy is a tendency towards designing political processes where decision-making authority is maximally at the lowest geographic level of organisation. To cite a specific hypothetical example, a national grassroots organisation, would place as much decision-making power as possible in the hands of a local chapter instead of the head office. The principle is that for democratic power to be best exercised, it must be vested in a local community. Devolution and autonomy are important elements of grassroots democracy. The idea is followed by many mass movements in the South, such as the Zapatistas of Mexico.

Comprehensive democracy has been proposed by the activists of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam network. It would include dimensions such as political, social, cultural, ecological, economic, gender, knowledge, etc., to make democracy a complete way of life. It builds on Gandhi's concept of swaraj, or self-rule, which includes the ideas of devolution and non-violence.<sup>23</sup>

Radical Democracy, horizontal democracy, earth democracy are yet some more streams of thought that want to take the ideas and practices of democracy further to respond to the need and aspirations of today.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper we have presented a challenging transformation agenda, pointing to various directions. The obvious question comes up: even if we agree with the approach, how such major changes could happen within the relatively short time frame that the urgency of environmental protection has?

We have implicitly presented two perspectives on the dynamics change. One scenario is that cultural change may happen almost by itself. In human history, things just start happening simultaneously in various places around the same time when the time is ripe.

Another scenario about the cultural change is that the members of the classes that have most to gain from transformation to sustainable cultures will rise up and force the changes. For this reason we have taken keen interest in the popular movements of the struggling and sustainable classes. An important contemporary gathering place for such movements is the World Social Forum process, where many of them come together and energise each other around the slogan 'Another World is Possible'. The non-hierarchical structure of the 'open space' created by the forum and the minimalist joint agenda of non-violence and rejection of neo-liberal corporate capitalism resonate well with the content of this paper.

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<sup>23</sup> Gandhi 1938.



The looming environmental crisis and the inadequate responses so far can easily create an atmosphere of hopelessness and even despair. The round of dialogues in East-Africa, South-Asia and Northern Europe, however, hardly had a trace of pessimism. We hope to leave the readers of the paper with this optimistic spirit. Focusing on life itself gives us answers and resources to imagine and build a sustainable future for all.

In this paper we have identified *economic growth imperative* and *hierarchies* as root causes contributing to environmental unsustainability and human indignity. For both we suggested alternatives constituting a thorough cultural and societal transformation of the over-consuming classes. We have argued that cultural transformation is possible indeed when sustainable economy and equality become the dominant societal objectives. Then natural policy directions will include arresting over-consumption and democratising the society.

We should see transformation towards sustainable cultures as an adventure leading to something clearly better than what we have now. There is no need to be fearful or worried. Embracing degrowth should be most empowering experience as by giving up unnecessary but environmentally and socially costly luxuries one can discover much more valuable things in life. And lending support to and calling for political and structural transformations towards sustainability will be saluted by the world majority and future generations. There are plenty of rewards in waiting in the sustainable future.

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