Facing the Crisis in SD

After Rio+20: Future needs and remaining challenges – Perspectives on SD for the next generations

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Key Messages

3 Themes ...

• **Science**: SD is where science meets decision-making
• **Systems**: SD brings systems thinking into policy
• **Growth**: SD facilitates the dialogue on reinvention
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• **Science**: SD is where science meets decision-making
• **Systems**: SD brings systems thinking into policy
• **Growth**: SD facilitates the dialogue on reinvention

3 Actions ...

• **Look up**: Promote and sustain the SD vision
• **Look down**: Enable greater sub-national action on SD
• **Look around**: Broaden and strengthen SD networking
Is “sustainable development” dying?
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Defining “crisis”

**crisis** |ˈkrīsis| noun ( pl. crises |-sēz| ) (from Greek, “krisis” meaning “decision”)

(1) a time of **intense difficulty, trouble, or danger**: as in “the current economic crisis”

(2) a **time when a difficult or important decision must be made**: a turning point

(3) the **critical moment in the progress of a disease**, indicating either recovery or death
Is SD really in “crisis”? 

• Rio+20 being branded as a “disappointment” or “failure” … even before it began
• Loss of trust in national government as lead actors to realize SD
• Ministerial-level battles for control of key concepts, terminology, policy initiatives, budgets
• Increased polarization between sectors, especially severe disillusionment among civil society leaders
• Science marginalized, economics trumps everything
National governments lose public trust

Edelman Trust Barometer 2012
(Global data)
National governments not trusted on SD

"Down to Business: Leading at Rio+20 and Beyond,” The Regeneration Project, 2012
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Let’s take stock of Rio+20 … again
Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (I)

• Full **reaffirmation of sustainable development**, and of the broad array of relevant international commitments

• Commitment to **increase the speed of action** on sustainable development

• First global consensus acknowledgement that **food, energy, climate are in crisis**
Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (2)

• Call for **new, broader measures of progress** to complement GDP and to be used in policy making

• Endorsement of **corporate responsibility / CSR programs and sustainability reporting**, including support for relevant policy and regulatory frameworks
Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (3)

- General adoption of the concept of “green economy” and establishment of a set of detailed policy guidelines for working with the concept in a policy context

- Endorsement of life-cycle assessment, sustainable design, and other core methodologies for greening economies
Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (4)

- Adoption of the **new 10-Year Framework Program** on sustainable consumption and production

- **Dismantlement of the CSD** and commitment to create a higher-level body

- A mandate and process for developing a set of global **Sustainable Development Goals**
Rio+20 outcome:
A few things that are missing …

• Acknowledgement of “planetary boundaries” and ecosystem limits

• Convincing, government-led mechanisms for financing and implementation of a broad-based sustainability transformation

• Strategy for dealing with the issue of growth
About Growth: What is the “issue”? 

• We are confused about what “it” means  
• But if we don’t have “it”, things get rapidly worse  
• So, we don’t like to question “it”  
• But: there are many different kinds of growth  
• We need more of some kinds, less of others  
• But: we’ve linked them all to the money system  
• … and that system is very difficult to change
Growth is the key issue for SD

It links three themes at the heart of SD today:

• It is the stumbling block creating trouble at the so-called “science-policy interface”

• Understanding growth requires developing a systemic perspective — which remains a challenge in highly differentiated and specialized governance systems

• It is the focus of a clash of worldviews that plays out in institutional and political decision-making
“Growth as Usual”: The Paradox

1. We need more of it: It reduces absolute poverty … but mature, post-industrial economies with aging demographic profiles have a difficult time maintaining high rates of GDP-measured economic growth.

2. We need less of it: Traditional economic growth puts extreme pressures on resources and ecosystems, while often widening the gaps between the wealthy and the poor.
The scientific backdrop:
Living during a “Great Acceleration”

1972: The Limits to Growth

- Controversial when launched, generated global headlines

- Routinely attacked – on false grounds – for nearly 40 years

- Now widely acknowledged as an accurate and prescient analysis (even by former critics)
Why have societies been in denial about the limits to growth for so long?

Answer: Resource substitution

At the Mad Hatter’s tea party, when the cups got dirty, they just moved down to the clean ones. That’s “resource substitution.” However, eventually they will have come all the way around the table ... and back to the dirty cups.
2009: The “Planetary Boundaries”

2011: The growth of questioning growth

- “Growth ‘as usual’ is not an option.”
- “We need to respond to [people’s] aspirations and to link economic growth with broader societal progress.”

— Angel Gurría, Secretary-General, OECD

Release of “How’s Life?”, 12 Oct 2011

- First annual survey of the current “state of the alternatives” to Growth-as-Usual

- Considers only concepts, indicators etc. in active use by some government, somewhere in the world

http://www.LifeBeyondGrowth.org
What is “Green Growth”?  

• Concept first championed by the UN Economic and Social Council for Asian and Pacific (ESCAP)

• “Green” means primarily “low-carbon,” and implies achieving normal (or accelerated) economic growth through investments in clean and green technology.

• Includes a focus on “sustainable livelihoods” and “Green Jobs”

Green Growth was explicitly embraced by the OECD and by the World Business Council on Sustainable Development. A major global institute based in Korea, Denmark, and Australia helps to facilitate the spread of ideas, research, planning, etc.

See: greengrowth.org
What is “Green Economy”?  

- Concept first championed by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), NGOs & think-tanks
- Much broader than Green Growth in its conception; includes environmental and social goals more centrally and explicitly
- Was a primary focus (and source of controversy) at Rio+20

UNEP also provides consulting support services to nations who wish to adopt the Green Economy framework. The UNEP “Green Economy Report” included a global modeling study showing that by redirecting 2% of global investment, the global economy could be “greened”.

See: unep.org/greeneconomy
What is “De-Growth”?

- Defined as “a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society”

- Proponents believe that the transition to a smaller-scale material economy is “inevitable” and that it will bring social and environmental benefits

- Champions include Tim Jackson, author of *Prosperity without Growth*, French Green Party, etc.

See: degrowth.net
Growth: A Spectrum of Alternatives

Source: AtKisson, Life Beyond Growth, 2012
Factors affecting the growth debate

**Frameworks**

DE-GROWTH

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GREEN ECONOMY

GREEN GROWTH

GROWTH AS USUAL

GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

GENUINE PROGRESS INDICATOR

GENUINE SAVINGS

GREEN GDP

GDP

**Indicators**

FINANCIAL CRISIS

DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS

DISASTER RECOVERY

GLOBAL POWER SHIFTS

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

ARMS CONFLICT

RIO+20 & UNITED NATIONS

PRIVATE SECTOR

Source: AtKisson, Life Beyond Growth, 2012
Defining the New Role of States: SD Facilitators

13. We recognize that people’s opportunities to influence their lives and future, participate in decision making and voice their concerns are fundamental for sustainable development. … [SD] can only be achieved with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and private sector, all working together to secure the future we want for present and future generations

“The Future We Want,” June 2012
The Three Themes

- **Science**: SD champions and functionaries have become *de facto spokespeople for science* in the policy arena (note the link to indicator work)

- **Systems**: It is our job to bring a systems perspective, but also to *increase the capacity of others to think in systems terms*

- **Growth**: We must increasingly moderate and *facilitate multi-sector engagement on reinventing growth* … for a civilization in crisis
The Three Actions

• **Look up:** Keep the SD vision alive, use the positives from Rio+20, draw on stories of progress in all sectors

• **Look down:** Increase efforts to create enabling envaironments for sub-national action

• **Look around:** Strengthen and broaden networks of sustainable development champions … and support each other
For a bit of inspiration, see ... 

www.Pyramid2012.net

The Workshops

Here we present a photo collage that shows the extraordinary diversity of the Pyramid 2012 campaign workshops. In the appendix to this report, we also present short summaries of those workshops that were formally reported to us in detail. For more information about all the workshops we know about, more photographs, and even some short videos, please visit the official Pyramid 2012 campaign website: http://Pyramid2012.net
Thank you

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