

Appendix C: Development, Progress and Sustainability — re-conceptualising their meaning

As should be expected with the change from marketocracy to Geocratia, fundamental concepts in the assessment of activity in the different forms of social organisation (nation, province, municipality, town, community...) are redefined as we transcend from capitalistic consumer societies to an ethos of sustainable democratic societies. These concepts are development, progress and sustainability and are closely connected and are interdependent. You cannot have development if you do not progress on your objective and, for the same reason, you cannot progress if you do not develop. Similarly, you cannot develop or progress if your trajectory is not sustainable through time.

Development and Progress are fundamental elements in our welfare, but, evidently, they need to be detached from capitalism and redefined for the only true sustainable development is development without growth. Development usually refers to a specified state of growth or advancement. In Geocratia, development implies always advancement, a better state than the present one; yet without requiring more growth, more reproduction, more consumption and more accumulation of resources, material and pecuniary. The same goes for progress. We progress when we get closer to our aspiration of a better quality of life not just for humans but for non-humans with less consumption of resources. Thus, we achieve progress every time we advance in our goal to reach a general level of welfare that is truly sustainable in the long term. In other words, progress must be directed at developing the state where we reach an equilibrium between a generalised level of welfare and a sustainable ecological footprint. We progress when we lower our consumption of resources but enhance the general level of welfare by increasing efficiencies, by in turn distributing far better the consumption of the resources required to achieve such a state. This represents the safe transition. This progress will also allow us to concurrently achieve social justice. This represents the just transition. This would give a new meaning to development in Geocratia. True development and progress take place in perfect sync with the purpose of true democracy: The welfare of all ranks of society, and the planet, in a sustainable manner, regardless of private interests.

From this new perspective, the public good always has precedence over the individual's private good. We cannot pursue our individual private interest at the expense of the health of the planet and the general welfare of the population: the public interest. But what is the public interest? In the new paradigm, this can only mean the exercise of truly democratic actions—actions that we define as human communities—to accomplish the general and sustainable level of the welfare of people and the planet. True development and progress are the development of human wellbeing—being able to enjoy our rights and comply with our responsibilities—and of a material quality of life in harmonious coexistence with a healthy environment, including preponderantly all living things, so that our global ecological footprint becomes sustainable at a stationary state much lower than at the present level of ecological impact.

Along the lines of social scientists who have been advocating an ethos of no growth (Kallis, Latouche, Harribey, Custers, Stoll, et al), development would mean the democratically-balanced development of all members of society who would enjoy access to the opportunities and resources necessary to develop and use their own potentialities to benefit themselves and their communities. Communities embody all living things and all lifeless resources provided by Mother Earth. In Geocratia, societies establish a balanced culture of use of all-natural and manmade resources to provide a high quality of life standard. For instance, efficiency and productivity will still have enormous value in developing processes that would provide the amount of electricity needed for a city to function adequately by consuming far less energy and contributing far less as well to global warming, deliberately avoiding the Jevons Paradox.¹

A city that functions adequately with far less energy consumption—both at its input and output—by definition generates a far smaller ecological footprint, which, concurrently, can be sustained. This would be achieved by changing energy consumption habits, the technology used to generate the required electricity from less energy as well as the use of more renewable and less non-renewable sources of energy, until we eventually reduce to its minimum the use of any energy polluting the environment and contributing clearly to global warming, namely: the complete obsolescence of fossil fuels. Nonetheless, this does not mean producing more so-called “green growth,” which, through increased efficiencies, would be bound to produce more consumption and consumerism (Jevons paradox). We must increase our efficiencies to produce the energy necessary to enjoy high-quality-of-life standards, but such standards must be clearly detached from the consumeristic expectations of the marketocratic paradigm. The high-quality standard would be the level set by the Demos—through true democratic interaction and closely following the scientific recommendations for a safe transition in planetary boundary terms,—that provides the maximum level of fulfilment of true societal needs.

¹ ↪ The Jevons Paradox materialises when new technologies increase efficiency and—under a market logic—increase demand due to a rebound in consumption levels.

To determine what are true societal needs, Michael Dawson poses four questions of true ecological sustainability for any product that is produced: 1. *Material Intake: How much and what types of material does making the product extract from the environment?* 2. *Material Output: How does the product end up putting materials back into the environment, in the form of manufacturing, product operation, and garbage/recycling wastes?* 3. *Energy Use: How much total energy does manufacture, use, and recycling of the product require?* 4. *Alternatives: How does the product in question perform in the above three areas versus available alternative means of performing the same type of work facilitated by the product in question?*² If they do not answer the four questions—especially the fourth question—in a way that they indisputably meet the criteria of true sustainability, then they are rendered superfluous, are unsustainable and embody the opposite of development and progress. Furthermore, if a product is sustainable because it complies with all four questions, but is frivolous because it fulfils an artificially created need, then it should be rendered unsustainable, because it inexorably carries its own footprint, which would contribute to increasing a community's overall footprint, making it harder to achieve sustainability for the sake of an unnecessary need.

This high quality of life standard is inextricably linked to the consumption of energy in a way that produces a truly sustainable ecological footprint. This is done in such a way that the right equilibrium is achieved when non-renewable energy resources—that have already been depleted or rendered obsolete—that are replaced with renewable energy resources that provide the energy required to fulfil the needs for the adequate functioning of the previously determined high level of life standard, and this is done in a way that secures long-term sustainability to all stakeholders of the community. To be sure, some non-renewable energy sources, such as oil,³ inevitably will be depleted in the future. But, under Geocratia, these resources would be depleted rationally, which means they would gradually be replaced by renewable resources that are used with maximum efficiency in their intrinsic value and in their long-term sustainability, with no regard for the then already redundant expectations of financial markets that will no longer play a role. Moreover, the use of renewable resources (solar, wind, water, geothermal...) would be used in a way that their ecological footprints are technologically reduced very meaningfully to the levels that guarantee their long-term use sustainably.

As for Sustainability, in Geocratia it must provide a high-quality standard of existence to the economic, social and environmental dimensions. This entails that there must be balance in each of these dimensions so that its participants—human beings, nature and the planet as a whole—can enjoy a high-quality level of life and a balanced use of both animate as well as inanimate resources (water, sunlight, wind, metals and many other chemical elements and compounds). Balance requires that no participants thrive at the expense of others; a condition that automatically makes redundant the logic of the capitalist market. It follows that if sustainability is anchored on the balance of each dimension, true sustainability cannot be achieved only by eliminating capitalism's economic injustice, by lifting people out of material poverty and incorporating them into the market as literally billions of new alienated consumers who would then have the power to consume from thousands of products and services of which they are currently deprived. Instead, we must increase the footprints of the dispossessed to dignified levels and drastically decrease the footprint of the rest, so that we reach a sustainable global ecological footprint. To be sure, we do not want to live US lifestyles, consuming five planets a year, and with inequality growing rapidly; nor like in India, consuming 0,72 planets a year, but with hundreds of millions of paupers always in peril of falling into famine conditions. We need to live with a global ecological footprint of less than one planet, but that by changing our life systems we would distribute far better the resources to allow everyone to live with dignity. It follows that true sustainability would be in itself a new paradigm that must entail not only replacing capitalism with a system that is socially equitable, but it will need, at its very core, to replace its DNA, with a new culture with an ethos that allows people to develop their own capacities to contribute to and take from their communities in an equitable and environmentally-balanced way, and not based on today's completely irrational and unsustainable consumption of our planet and its sources of energy. Similar to what Ozzie Zehner rightly asserts, the world does not have an energy crisis but a consumption crisis.⁴

² ↪ Michael Dawson: [Electric Evasion](#), Counterpunch, 15 October 2010.

³ ↪ Robert L. Hirsch, Roger Bezdek, Robert Wendling, *Peaking of World Oil Production: Impacts, Mitigation, and Risk Management*, National Energy Technology Laboratory of the Department of Energy, February de 2005.

⁴ ↪ Ozzie Zehner: *Green Illusions: The Dirty Secrets of Clean Energy and the Future of Environmentalism (Our Sustainable Future)*, University of Nebraska Press, 2012, Pp positions on e-book 667 and 675.