

II. PROS SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES

PROBLEMY EKOROZWOJU – PROBLEMS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
2009, vol. 4, No 1, 155-159

O polityce zrównoważoności wyznaczonej przez EEAC, w kontekście ostatnich pięciu lat

On the Politics of Sustainability a Long Way Ahead EEAC, the Way Ahead in the Light of the Last Five Years

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Streszczenie

Wyznaczanie kierunku polityki dla kolejnych trzech pokoleń jest zadaniem trudnym. Społeczeństwa lubią wprawdzie futurologiczne refleksje, ale nie posiadają skutecznych instytucji zdolnych przeprowadzić długoterminowe przygotowania. Jeśli zagłębimy się w zrównoważoność, zadanie okazuje się niewykonalne. Zrównoważoność stawia wymagania. Wymaga od nas funkcjonowania jedynie w ramach granic naturalnej tolerancji przyrody i docenienia wartości procesów zachodzących w ekosystemie. Nie posiadamy jednak podstaw naukowych ani kompetencji by wypełnić te postulaty. Jednocześnie będziemy musieli dostrzegać prawa sprawiedliwości społecznej jeżeli mamy tworzyć społeczeństwo, które troszczy się o innych i o planetę. Ponieważ nie jesteśmy zbyt dobrzy w zapewnieniu sprawiedliwości teraz, to ten cel także wzbudza zastrzeżenia.

Artykuł podejmuje wszystkie te zagadnienia. Sugeruję, że potrzebujemy wizji zrównoważonej ekonomii i zrównoważonego społeczeństwa, aby stworzyć procedury oceny politycznej, która umożliwi rządów i wyborcom planowanie działań z dużym wyprzedzeniem. To umożliwi odrodzenie cnoty i odpowiedzialności, zarówno po stronie obywateli, jak i rządów.

Żyjemy w czasach o niespotykanych wyzwaniach. Globalizacja ogranicza możliwości działań podejmowanych przez poszczególne kraje w sytuacji, gdy to lokalne rozwiązania są bardziej sensowne i efektywne. Także zarządzanie UE będzie bardzo trudne w sytuacji, gdy poziom i szybkość rozwoju jest tak zróżnicowana pomiędzy poszczególnymi członkami, a widomo recesji ostudza optymizm.

Ale nie możemy zrezygnować z konieczności zrównoważonego planowania przyszłości, nawet wobec trudnych wyzwań. Artykuł wskazuje na pewne możliwości osiągnięcia postępu, zarazem przyznając, że ryzyko może być zbyt wysokie.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważoność, planowanie przyszłości, zintegrowane ocena zintegrowana, UE, polityka środowiskowa, zównoważoność w długiej perspektywie

Summary

Determining policy for three generations ahead is difficult at the best of times. Society likes future thinking, but does not have the governing institutions to carry out long term preparation. If we layer in sustainability then the task becomes almost insurmountable. Sustainability makes very special demands. It requires us to live within the bounds of nature's tolerances and to observe the value of ecosystem processes. Yet we neither have the science nor the capacity to adapt to such strictures. Also we will have to observe the rights of social justice and fairness if we are to create a society that cares for others and for the betterment of the planet. Since we are not too good at providing for distributional justice nowadays, then this objective will also be daunting.

This paper takes all of these matters into consideration. It suggests that we need a vision of a sustainable economy and society so that we devise policy assessment procedures that enable governments and electorates to plan for long term eventualities. This will in turn a resurgence of virtue and responsibility both on the part of citizens and also of governments.

We are passing through unprecedented times. Globalisation limits national action just when local scale sustainable endeavours are more effective and meaningful. Revamping the governing of the EU will be very tricky when the speeds and positioning of development are so very varied amongst member states and the recession bites into optimism for the foreseeable future.

But we cannot let go of the need to plan for sustainable futures, even when the going gets tough. This paper offers some scope for moving forward, but recognises that the stakes maybe just be too high.

Key words: sustainability, futures planning: integrated assessment, EU, environmental policymaking, sustaining the long term

We love to forecast, but we seldom get our predictions right. We are surprised even when we feel we have explored all possible scenarios. Oil prices, food prices, terrorist events and the possible demise of the bumble bee in Europe (1) all caught us out. To imagine what might be the very long term effects of decisions taken today is now a respectable scientific enterprise. It involves creative artists, story tellers, novelists and playwrights, as well as some of the most imaginative scientific modellers. Yet we still do not really know whether we are creating conditions for a malleable, adaptive society with governing arrangements that promote ecological resilience, social justice, human wellbeing and security: or whether we are inadvertently promoting a brittle and fractious society that will fight amongst itself so that some will survive at the expense of the others. In short, we face a highly uncertain future, even more so if something close to sustainability is ever likely to occur. Yet we do not properly know, nor do we have the effective means of shaping, whether what institutions of governance we are designing will promote or dictate for a reliable sustainable livelihood for all humanity at the end of the century.

This particular theme formed the focuses of a statement presented to the annual meeting of the Europe network of Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) in October 2008 [2]. The purpose of this network is to cause a common purpose amongst the wide ranging roles and styles of operation of the various advisory bodies to national governments throughout the member states of the European Union. The statement itself was aimed at assessing how well various aspects of modern societies and economies plan for, and are adapted to, thinking, assessing and acting for a long way ahead.

The statement began with a concept of sustainability for a long way ahead.

"Sustainable development seeks to ensure that humankind cares for the needs and interests of all people, among different nations and between generations, in such a way that all are treated fairly and with justice. Such a robust society will act in such a way as to maintain and enhance the life support

functions of the planet, and will establish an economy designed to foster livelihoods that create both prosperity and a fundamental sense of personal and collective wellbeing. This trajectory encompasses not only all citizens alive today, but all generations to come. Their wellbeing should be intrinsically "our" wellbeing. Sustainable development requires transformation and innovation in the public and private sectors, creativity in society, the capacity to anticipate future effects, to act with precaution and prevention, and to make responsible decision affecting the vitality of the future".

To do this task, the EEAC took eight connected themes.

Governance : markets : social justice : education and learning : demography : cultures : regionalism and localism : designing budgets

The overall conclusions are as follows.

Governance

Governance arrangements are generally designed on the basis of surviving from non-sustainable outcomes, even though political intent is to promote sustainability. Democracies generally support and defend the short term and the protection of a robust economy and security (at all scales). Governments in many EU Member States are showing many innovations in long term strategic decision making. This is very welcome. But few of these measures are based either on plausible scenarios where sustainability is critical; nor do they suggest that electorally-based political pressures and responses take into account ecological integrity, the long term effective funding of ecosystem processes such as soil care, water stewardship, marine sensitivity or environmental health in air quality and toxic substances management.

This suggests that there is a need for mechanisms for including the long term into decision structures, for incorporating social justice considerations at the outset, as a matter of basic principle, and of creating an accounting system that incorporates sustainability principles and metrics in the reports and

management styles of the public, private and civil sectors, as well as in all budget management. A tall order and one to which some effort is now being sought [3].

Markets

Markets have recently shown that they offer little in the way of guarantees for the long term sustainability of humanity (4). Markets manage for risk, but are not adequately regulated to deal with the opportunities of designing economies for sustainability. All this is well known. What is not yet clear is how appropriate means of regulation can be put in place when governments themselves are not clear as how to proceed, and the accounting arrangements are still in innovation.

This in turn, suggests the need to examine the relationship between culture, consumerism, governance generally, and the various motives that should link them together. This combination is the focus of much examination [4]. What is emerging is the scope for a more “virtuous” society. This word “virtue” requires some explanation:

- (i) A sense of autonomy, self worth and self esteem so that all individuals and their neighbourhoods and communities are able to act with integrity and collective purpose;
- (ii) a sense of compassion, justice and caring that encourages both individuals, but also communities of interest (families, schools, community groupings, whole settlements) to act with a sense of empathy and identity for the wellbeing of future people (notably their descendents);
- (iii) a strong sense of responsibility for taking into account the basic principles of sustainability, notably for living within the limits of natural functions, of embedding the rights and obligations of others, and of seeking to create a future society capable of working with both government and markets in the midst of promoting planetary and human health and wellbeing.

Again, this is a tall order. But it is also the basis of much examination [5]. The EEAC analysis argued for a new form of compassionate governance and economy where the outcomes of economic activity are both virtuous and just (4). Arguably, this should be the basis of the revolution in the global economy that should result from the efforts to respond creatively to the current recession. This, in itself, is the subject of much discussion [6].

The diagram 1 summarises the arguments here. Markets deal with risk and uncertainty through risk avoidance, insurance, discounting and hedging. To ensure that all of this relates to sustainability a long way ahead, discount rates may have to be very low to enable long term investments to succeed, democ-

racies may need to act and vote for the distant future as well as the wellbeing of the next generation, and citizens may have to adopt the mantle of virtue. Many readers may regard all this as fanciful. But we are approaching an unprecedented combination of global depression, potential ecological destruction, and the overarching need to act together against a common arena for reform, which is the old governing and economic order. The reports of the various official bodies linked to the United Nations and the main research organisations all attest to this crisis (7).

Culture, demography, localism

There is much speculation as to how a global culture might shift towards sustainability in what may be only a generation, say thirty years. There is no precedent for such a revolution, on such a scale, in such a short period of time. Maybe it will not be possible. The EEAC statement agreed for more analysis of both the safeguards of testing “wellbeing” arrangements, many of which remain and evolve at local levels. It also provides a case for a more radical and transformative approach to the use of the media, the internet, social networking communication and social mobilisation via community-based action. This is still very much a speculative arena. There is an emerging excitement over localism [8], but it is not yet rooted in sustainability. Yet the mechanisms are there for local action, within governing frameworks that promote sustainability, to be more effective.

To get there the statement called for:

- (i) a visionary exercise, mainly involving the young, that would set the frame for a more sustainable economy and society for mid century;
- (ii) a debate around the consequences of migration, of social cohesion, compassion and forbearance in the mixing of peoples, cultures, religions and faiths in new configurations. This will require much sensitivity, community engagement and possibly a new form of communication
- (iii) ~~to further~~ a debate on styles of investment in infrastructure, notably transport, energy, water supply and communication for the settlement patterns of half a century hence. It is vital that major capital investments are not made in such a manner as to “freeze” settlement patterns, ecology and water care, commodities consumption and relationships to nature and biodiversity that make any meaningful transition to sustainability very difficult, if not impossible.

Education and learning

The process of education for sustainability is essentially an experience of continued engagement and learning. There is a strong case for enabling every educational activity to be a laboratory for sustainable living and working. What a success it would be if every youngster throughout the planet, was enabled to live out sustainable health and training and skills throughout that sets a global framework on local distinctiveness. This outcome, noted the statement, was one of the most important objectives for the mission.

Such a process would also contribute to the practice of both diversity of regionalism, and the identity of localism. One possible outcome of the shifts in governance, markets and culture, may be the emergence of more activity and responsibility at the level of the community and the informal collectivity of common interest.

Perspective

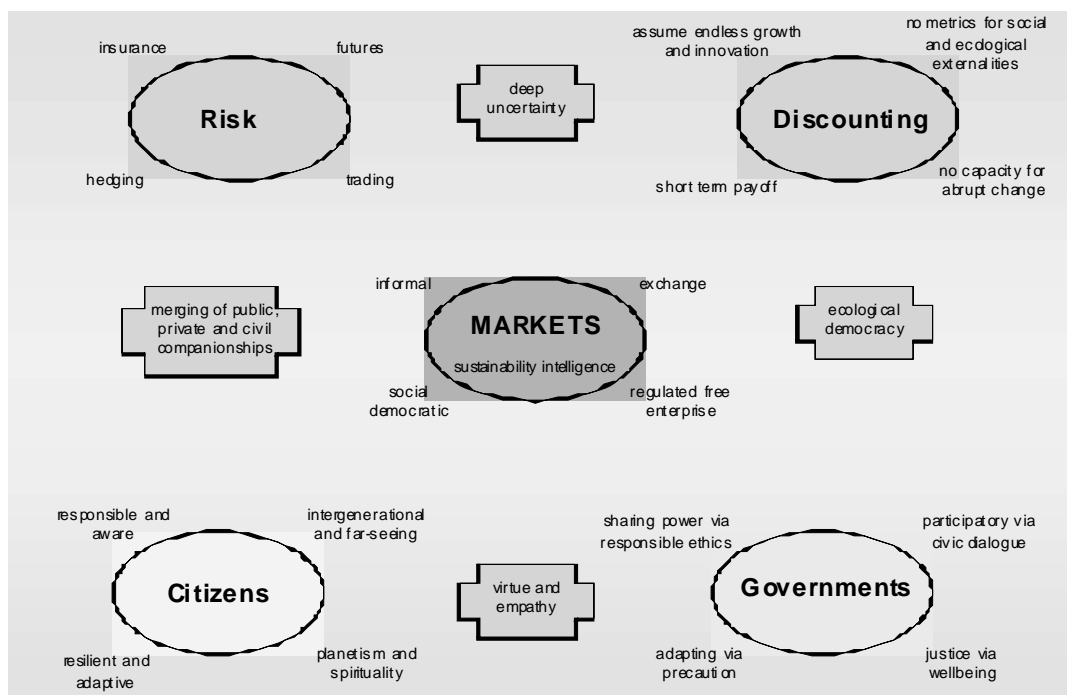
What this exercise suggests is that, as a society, we are beginning to analyse and mobilise or the sustainable long term. It is worthwhile mentioning that some of the debate surrounding the creation and escape for the current credit shortage and recession, is suggesting that we now have a golden opportunity, not to restore the old ways, but to explore and innovate the new ways. So much excitement is around not least because there is a history of scenarios, visioning and sustainability that is beginning to provide the signals for the next phase of the creative transition.

It is possible for governments to imitate serious visions of a credible sustainable future. It is also more common-place for businesses to do so, and to attest their attentions to a more inclusive social justice and ecological resilience. They see this as not just part of a business case. It may well be a matter for their economic and commercial survival. So the stakes are very high, and the prospects brighter than they have ever been.

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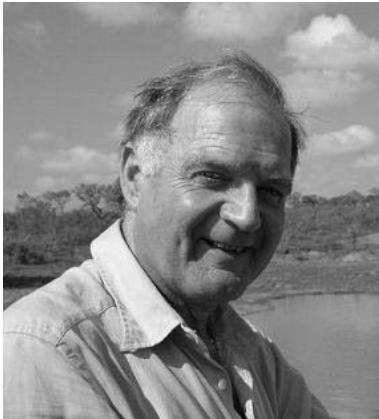
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Diagram 1.



7. See the various UN Development Programme reports especially on social justice, water and climate change, UNDP, New York.
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About the Author



Tim O'Riordan.

Research Interests: Environmental policy analysis, environmental impact assessment, environmental governance and decision-making.

Before retiring in July 2005 Tim was Professor of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia. He has edited a number of books on the institutional aspects of global environmental change policy and practice, and led two international research projects on the transition to sustainability in the European Union (1995-1999). His current research interests are focused on global-local relations and their implications for the transition to sustainability in Europe. He is also involved with user groups, in the practical application of deliberative and inclusionary processes for the reallocation of scarce water resources in Broadland, and in the management of the public private partnership for flood alleviation again in the Broads.

He has served as Chairman of the Environment Committee for the Broads Authority, was a member of Norfolk and Suffolk Local Flood Defence Committee, of advisory panels to Dow Chemical and Eastern Group PLC. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Academy in 1999 and continues to be an active member of the Sustainable Development Commission.