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THE NEED FOR THE HOME PERSPECTIVE

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We have had to leave out two parts of the original article for reasons of space. The first deals with the fortress perspective, which works on the silent assumption that development will have to remain spatially restricted, but can be made sustainable for the richer parts of the world. The second considers the astronaut's perspective, which recognizes that development is precarious in time and seeks to turn the planet into an object of global management, through an efficiency revolution, making minimal use of nature. We have here concentrated on the home perspective, which understands sustainability as being that of communities, through resistance to development: the quest for justice must, then, delink from development, and all ideas of development in its conventional sense must be abandoned.

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After forty years of development, the state of affairs is dismal. The gap between frontrunners and stragglers has not been bridged; on the contrary, it has widened to the extent that it has become unimaginable that it could ever be closed. The aspiration to catch up has ended in a blunder of planetary proportions. The figures speak for themselves: during the 1980s, the contri-

bution of developing countries, where two-thirds of humanity live, to the world's GNP has shrunk to 15 per cent, while the share of the industrial countries, with 20 per cent of the world's population, has risen to 80 per cent.[1] To be sure, upon closer inspection the picture is far from homogeneous, but neither the Southeast Asian showcases nor the oil-producing countries affect the conclusion that the development race has ended in disarray. The world may have developed, but it has done so in two opposite directions.

This is all the more true if one considers the destiny of large majorities of people within most countries: the polarization between nations repeats itself in each case. On the global as well as on the national level, there is a polarizing dynamic at work, which creates an economically vigorous middle class on the one side and large sections of socially excluded population on the other side. The best one can say is that development has created a global middle class of those with cars, bank accounts and career aspirations. It is made up of the majority in the North and small elites in the South and its size equals roughly that 8 per cent of the world population which owns an automobile. They are, beyond all national boundaries, increasingly integrated into the worldwide circuit of goods, communication and travel. An invisible border separates in all nations, in the North as well as in the South, the rich from the poor: entire categories of people in the North – like the unemployed, the elderly and the economically weak – and entire regions in the South – like rural areas, tribal zones and urban settlements – find themselves increasingly excluded from the circuits of the world economy. 'North' and 'South' are therefore less and less geographical categories but rather socio-economic ones, referring to the line which divides the strong world market sectors from the competitively weak, economically superfluous sectors in society.[2] A new bipolarism pervades the globe and reaches into every nation; it is no longer the East–West division which leaves its imprint on every society, but the North–South division.

THE CRISIS OF NATURE

A second product of the development era has dramatically come to the fore in recent years. It has become evident that the racetrack leads in the wrong direction. President Truman first defined the poorer countries as 'underdeveloped areas' in his inaugural speech before Congress on 20 January 1949 and he could still take it for granted that the North was at the head of social evolution. Now, this premiss of superiority has been fully and finally shattered by the ecological predicament. For instance, much of the glorious growth in productivity is fuelled by a gigantic throughput of fossil energy which requires mining the earth on the one side and covering her with waste on the other. By now, however, the global economy has outgrown the capacity of the earth to serve as mine and dumping ground. After all, the

world economy increases every two years by about the size ($60 billion) it had reached by 1900 after centuries of growth. Although only a small part of the world's regions has experienced economic expansion on a large scale, the world economy already weighs down nature to an extent that she has in part to give in. If all countries followed the industrial example, five or six planets would be needed to serve as 'sources' for the 'inputs' and 'sinks' for the waste of economic progress. A situation has thus emerged where the certainty which ruled two centuries has been exposed as a serious illusion: that growth is a show with an open end. Economic expansion has already come up against its bio-physical limits; recognizing the finiteness of the Earth is a fatal blow to the idea of development as envisaged by Truman.

After five hundred years, the North's protected status seems to be drawing to an end. Europe's journey to the ends of the Earth, initiated in the fifteenth century and completed in the twentieth, has lifted history to new heights, but has at the same time produced a configuration of conflicts which will inevitably shape the face of the twenty-first century. A world divided and a nature ill-treated is the heritage which casts its shadow forward. It is not that these conflicts as such are news, but that their impact potentially spreads worldwide, as the pace of globalization accelerates. For the unification of the world increasingly shows its seamy side; the globalization of goodies is accompanied by the globalization of troubles. What is new, in fact, is that the North is less and less protected by spatial and temporal distances from the unpleasant long-term consequences of its actions.

For several centuries the North could avoid dealing with the reality of a divided world, since the suffering occurred far away. Long distances separated the places of exploitation from the places of accumulation. However, as distances shrink, so the distance between victims and winners shortens, exposing the North to the threats of a divided world. Globalization not only joins the haughty North to the South, but also the chaotic South to the North. Likewise, the bitter consequences of the ill-treatment of nature make themselves felt. Many generations could afford to neglect the limits of nature as a source and a sink; the costs of the present have been transferred to the future. The more the rate of exploitation increases, however, the faster the finiteness of nature makes itself felt on a global scale. Since the distance in time, which for so long bolstered industrialism against its effects, is shrinking, the bio-physical limits of nature have forcefully emerged in the present. For these reasons, time and space, delay and distance, have ceased to provide a protective shell for the world's rich; as globalization promises the simultaneity and ubiquity of goodies, so also is the simultaneity and ubiquity of troubles to be expected.

THE HORNS OF THE DILEMMA

'Development', as a way of thinking, is on its way out. It has slowly become common sense that the two founding assumptions of the development promise

have lost their validity. For the promise rested on the belief, first, that development could be universalized in space, and, second, that it would be durable in time. In both senses, however, development has revealed itself as finite, and it is precisely this insight which constitutes the dilemma that has pervaded many international debates since the UN Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972. The crisis of justice and the crisis of nature stand, with the received notion of development, in an inverse relationship to each other. In other words, any attempt to ease the crisis of justice threatens to aggravate the crisis of nature. And the reverse: any attempt to ease the crisis of nature threatens to aggravate the crisis of justice. Whoever demands more agricultural land, energy, housing, services, or, in general, more purchasing power for the poor, finds himself in conflict with those who would like to protect the soils, animals, forests, human health or the atmosphere. And whoever calls for less energy or less transport and opposes clear-cutting or input-intensive agriculture for the sake of nature, finds himself in conflict with those who insist on their equal right to the fruits of progress. It is easy, however, to see that the base upon which the dilemma rests is the conventional notion of development; for if there was a development that used less nature and included more people, a way out of the dilemma would open up. It is small wonder, therefore, that in the last two decades committed minds from all corners of the world have been calling for an 'alternative model of development'.

The comet-like rise of the concept 'sustainable development' is to be understood against this background. It promises nothing less than to square the circle: to identify a type of development that promotes both ecological sustainability and international justice. Since the time of the Club of Rome study Limits to Growth, two camps of political discourse had emerged, one under the banner of 'environment' and the other under the banner of 'development'. The voices from the North mostly emphasized the rights of nature, while the voices from the South tended to bring claims for justice to the fore.[3] In 1987, the World Commission for Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) appeared to have succeeded in building a conceptual bridge between the two camps, offering the definition which has become canonical: sustainable development is development 'that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.[4]

However, a quick glance reveals that the formula is designed to maximize consensus rather than clarity. As with any compromise, that is no small achievement, because the definition works like an all-purpose cement which glues all parts together, friends and foes alike. The opponents of the 1970s and 1980s find themselves pinned down to a common ground, and since then everything has revolved around the notion of 'sustainable development'. Nevertheless, the price of this consensus was considerable. Dozens of definitions are being passed around among experts and politicians, because many

and diverse interests and visions hide behind the common key idea. As so often happens, deep political and ethical controversies make the definition of the concept a contested area.

The formula is based upon the notion of time. It invites the reader to raise his eyes, to look at the future, and to pay due consideration to the generations of tomorrow. The definition officially confirms that the continuity of development in time has become a world problem. The egoism of the present is under accusation – an egoism which sells off nature for short-term gain. In a way, the phrase reminds one of the words by which Gifford Pinchot, the steward of Theodore Roosevelt's conservation programme, sought to bring utilitarianism up to date: 'conservation means the greatest good for the greatest number for the longest time'. But, upon closer inspection, one will note that the definition of the Brundtland Commission does not refer to 'the greatest number', but focuses instead on the 'needs of the present' and those of 'future generations'. While the crisis of nature has been constitutive for the concept of 'sustainable development', the crisis of justice finds only a faint echo in the notions of 'development' and 'needs'. In the definition, the attention to the dimension of time is not counterbalanced by an equal attention to the dimension of space. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to say that the canonical definition has resolved the dilemma 'nature versus justice' in favour of nature. For two crucial questions remain open. What needs? And whose needs? To leave these questions pending in the face of a divided world means to sidestep the crisis of justice. Is sustainable development supposed to meet the needs for water, land and economic security or the needs for air travel and bank deposits? Is it concerned with survival needs or with luxury needs? Are the needs in question those of the global consumer class or those of the enormous numbers of have-nots? The Brundtland report remains undecided throughout and therefore avoids facing up to the crisis of justice.[5]

Environmental action and environmental discourse, when carried on in the name of 'sustainable development', implicitly or explicitly position themselves with respect to the crisis of justice and the crisis of nature. Different actors produce different types of knowledge; they highlight certain issues and underplay others. How attention is focused, what implicit assumptions are cultivated, which hopes are entertained, and what agents are privileged depends on the way the debate on sustainability is framed. What is common to all these discourses, I would submit, is the hunch that the era of infinite development hopes has passed, giving way to an era in which the finiteness of development becomes an accepted truth. What renders them deeply different, however, is the way they understand finiteness: either they emphasize the finiteness of development in the global space and disregard its finiteness in terms of time, or they emphasize the finiteness of development with regard to time and consider irrelevant its finiteness in terms of global space. In [what follows], I would like to sketch out three different perspectives of 'sustainable development' which differ in the way they implicitly understand finiteness.

The *fortress perspective* works with the silent assumption that development, unfortunately, will have to remain spatially restricted, but can be made durable for the richer parts of the world. It neglects the fact that the range of harmful effects produced by the North now covers the entire globe and limits the responsibility of the North to its own affairs. The *astronaut's perspective* takes a different view. It recognizes that development is precarious in time and seeks global adjustment to deal with the crisis of nature and the crisis of justice. As a response to the global reach of harmful effects, it favours the extension of the range of responsibility, until it covers the entire globe. The *home perspective*, in turn, accepts the finiteness of development in time and suggests delinking the question of justice from the pursuit of development. It draws a different conclusion from the fact that the range of effects produced by the North has vastly outgrown the radius of Northern responsibility, and advocates reducing the effects until they remain within the given radius of responsibility. It is very possible that the relative strength of these perspectives will shape the future of North–South relations.

[The author then presents, in greater detail, the characteristics of the fortress perspective and the astronaut's perspective, before passing to the home perspective.]

THE HOME PERSPECTIVE

The world was surprised and responded to the events in Mexico with irritation, as hundreds of armed *indios* all of a sudden occupied the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. On the very day that the NAFTA agreement became effective, a hitherto unknown liberation movement emerged from the forests of Chiapas and challenged the Mexican government. What did the rebels want? Where were they coming from? In the following days, a long letter from subcomandante Marcos was published in the press, which began:

> Suppose you want to travel to the South East of the country and suppose you find yourself on one of the three roads which lead to the state of Chiapas … Our wealth leaves this land not just on these three roads. Chiapas is bleeding to death in a thousand ways: through oil and gas pipelines, power supply lines, railway coaches, banking accounts, trucks, ships and airplanes, clandestine paths and paved roads. This land continues to pay its tribute to the empire: oil, electricity, cattle, coffee, maize, honey, tobacco … Primary resources, several billion tonnes with various destinations, flow out to … the USA, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan, but always with the same destination – the empire.[6]

The Chiapas rebellion was a sudden signal. It pulled back the veil of oblivion from those indigenous and rural populations in the hinterland of the global middle classes who are largely excluded from the fruits of the unification of the world. They are to be found everywhere, in innumerable villages and on all continents: peasants and landless workers, migrants and tribals,

the periphery of the world market. Despite their many differences, they generally share the fate of being threatened by the claims urban-industrial developers make on their resources. However, when water sources dry up, fields get lost, animals vanish, forests dwindle and harvests decrease, the basis of their livelihood is undermined, and they are pushed onto the market, for which they do not have sufficient purchasing power. In such circumstances, the growth economy threatens life-support systems in two ways: that of people immediately and that of the biosphere in the long run. The crisis of nature and the crisis of justice coincide for large parts of the world population in the experience of being marginalized by expansionist 'development'.

THE NORTH AS ARENA OF ECOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

The proud declarations from Chiapas give voice to the ordeals of the great majority of the world's population. There is not, however, much reason to believe that this division of the world – the international consumer classes on the one hand, the urban poor on the other – can be overcome by accelerating the course along the racetrack of 'development'. On the contrary, an exponential growth of the world economy will most likely increase the pressure on the hinterland with its resources of nature and labour power, a pressure which constantly threatens to push the mini-economies beyond the islands of affluence into disintegration. It is understandable, in this context, that for many communities 'sustainability' means nothing else but resistance against development.[7]

It is one of the unelaborated assumptions of the home perspective that, conceptually speaking, the quest of justice needs to be decoupled from the pursuit of conventional development. This insight arises from the struggles of many communities, be it in Chiapas or in the Narmada Valley. But not only that: such an insight also arises forcefully from the limits of development in terms of time. Since the crisis of nature blocks the universalization of development, it is also in the name of justice that the conventional development idea should be abandoned. The crisis of justice, according to this perspective, cannot be dealt with by redistributing 'development', but only by getting off people's backs, limiting the development pressures emanating from the various 'Norths' in the world.

This approach links those activists, NGOs, politicians and dissident intellectuals – the social base of the home perspective – in the North who are concerned about justice with those who are concerned about nature. Both groups converge in expecting the North to retreat from utilizing other people's nature and to reduce the part of the global environmental space it occupies. After all, most of the Northern countries leave what W. Rees has called an 'ecological footprint' on the world which is considerably larger than their territory. They occupy foreign soils to provide themselves with tomatoes, rice,

feedstuff or cattle; they carry away raw materials of any kind; and they utilize the global commons – like the oceans and the atmosphere – far beyond their share. By way of example, Germany – not to mention the USA – uses seven times more energy per capita than Egypt, fourteen times more aluminium than Argentina, and 130 times more steel than the Philippines.[8] As everyone knows, the Northern use of globally available environmental space is excessive; the style of affluence in the North cannot be generalized around the globe, it is oligarchic in its very structure. The protagonists of the home perspective conclude that those who want more fairness in the world will work towards reducing the 'ecological footprint' which their society leaves on others.

For this way of thinking, the North is called upon to reduce the environmental burden it puts on other countries, and to repay the ecological debt accumulated from the excessive use of the biosphere over decades, indeed centuries. The principal arena for ecological adjustment is thus neither the Southern hemisphere nor the entire globe, but the North itself. It is the reduction of the global effects of the North to the radius of real responsibility that is at the centre of attention, not the extension of Northern responsibility to coincide with the radius of the effects. The home perspective believes in making room for others by an orderly retreat; it proposes a new kind of rationality, which could be called 'the rationality of shortened chains of effect' for meeting the crisis of justice and of nature. Neither the astronaut's perspective nor the fortress perspective shape this perception, but rather the ideal of a good global neighbourhood. It requires a reform of home, out of a cosmopolitan spirit.

EFFICIENCY AND SUFFICIENCY

Yet the reform of home is a major challenge. Level-headed consideration of the necessary reduction in demands made on nature gives rise to doubts about the wisdom of reducing ecology to efficient resource management. For the magnitude of reduction required if nature is to be used in an ecologically sound and internationally just way makes the head spin. According to a current rule of thumb, only a cutback of between 70 and 90 per cent in the throughput of energy and materials in the forty to fifty years ahead would do justice to the seriousness of the situation. Only a daring optimist will believe that such a target could be achieved merely by improvements in efficiency. An efficiency revolution will not be enough.

Therefore the home perspective hesitates to overemphasize efficient resource management, and attempts to focus the social imagination on the revision of goals, rather than on the revision of means. That this caution makes sense is also logically clear. Over the longer term, saving effects are invariably swallowed up by the quantity effects involved, if the overall dynamics of growth are not slowed down. Consider the fuel-efficient car.

Today's automobile engines are definitely more efficient than in the past; yet the relentless growth in the number of cars and miles driven has cancelled out that gain. And the same logic holds across the board, from energy saving to pollution abatement and recycling. What really matters, in fact, is the overall physical scale of the economy with respect to nature, not simply the efficient allocation of resources. Herman Daly has made a telling comparison: even if the cargo on a boat is distributed efficiently, the boat will inevitably sink under too much weight – even though it may sink optimally! Thus efficiency without sufficiency is counter-productive: the latter has to define the boundaries of the former.

A society in balance with nature can, in fact, only be approximated through a twofold approach: through intelligent rationalization of means and prudent moderation of ends. In other words, the 'efficiency revolution' remains directionless if it is not accompanied by a 'sufficiency revolution'. Nothing is ultimately as irrational as rushing with maximum efficiency in the wrong direction. A 'sufficiency revolution', however, can neither be programmed nor engineered; it involves a mixture of subtle and rapid changes in the cultural outlook and the institutional setup of society. Therefore this environmental discourse focuses its attention on values and institutional patterns – in short, on the symbolic universe of society, while both the fortress and the astronaut's perspectives highlight the physical energy processes – in short, the world of material quantities. Obviously, it is here that the home perspective becomes somewhat lofty: its discourse amounts to an invitation, not a strategy.

NEW MODELS OF PROSPERITY

Fortunately for these environmentalists, wealth is no longer what it used to be. Annually, enormous resources of nature and intelligence are invested to increase an already immeasurable economic strength by several per cent. After all, humankind – which essentially means the global consumer classes – has consumed as many goods and services since 1950 as the entire previous period of history.[9] But is it to be taken for granted that an increase in well-being corresponds to an increase in GNP? Meanwhile, there are some indications that industrial societies passed a threshold in the 1970s, after which growth in GNP no longer relates to growth in the quality of life.[10] This is good news for the home perspective, because it encourages these voices to assume that even a shrinking volume of production would not necessarily lead to a shrinking well-being: on the contrary, even a growth in well-being may be imagined.

Given that the negative consequences of economic growth seem to have increased faster than the positive consequences for the last twenty years, the home perspective view counts on the emergence of counter-motives to the growth philosophy of the ever 'faster, farther and more'. Consider, for

instance, the energy-intensive urge for acceleration. If pursued thoroughly enough, acceleration demonstrates the unfortunate tendency to cancel itself out. One arrives faster and faster at places at which one stays for ever shorter periods of time. Acceleration shows, beyond a certain level, a counter-productive tendency; it is therefore not so surprising that a renewed interest in slowness is developing beneath the veneer of enforced acceleration. What would an advanced transportation system look like if it were not shaped by the imperative of acceleration? As with time, so with space: after distance-intensive life-styles have become widespread, a new appreciation for one's place and community is now growing. What would politics look like if it centred on the regeneration of places? A similar sensibility might be growing regarding the possession of things. The resource-intensive accumulation of goods, the thousand brands and fashions, increasingly congest everyday life, making it difficult to keep afloat. As a consequence, the ideal of lean consumption becomes more attractive, because a wealth of goods is at odds with a wealth of time. How would things look if they were designed with a view to quality, durability and uniqueness?

Such questions are being raised. All of them reveal a fundamental concern of the home perspective: the search for a society which is capable of remaining on an intermediary level of performance. In other words, a society which is able not to want what it would be capable of providing. Self-limitation always implies a loss of power, even if it is sought in the name of a new prosperity. However, in what way a renunciation of power for the sake of the common good could be reconciled with the question of individual liberty remains the conundrum of the home perspective. At any rate, both the crisis of justice and the crisis of nature suggest looking for forms of prosperity that would not require permanent growth. For the problem of poverty lies not in poverty but in wealth. And, equally, the problem of nature lies not in nature but in overdevelopment. It is likely that Aristotle was well aware of these interconnections when he wrote: 'The greatest crimes are committed not for the sake of necessities, but for the sake of superfluities. Men do not become tyrants in order to avoid exposure to the cold.'[11]

NOTES

1. W. Kuhne, 'Deutschland vor neuen Herausforderungen in den Nord-Sud-Beziehungen', *Aus Politik Und Zeitgeschichte*, Supplement to *Das Parlament*, no. 46, 1991, p. 6.

2. See, for instance, the telling title of Rajni Kothari, *Growing Amnesia: An Essay on Poverty and Human Consciousness*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1993.

3. For an overview of the international discussion, see John McCormick, *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989; Hans-Jurgen Harbordt, *Dauerhafte Entwicklung Statt Globaler Selbstzerstorung: Eine Einfuhrung in das Konzept des 'Sustainable Development'*, Berlin, 1991; Peter Moll, *From Scarcity to Sustainability. Future Studies and the Environment: The Role of the Club of Rome*, P. Lang, Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1991.

4. World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 8.

5. Paul Ekins, 'Making development sustainable', in Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *Global Ecology: A New Arena of Political Conflict*, Zed Books, London, 1993, p. 91, suggests a similar reading.

6. *Perfil de la Jornada*, Mexico City, 27 January 1994 (author's translation).

7. Yash Tandon synthesizes the experience of peasant movements in sub-Saharan Africa in this way. See his 'Village Contradictions in Africa', in Sachs, ed., *Global Ecology*, p. 221.

8. Raimund Bleischutz and Helmut Schutz, *Unser Trugerischer Wohlstand*, Wuppertal Institut fur Klima, Umwelt, Energie, 1993, p. 5.

9. Alan T. Durning, *How Much Is Enough?*, Earthscan, London, 1992, p. 38.

10. See the discussion on the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare in Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, *For The Common Good*, Beacon Press, Boston, Mass., 1989, pp. 401–55.

11. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1267a.