Liliane Danso-Dahmen, Philip Degenhardt (Eds.)

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

PERSPECTIVES FROM ASIA AND EUROPE

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Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung

CONTENT

Elmar Altvater *

PROLOGUE

The Socio-Ecological Transformation (SET) is a question of survival for mankind. The reason for this dramatic statement is simple. The capitalist mode of production and the lifestyle it engenders are not sustainable, either socially or ecologically. However, the regions of the world, the people who live there, and the different classes are unequally and unevenly affected. As the OECD noted in a recent report on Southeast Asia, China, and India, the former is among the regions of the world most strongly impacted by climate change. At the same time, the high economic growth in Asia is accompanied by a steadily rising (fossil) energy demand. The effects on ecosystems are well known – but nevertheless not commensurately taken into account, either in daily life or in political decision-making.

It is not only ecological transformation that is on the agenda, but social trans-formation as well. Recent studies by international expert commissions once again showed that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening in most nations and on a global scale. One percent of the world population owns more wealth than the remaining 99 percent. Social tensions are therefore growing, as are social and political conflicts.

Thus, for those who participated in the "Socio-ecological-transformation" conference in Hanoi, the necessity of a social-ecological transformation in Southeast Asia was obvious. Not only is it scientifically evident; when faced with such a scandalous level of inequality, it is also a must politically. The urgency was drastically felt when participants walked a few steps from the Conference Hotel towards West Lake and were confronted with a heaving mass of traffic in which scooters of all sizes determined the noise and tempo. Hanoi, a city of roughly 7 million citizens, has at least as many scooters. Because the public transport system is completely underdeveloped, people have no alternative but to individually use motorbikes to get around. It is astonishing for Europeans to see that this individualized mass transport

system works. Congestion is non-existent because only a few traffic lights regulate the traffic, and road users therefore have to keep themselves in check: pedestrians, cyclists, mopeds, cars, buses, trucks, wheelbarrows, even wheelchairs – they all use the same public space, and because everyone is considerate of each other, traffic flows without congestion and aggression. There is no separation between the highway and the sidewalk, especially as the pavement is also used by street sellers, takeaways, and as a parking lot for motorbikes.

The fact that this chaos comprising millions of bikes and other vehicles is constantly reorganizing itself is not well understood by Europeans. Traffic is not only a matter of technique and rules, of assertiveness and cleverness, but also an influential social form of living together. European traffic planners should be sent to Hanoi to study the existing systems. They could learn a lot about the design of individual traffic flows and find effective arguments for the superiority of a functioning rail-bound public transport system.

If you have gone through the streams of scooters and cars to West Lake, you will encounter the next piece of evidence that argues for the need for social and ecological transformation: a wonderful urban lake, fed by the "Red River" and comparable in size and location to the Lagoa in Rio de Janeiro, that is now more of a sewer than an urban recreation area. This is a loss which, as in the case of the Brazilian Lagoa, could also be remedied by appropriate renaturation measures.

Here, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, with the help of its contacts in Brazil, could provide sensible social-ecological assistance. The SET project can work as an inter-nationally interconnected learning system. But the difficulties are considerable and should not be underestimated. First of all, the necessary ecological transformation will only work in combination with social transformation. In Latin America, leftist governments from Venezuela to Brazil and Argentina decided to employ a traditional strategy of exporting raw materials (oil, minerals including rare earths, and agricul-tural commodities such as soy, sugarcane, or meat) during the first decade of this century in order to finance social projects from the revenues. This was successful while commodity prices were soaring, but it inevitably fell into crisis when commodity prices declined – "secularly" as in the entire second half of the twentieth century. Therefore (and secondly) SET must be organized as an international and, ultimately, global project. The performance depends on the development of prices, on exchange and interest rates on the world market, on power relations between nations, and on international treaties and structures of global or regional governance.

SET is not – or not only – a bundle of (economic) policy measures that governments have to implement. SET aims to change living and working conditions, production, and lifestyles. It thus only works in a democratic environment; it requires the participation of the people. In Southeast Asian cultures, there is still resistance to the Western European and American "imperial way of life and production". A "minimal lifestyle" can therefore be lived. It allows the conditions of ecological sufficiency to be

taken into account. The Social-Ecological Transformation must comprise all spheres of Planet Earth. Otherwise it will be impossible to mitigate or stop climate change, the deterioration of the waters and soils, and to improve the evolutionary conditions of the natural world. This is the prerequisite for the social transformation, for improved equity and participation and, last but not least, for a peaceful coexistence between peoples.

* Elmar Altvater † 1 May 2018 in Berlin

Liliane Danso-Dahmen

INTRODUCTION
"SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION –
PERSPECTIVES FROM ASIA AND EUROPE"

We, authors, scholars, and political actors from Asian countries and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS) Office Hanoi, RLS Office Beijing, RLS Office New Delhi, and its colleagues in Berlin, are very proud and glad to be able to present here, finally, this booklet titled "Social-Ecological Transformation – Perspectives from Asia and Europe", which includes six articles comprising cases from Southeast Asia, China, and India, as well as one article from Germany comparing two political concepts.

I use the word "finally" because this booklet is the preliminary result of a long "journey" of meetings and discussions involving different people, such as political activists, scholars, and decision makers from many parts of the world, which were initiated and organized in Vietnam by our office in Hanoi back in 2015.

However, considering the complexity of the issues involved when dealing with Social-Ecological Transformation (SET) and in the face of the great historical, cultural, social, economic, and political diversity of the countries from which cases are examined in this booklet (such as the Philippines, Vietnam, China, and India), this "journey" was not "long" in terms of time but "long" in terms of being "rich" in experiences and lessons learnt by the people involved. We call it a "journey" rather than just a "process" because one of the main lessons is that the process itself is an aim, not a clearly defined "result". The original aim in the beginning of this process was to establish a "permanent working group on SET in Asia" consisting of political actors from countries and regions in Asia where the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung is politically active and which provides a platform for progressive thinking and alternative approaches on the continent, challenging the dominant mode of production and economic growth-oriented policies in the region more effectively. The original idea was that this platform would contribute to the development of an alternative political concept for Asia towards a social-ecological transformation. In fact, it is clear that in many countries in Asia the political model of "sustainable development"

has been misused by multinational corporations and other capitalist forces intent on maximizing growth. Such growth is frequently harmful to the environment, human health, and workers' rights. In place of this paradigm, socio-ecological transformation creates an alternative future of "real sustainability", addressing multiple crises through a common approach based on the democratization of policy-making and local and regional solutions for everyday problems. The global proliferation of an "imperial lifestyle", which contains Western-influenced values and a multitude of criteria regarding consumption, beauty, human relations, and more – too many to be listed here – is definitely present in Asia, too. The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Southeast Asia (RLS SEA) and its partners and friends, as well as many colleagues and comrades around the world, are convinced that this process does not represent a "change for the better", but merely signals that the globalized capitalist production model, including resource extractivism, destruction of the environment, and the exploitation of human beings, is being pushed forward by elites, making the poor even poorer and the rich even richer, just like elsewhere.

When we started our meetings and workshops on SET in Southeast Asia, we believed (and still do) that the idea of SET offers the potential of "active solidarity with the poorest socially and globally" to redistribute assets and fight corruption. Of the political approaches and strategies that we discussed during the evolution of the work process, the contributions from Latin America, specifically from the "Beyond Development" work process initiated by the RLS office in Quito, were particularly fruitful for drafting this booklet. Inspired by this process and its spirit of encouraging critical analysis and in-depth discussions on hegemonic beliefs and alternatives to these, the RLS office Hanoi translated the very first output of this Latin American approach into three languages – Vietnamese, Khmer, and Burmese – to engage political actors in Southeast Asia in discussions concerning their perspectives on current developments and policies, too. By sharing their fundamental ideas and by active engagement in our discussion process in Southeast Asia, participants of the Latin American work process on "Alternatives to Development" also contributed valuable insights for this booklet and for our political work – both now and in future.

In this context, this booklet represents an intermediate step in the journey of our joint learning processes: We listen to each other's case studies on socio-ecological transformation and we learn from one another. The RLS supports these learning processes by disseminating these cases throughout countries and regions, and by offering space to discuss alternatives. RLS SEA thereby follows a multi-disciplinary approach based on community learning and awareness raising among both the public and policy makers, i.e. political actors.

"Social-Ecological Transformation – Perspectives from Asia and Europe" starts with two explorations from China by *Prof. Huan Qingzhi* introducing "socialist eco-civilization" and explaining its relevance in the Chinese context when discussing SET. In his view, "the 18th congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012

marked a new stage of eco-civilization in China, theoretically and practically". In his first article, Prof. Huan Qingzhi describes this approach and development around this theoretical concept in detail, and, in his second article, demonstrates a method by which this theoretical concept can be used to assess the performance of locations in China with regard to meeting the criteria entailed in the concept.

Maris dela Cruz from the Philippines presents a regional alternative approach – the case of "Network for Transformative Social Protection (NTSP)" – focusing on the region of Southeast Asia in the context of the regional integration process of the "Association of Southeast Asia Nations" (ASEAN). In comparison to the "ecological" approach presented earlier, Maris highlights the importance of recognizing the "social" in connection with democratization and human rights issues when thinking about alternatives to the dominant capitalist development model. In this way, the call by the NTSP for a "social ASEAN" goes far beyond regional boundaries and interests.

This booklet also features a case study from Vietnam by *Lam Thi Thu Suu* and *Liliane Danso-Dahmen*, contextualizing one local-level example within the wider SET approach. The example focuses on one Vietnamese non-governmental organiza-tion's effort to support communities affected by hydropower dam developments in the country. The political sensitivity of this issue has increased over the past years as the government is interested in promoting hydropower electricity in Vietnam as an important pillar of its renewable energy approach based on the so-called national "green-growth strategy". Therefore, it is vital for RLS SEA and its partners in Vietnam to give communities the space to raise their concerns with authorities and to help locally based alternatives to function in their specific context.

In his paper, "The Effects of Development and Struggles for Social Justice and Alternatives in India", *Madhuresh Kumar* discusses the impacts of the Indian State's development priorities on people as well as social and environmental movements' responses. One key aspect of this development model is that it undermines democratic institutions, excluding the role of local self-government institutions in decision-making processes. In this context, activists struggling for alternatives expanded their role, which was not only limited to organizing social actions such as protests but needed to be widened by comprising, e.g., the acquisition of scientific knowledge, analyzing data, and the dissemination of knowledge and information.

Still exploring the Southeast Asian context but from a different perspective, *Ashish Kothari* introduces one alternative approach, i.e. concept, which aims towards a "Radical Ecological Democracy" also called "RED". This approach, deeply rooted in local resistance projects and activities against the dominant development model, is based on five defined "pillars". Each pillar of RED describes values and strategies towards a comprehensive alternative, which is also aimed at a global level through recognizing cultural diversity and the need to democratize knowledge.

Our booklet closes with a critical reflection by *Philip Degenhardt* from Germany on the context of the sustainable development concept and its supporters, and the

emergence of the socio-ecological transformation approach as a way to challenge the capitalist system in all its aspects. In doing so, he also refers to scholars and activists from the RLS network and thereby provides a good overview of the scope and the role of SET for progressive networks and political actors fighting the dominant capitalist model.

As stated before, this booklet, which features authors from Asia and Europe writing about socio-ecological transformation issues from their specific political context, presents the beginning of a "learning voyage" rather than the "end of a journey". RLS Southeast Asia would like to thank all those who have contributed meaningful pieces to this journey by giving advice and participating in meetings, sharing stories, offering critiques in solidarity, and in many other, varied ways. The list of those involved is too long to include all the names of friends, colleagues, comrades, and supporters here. However, on behalf of the RLS SEA team, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to *Elmar Altvater* from Berlin, who supported our discussions immensely by sharing his knowledge and experiences on transformation from his intellectual works and by taking an active role in important meetings and discussions prior to the drafting of this booklet. I would particularly like to thank him and all our supporters for sharing ideas with us on alternatives regarding a social-ecological transformation in Asia and beyond.

Qingzhi Huan

SOCIALIST ECO-CIVILIZATION AND SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

Abstract: Eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction, the biggest buzzword among green thinking and policy discussions in China since the 18th congress of the CPC in 2012, risks being an ideologically and semantically ambiguous term. One negative consequence of this situation is that, in practice, it makes critical academic study of, and cross-cultural dialogue on, eco-civilization very difficult, if not impossible. One way to move out of this predicament, from an eco-socialist perspective, is to reveal and explicate the political dimension of eco-civilization by clearly proposing a green-left alternative, or politics of "socialist eco-civilization".

Keywords: socialist eco-civilization, eco-civilization construction, social-ecological transformation, green-left politics, China

While becoming better known to the world as a state strategy of China over the past decade, eco-civilization *(shengtaiwenming)* or eco-civilization construction *(shengtaiwenming jianshe)* is still a concept which can only be understandable in the Chinese context of discourse, and which has far less than expected international recognition – sympathetic response or criticism – even among green-left academia (Magdoff 2012/2011; Salleh 2008; Morrison 2007). A key reason for this seemingly unfair situation is that, from my own thinking, eco-civilization as a concept and theory of environmental humanities and social sciences remains neither fully explored nor explained, despite remarkable efforts made by Chinese colleagues (Huan et al. 2014; Zhang Y. 2014; Fang 2014; Lu 2013; Liu S. 2006). As a result, connotations of this term are semantically and ideologically not clear enough, and in reality it is too often regarded as a general designation of "green thinking/policy" or just an up-to-date version of national environmental policy. My assumption is that the inadequate and/or uncritical conceptualization and elucidation of eco-civilization should be, first of all, to blame for its less warm reception by the outside world. Thus, in this essay, I will start from an overview of the evolution of this term by focusing on a

more specific expression of "socialist eco-civilization" rather than "eco-civilization" in general, and then try to reveal its theoretical/practical potential for green-left politics by comparing it with the discourse of "social-ecological transformation" as a critical political ecology.[1] Finally, I will conclude with a brief introduction to the China Research Group on Socialist Eco-civilization (CRGSE) which is supported by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung under the 2015–2017 framework project on "social-ecological transformation and sustainable development in China", focusing on its primary thinking and planned work in the years ahead – a specific effort by us to put the idea of, and belief in, socialist eco-civilization into practice.

An overview of the conceptual development of socialist eco-civilization

As an academic term in Chinese, eco-civilization was originally used by Qianji Ye, a well-known agriculturist, in his article which was published in 1984 in *The Journal of Moscow University* (scientific socialism edition), and then translated into Chinese by *The Guangming Daily* on February 18, 1985. Qianji Ye's major idea is that China should be tasked with developing a new pattern of civilization with the characteristic of a harmonious human-nature relationship by paying special attention to the future development of Chinese agriculture (Ye 1987). In contrast, it was not until 1995 that Roy Morrison coined the term for the first time in the English-speaking world with a similar meaning, referring to a new type of democracy and civilization (Morrison 1995).

From the late 1980s, eco-civilization, or sometimes eco-civilization construction, was gradually incorporated into the Chinese academic circle in the sense that during a long process of modernization, China needs to achieve both material and spiritual as well as institutional and social progress, or to construct a multi-dimensional systemic civilization, and ecological progress or improvement is at least as important here as other societal aspects. Accordingly, one can find that a mainstream understanding of the concept of eco-civilization in the academic writings during this period is that it signifies the ecological or "relation with nature" aspect of socialist modernization as a whole, or a healthier and more harmonious structure of the human-nature relationship as well as the practical pursuit in this direction (Li 2003; Liao 2001; Liu X. 1999; Liu Z. 1997). For instance, in his book on *Production Practice and Eco-civilization,* Haiyuan Zhang argues that environmental problems originate from the defects of human production practice, and getting rid of environmental problems in human production practice will lead to a new pattern of civilization, namely an eco-civilization (Zhang H. 1992). In this regard, the conceptualization of

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1   It is true that there are different understandings of the exact meaning of "political ecology" among the scholars in continental Europe and in North America and the UK. Here, "critical political ecology" refers to the "social-ecological transformation" theory and practice or "transformative politics" in a broad sense, used typically by a North-South network led by Ulrich Brand (see below for more details), which is more consistent with the tradition of what was defined by French eco-socialist André Gorz (1980, 1994), proposing a critical attitude towards the current capitalist system and replacing it with an eco-socialist model.

eco-civilization is, from the outset, not just a purely academic endeavor and can only be explained from the particular Chinese context of discourse.

A primary (if to a large extent unnoticed) impulse from formal politics for eco-civilization came from a decision to promote the development of forestry issued on June 25, 2003, by the central committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council, in which for the first time eco-civilization was officially adopted as a "flagship term" in the national governmental policy, "to construct an eco-civilization society with beautiful mountains and rivers". It is no surprise that such a breakthrough of policy greening at the national level first occurred in the field of forestry, because the governmental officials in this policy sector are familiar with the ongoing discussion surrounding eco-civilization in academic circles. Though it is worth noting that eco-civilization here is used more like an adjective than a noun, and with a relatively limited focus on "forest planting" or "protecting ecosystems".

Another significant turning point was the 17th congress of the CPC held in October 2007. Eco-civilization historically appeared in the central committee of the CPC's working report, emphasizing the importance of "constructing eco-civilization" and raising "eco-civilization perceptions" (Hu 2007: 20). For the former, it refers to introducing/implementing certain policy measures such as reshaping an industrial structure, growth mode, and consumption pattern which can save energy and resources and protect the ecological environment, promoting a rapid expansion of the circular economy and renewable energies, and effectively controlling the major pollutants so as to improve the quality of the ecological environment; for the latter, to cultivating an environmentally-friendly way of thinking and lifestyle among the public. Noticeably, rather than offering a clear definition of what eco-civilization is, this most authoritative official document only summarizes its two key aspects: the building of eco-civilization and the promotion of education on eco-civilization perceptions. Accordingly, an issue likely to cause controversy is that one may question whether eco-civilization itself and eco-civilization construction are the same thing.

Inspired by the 17th congress of the CPC, a number of noteworthy research results on eco-civilization were achieved in the next five years. For instance, in the book titled *On Eco-civilization* (Ji 2007), eco-civilization is classified into four aspects: consciousness, behavior, institutions, and industry. *Ten Theses on Eco-civilization* (Zhang W. 2012) discusses the ten policy fields in relation to eco-civilization: political leadership, policy guidance, laws and regulations, green industry, advanced technology, ecological enterprises, ecological culture, societal participation, regional integration, international exchange, and cooperation. And *Eco-civilization Construction: Theory and Practice* (Wu 2008) and *Theory and Practice of Socialist Eco-civilization Construction* (Wang and Yang 2011) are the case studies of Xiamen City and Hainan Province. A mixed feature of the writings during this time is that researchers paid more attention to realistic paths and the local practice of eco-civilization construction, rather than rational analysis of the eco-civilization concept itself. An appropriate example here is that both Mouchang

Yu and Xueming Chen emphasize the socialist implication or dimension of eco-civilization in their homonymous books *On Eco-civilization* (2010, 2008), arguing that the essence of socialism and the essence of eco-civilization are coherent and the social formation of eco-civilization is eco-socialism, but their proposals were not met with widespread acceptance or response by scholars in the academic circle.

Owing to both internal and external impetuses, a political consensus is emerging that the time has come to seriously deal with environmental problems cumulated over the past decades. The 18th congress of the CPC in November 2012 marked a new stage of eco-civilization in China, both theoretically and practically. In the central committee of the CPC's working report, there is an independent chapter on "Vigorously promoting eco-civilization construction", which provides a much more detailed description of the theoretical and policy connotations of eco-civilization construction (Hu 2012: 39–41). Compared with the statement including two phrases ("constructing eco-civilization" and raising "eco-civilization perceptions") in one paragraph five years ago, this chapter, especially its first and last paragraphs, explicates more systemically and radically what eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction means to the CPC.

Three points can be drawn from reading the chapter. First of all, a systematic exposition as such represents a new viewpoint of eco-civilization, or a more civilized ecological sensitivity, and of the CPC as a leftist governing party. Arguably, formulations found in it such as "Respecting nature, adapting to nature and protecting nature" and "Cherishing nature, protecting ecology" are environmentalist or even ecologist thinking, a very new element of the CPC's ever greening political ideology over the past decades (Huan 2010: 195–199).

Secondly, such an exposition indicates a process of political reorientation for the CPC, ranking eco-civilization construction as one of the key tasks of socialist modernization, or acknowledging that it is at least as important as other developmental targets such as economic growth, political modernization, social development, and cultural construction. Adhering to the way of thinking or the principle of "Five-in-one" *(wuweiyiti)*[2] implies that the CPC and the Chinese government are gradually shifting to a more balanced, comprehensive, and scientific discourse on modernization or development, after more than 35 years of continuously insisting on "taking economic construction as the central task" and emphasizing that "development is of overriding importance" (Deng 1992: 377).

Thirdly, this exposition also heralds a major adjustment in governance strategy and policy concerning how to achieve the above goals of ideological greening and political reorientation. According to the exposition, four key strategies and general tasks for

2   According to the working report, *wuweiyiti* ("five-in-one") refers to the integration of "eco-civilization construction into all aspects and the whole process of economic construction, political construction, social construction and cultural construction" (Hu 2012: 39). In other words, these five policy fields constitute an integral whole of socialist modernization target and process.

promoting the construction of eco-civilization include: "Optimiz[ing] the pattern of land and space development, comprehensively promot[ing] resource conservation, increase[ing] the natural ecosystem and environmental protection, and strengthen[ing] the construction of eco-civilization system" (Hu 2012: 40–41). Obviously, it is by no means easy to fully implement these measures without profoundly reforming the current governmental structure and governance of China. Therefore, the claim to be "vigorously promoting eco-civilization construction" is, to a large extent, or primarily, a "self-revolution of government" (Zhang Y. 2015). That is also the reason why "modernization of governance system and governance capacity" is ranked as one of the key targets of "comprehensively deepening reform" for the current government.

Since 2012 the central committee of the CPC and the State Council have issued three follow-up documents in this policy field: *Decision to Comprehensively Deepen the Reform of Several Major Issues* (2013), *Suggestions on Promoting the Construction of Eco-civilization* (2015) and *Overall Plan for the Reform of Eco-civilization System* (2015). All of them are of crucial importance in the sense that, acting as an up-to-date version of the road map or policy-initiative basket, these documents will, to a large extent, determine how the grand idea of eco-civilization is to be implemented or realized in the years to come. And, indeed, by reading them, one can gain a better understanding of the evolution of a certain point from an early suggestion to a mature public policy, for instance in cases with an "ecological redline system" (an administrative policy of delimitating certain insurmountable ecological standards or boundaries) and an "ecological compensation system" (an administrative policy of compensating the loss of ecological public benefits providers). However, it needs to be emphasized that the chapter of the central committee of the CPC's working report to the 18th congress contains the most authoritative formulation and interpretation of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction. In contrast, all the other documents are more specifically focused on issues or policy measures.

Looking back on the conceptualization of eco-civilization over the past decade, we can find two very prominent phenomena. First, there is an obvious difference, or "dislocation", of focus between the academic researchers and the policy decision makers. Scholars of environmental humanities and social sciences prefer the term "eco-civilization", emphasizing its new characteristics regarding the relationship between humans and nature, or as a type of civilization differing from modern, industrial society, thus very much a philosophical or ethics-related understanding. According to this notion (Lu 2013:13), eco-civilization and its practice are, to a large extent, an ecological negation and transcendence of modern industrial and urban civilization, and have a close connection with a new kind of economic, social, and cultural institution framework and perception basis.

By comparison, it seems that the CPC and the governmental departments prefer the term "eco-civilization construction", emphasizing its connotations as a policy guideline and coverage ("the starting-point of policy") (Xia 2007). Arguably, "constructing

eco-civilization" and raising "eco-civilization perceptions" in the working report to the 17th congress of the CPC, "five-in-one", "three developments", and "four key strategies and general tasks" in the working report to the 18th congress of the CPC, "four items of institutional and system reform" in the *Decision* of 2013, and "greening" and "the eight core tasks" in the *Suggestions* of 2015[3] should all be understood in this context. As a result, both the policy measures and implementing mechanisms which were eventually adopted are, to some extent, "selective" and not necessarily in line with the essential requirements of eco-civilization construction. This is not an uncommon phenomenon in public policy decision-making and implementation. But, owing to a lack of effective input of critical messages from the academic side in the Chinese context, this problem is particularly prominent.

Second, there is little reflective or critical discussion on eco-civilization from the perspective of environmental humanities and social sciences. In order to make up for this deficiency, I have suggested that the concept of eco-civilization be broadly defined by a four-implication description (Huan 2014): at the level of philosophy and ethics, eco-civilization is a weak eco-centrist (environmentally-friendly) natural or ecological relation value and morality; at the level of political ideology, eco-civilization is an alternative economic and social formula differing from the dominating capitalist one; at the practical level, eco-civilization construction refers to the appropriate relation between humans and nature throughout the process of creating a socialist civilization, or the government's daily work of ecological and environmental protection; in the specific context of modernization and development, eco-civilization construction refers to the green dimension of socialist modernization, and economic and social development. What I want to emphasize is that, while talking about eco-civilization, we should notice both the double dimensions of theory and practice and the double dimensions of "deep-green" and "red-green" perspectives.

In addition, I have suggested that eco-civilization (construction) as a systemic theory of environmental politics or eco-culture in China be expounded from the following three aspects or sub-dimensions (Huan 2015a): a "green-left" ideological discourse on development of the governing political party, an environmental political-social theory insisting on a comprehensive transformation, or reconstruction, of contemporary

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3   The "three developments" are green development, low-carbon development, and circular development; the "four items of institutional and system reform" are establishing a natural resource assets property rights system and use control system, defining an ecological protection redline, implementing the system of paid use of resources and the ecological compensation system, and reforming the management system of ecological environment protection; and the "eight core tasks" are strengthening the main function orientation to optimize the pattern of land and space development, promoting technical innovation and structural adjustment to improve the quality and efficiency, comprehensively promoting resource conservation as well as its circular and efficient use to fundamentally change the way of use, increasing the natural ecological system and environmental protection to improve the quality of the ecological environment, perfecting the eco-civilization system, strengthening the statistical monitoring and supervision of law enforcement in eco-civilization construction, speeding up the formation of good habits to promote the building of eco-civilization, and strengthening the organization and leadership.

society, and an organic philosophy and way of thinking with a strong link to the Chinese and/or classic tradition.[4] In doing so, I believe, the theory of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction can be quite a radical one – both as a critique of reality and in terms of imagining a future alternative.

It must be retrospectively admitted that the potential of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction as academic concepts is far from fully realized. The unsymmetrical status or power in conceptualizing this discourse between scholars and policymakers puts too much emphasis on the latter and has, as already mentioned, thus far hindered rather than promoted a democratic and real constructive discussion among academics. For eco-socialists like us, a particularly urgent issue is how to promote the implementation of a socialist eco-civilization agenda as officially approved at the 18th congress in China within a capitalism-dominated world. To find the right answer to this question, we first need to correctly answer the other concrete questions: is the model provided by the Western countries for dealing with their ecological and environmental problems over the past decades the right approach? Or, in other words, is it appropriate to say "the West's today is our tomorrow"? And then, is it possible and desirable for us to follow the "shallow-green" or eco-capitalist measures to achieve a socially just and environmentally sustainable future? Or do we need to practice a new kind of thinking and choice? And why can it only be an eco-socialist one?[5]

Socialist eco-civilization in a perspective of social-ecological transformation

To make the above more internationally communicable, a comparative analysis of socialist eco-civilization will surely be helpful. I will now try to put socialist eco-civilization in the context of social-ecological transformation theory and practice.[6] In my

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4   The ancient Chinese civilization, mainly influenced and nourished by Confucianism, is arguably a systemic ecological civilization in the sense that for centuries it has consciously and successfully maintained a relatively harmonious relation between humans and nature (Qiao 2013), though caution should be taken when saying that organic thinking is only an asset of oriental or Chinese culture.

5   China can claim to have a strong tradition of eco-socialist thinking or research, including in the field of eco-civilization. For instance, as early as the late 1980s, Prof. Sihua Liu clearly pointed out that socialist modern civilization represents a high degree of unity between socialist material, spiritual, and ecological civilizations (Liu S. 1989: 275, 276). However, it is also true that, even after the 18th congress of the CPC in 2012, too many scholars and governmental officials still avoid deliberately using the term "socialist eco-civilization".

6   There is no perfect explanation of the methodological "defect" by comparing "socialist eco-civilization" – a quite radical-looking discourse of political ecology – and "social-ecological transformation" – a relatively conservative-looking one (not necessarily so). The reason why it attracts me is that the research framework of "social-ecological transformation" can be understood and used both in a broad sense and a narrow sense. From a Chinese perspective, on the one hand, socialist eco-civilization theory and practice is necessarily an integral part of a worldwide process of social-ecological reconstruction, implying that China has to work hand-in-hand with other countries or regions to eventually transcend capitalism after a relatively long period of learning from or "practicing" capitalism; on the other hand, socialist eco-civilization theory and practice represents a direction or future of decreasing rather than increasing capitalist elements, both economically and socially, requiring China to be very cautious of weakening or eliminating those socialist policies or institutional arrangements established in the early days of the PRC. Thus, I believe an active exchange and dialogue with the various moderate green-left politics, including "Alternatives to the development model", is beneficial to the thinking or pursuit of a socialist eco-civilization.

opinion, socialist eco-civilization and social-ecological transformation can, to a great degree, be considered two regional versions of contemporary global green-left politics seeking a societal reconstruction approach to the multi-dimensional crises caused by the dominant capitalist mode of production, living and way of thinking.

Recently, Chinese eco-Marxists have strengthened our collaboration with major experts in the research field of social-ecological transformation, especially developing a global network of "Alternatives to development" led by Prof. Ulrich Brand.[7] For instance, from March 31 to April 11, 2015, in collaboration with RLS Beijing, we organized a workshop/lecture series on "Green capitalism and social-ecological transformation" at *Peking* University, *Renmin* University of China, *Zhongnan* University of Economics and Law, *Wuhan* University, *Fudan* University, and *Tongji* University. Ulrich Brand was invited, giving a series of lectures and key talks on green growth, green economy, green capitalism, social-ecological transformation, critical political ecology, eco-Marxism, and the current global green-left.

According to Brand (2015a), in light of the economic crisis in Europe and the USA and the fact that policies of sustainable development have largely failed, now it seems that the concept of "green economy" is attractive for certain socio-economic actors, and in various programmatic conceptualizations, the green economy has been proclaimed as an approach to overcome the existing multiple crises and constitutes a social, ecological, and economic win-win situation. In Brand's opinion, the green economic strategy is crystallizing a new emerging capitalist formation, which can be referred to as "green capitalism". This is taking place in a situation in which the old formation – neoliberal, finance-dominated capitalism – is experiencing a profound, multifaceted crisis. As we all know, capitalism molds not only social relations but also relations between society and nature. Like other relationships between society and nature under capitalist conditions, green capitalism is realized in a highly selective manner in some branches and some regions while excluding other people and other regions and putting the material lives of those excluded at stake. For Brand, the concept of green capitalism is related to the uneven development of capitalist economy in time and space as well as the current international economic and political

7   Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen, 'Global environmental politics and the imperial mode of living', *The Journal of Poyang Lake,* 1/2014, pp. 12–20; Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen, 'Green economy strategy and green capitalism', *Theoretical Trends Abroad,* 10/2014, pp. 22–29; Ulrich Brand, Xueming Chen, Qingzhi Huan, Yunfei Zhang and Rensheng Liu, 'Who eats the pollution? The answer from green capitalism' (academic dialogue), *China Newspaper of Social Science,* 13 May 2015; Ulrich Brand, Camila Moreno, Rensheng Liu, Yunfei Zhang and Qingzhi Huan, 'Green capitalism, social-ecological transformation and global left' (academic conversation), *The Journal of Poyang Lake,* 3/2015, pp. 59–66; Ulrich Brand, 'How to get out of the multi-crises: A critical social-ecological transformation theory', *Social Sciences Abroad,* 4/2015, pp. 4–12; Victor Wallis, 'The search for a mass ecological constituency', *Social Sciences Abroad,* 4/2015, pp. 31–40.

order. In particular, hegemony of an "imperial mode of living"[8] – a very resource intensive and environmentally destructive mode of living and production – has given the European countries and the USA an edge in terms of the global division of labor, access to natural resources and the use of space for environmental pollution. Worse still, some elites from developing countries and emerging economies have made it their goal to pursue the imperial mode of living. Based on the above analyses, he argues, for the green-left, it is essential to realize that green growth and green economy are nothing but policy instruments used by capitalism to regulate its growth and contain the accumulated crisis, and we should consider green capitalism as one form of capitalist development, which will last an unknown period of time.

As far as I am concerned (Huan 2015b), on the one hand, "green capitalism" and "social-ecological transformation", as a couple of analytical (rather than normative) concepts, can indeed help us to deepen our understanding of the political and economic essence of the "green trend" led by the Western countries and the contemporary feature of "green-left" political forces in a process of strategic and political reorientation. In other words, it is reasonable to say that, following the development of contemporary capitalism into a new stage of "green capitalism", "climate capitalism", or "low carbon capitalism", political discourse and the practice of the international community fighting against capitalism must also shift towards a "green-left" or a "transformative-left".

It is not a coincidence that my own research on eco-capitalist theory and practice from the perspective of environmental politics has come to a similar conclusion (Huan 2015c). My main points are as follows: eco-capitalism can be broadly defined as a model of gradually solving environmental problems through economic and technical innovation, which aims to maintain rather than challenge the dominant capitalist institutional framework of market system and democratic politics; as a mainstream school of environmental politics, it is playing a prominent (if not the most significant) role in leading to environmentally-friendly policy and social change. Moreover, one could argue that it is eco-capitalist thinking and strategy as such that is pursuing a mission of creating new opportunities for "green economic growth" and "green political legitimacy" in a post-industrial era. Therefore, one can understand that in reality eco-capitalism actually attracts a large number of political followers and supporters, though many of them may dislike and avoid using the term itself. Of course, from a perspective of eco-socialism, it is very clear that eco-capitalism is just a "shallow-green" political theory that tries to incorporate the ecological dimension into a capitalist framework rather than to regulate capital using an ecologist principle.

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8   The "imperial mode of living" is one of the key terms used by Ulrich Brand (2014) to demonstrate that "green capitalism", which can at best achieve a selective greening of modern society, will probably last a much longer time than some radical eco-socialists would like to believe or "permit" (Kovel 2001; Sarkar 1999; O'Connor 1998).

On the other hand, I strongly believe that there can be a distinctive expression and interpretation of the discourse on social-ecological transformation against the background and context of today's China, and that is why Chinese eco-Marxists propose the term "socialist eco-civilization" (Huan 2013, 2009; Liu S. 2014/06; Chen 2008). For us, socialist eco-civilization is a combination of socialism (social justice) and ecology (ecological sustainability), which stands for a historical alternative to the modern capitalist system, including its ideology and values. Historical experience in the pre-capitalist era has shown that when economy is placed within rather than above the whole society, the logic of capital – if capital does exist – has to adapt itself to traditional social norms and ecological rationality – or at least it has no way of being a monopolizing or hegemonic force. Recognizing this, of course, does not mean that we should regress to the pre-modern society. Rather, it indicates that we should look towards a green future, and for that purpose the first consensus we must reach is that hegemony of the logic of capital – its contemporary form – is challengeable. Combating ecological problems, in the final analysis, requires a new type of "social relations" or "societal-natural relation", and such a new relation or relation structure is the fundamental implication of socialist eco-civilization.

Admittedly, putting forward the concept of eco-civilization can itself be considered a sign that China has already realized that it needs to achieve a historical synthesis of new modernization, environmental good governance, and a revival of traditional ecological wisdom, such as the major Confucian ideas of "virtue to animals", "grace to vegetation" and "goodness to soil/water/stone" (Qiao 2013). The so-called "five-in-one" strategy is a typical expression born out of this kind of understanding and thinking. In other words, whatever the seriousness and complexity of the environmental challenges confronting China and the various resources it has to tackle them, eco-civilization construction will necessarily be a comprehensive process of "greening", or greening of the entire society. A socialist eco-civilization perspective, however, implies a clear and conscious integration of ecological consideration and socialist alternatives – both a fundamental change of individual values and an institutional reconstruction of contemporary society: a "red-green" revolution of human civilization. It is a pity that the socialist nature of socialist eco-civilization has been inadequately discussed so far by the Chinese scholars. Many of them take it for granted that a socialist country led by the CPC is definitely heading towards a socialist eco-civilization. Given historical experience and the present reality, I am suspicious of this assumption. In fact, even the appearance and spread of green capitalism in Europe and the USA, as Ulrich Brand has convincingly demonstrated (Brand and Wissen 2015b; Brand 2014), can be a double-edged sword to the eco-civilization construction in China. It is partly because of this appealing example that too many Chinese researchers are still devout believers in the results, models, and ideas of environmental management in the European countries and the USA, which is the very reason why the ideas of "pollute first, clean up later" are so entrenched. Therefore, it is

extremely important that mainstream Marxist scholars in China pay more attention to enriching the ecological implication of the Chinese socialist system in line with the practice of eco-civilization construction, which will lead to further promotion of the practice (Huan 2015d).

"Green-left" scholars in Europe and Latin America, especially the group "Alternatives to development", pay much attention to the discourse of anti-green capitalism and the practice of social-ecological transformation based on a critical political-ecological analysis of the current capitalist reality. By comparison, Chinese eco-Marxists are putting more of their efforts into theoretical exposition and the practical promotion of a socialist eco-civilization. We are actually working towards the same goals with slightly different approaches. By keeping such a comparative angle in view, not only can we maintain reasonable and patient expectations of contributions to a socially just and ecologically sustainable future of earth from the Chinese side, but we can also have a better exchange and dialogue regarding how to identify our common enemy in reality and define our common goals for the future, arriving at a more effective mid- and long-term strategy for the global green-left.

For instance, there are some common basic issues which need to be further explored for the study of both socialist eco-civilization and social-ecological transformation (Huan 2016). These include: 1) formulating societal and ecological institutional restrictions on capital and the logic of its operation (in concrete and practical terms); 2) considering more positively the preservation of areas of social life heretofore relatively uncommodified such as family life, community activities, and indigenous living styles and habits; and 3) (re-)discovering and promoting the alternative implications of modern institutions such as "state", "government", "society", "planning", "education", "technology" and "entrepreneurship".

An outline for further study of the socialist eco-civilization in China

To promote the research of socialist eco-civilization in China, on June 26–27, 2015, the Research Institute of Marxism (RIM), *Peking* University and RLS Beijing co-organized a symposium on "Socialist eco-civilization and the green-left study in China in a perspective of social-ecological transformation". Except for the opening and closing ceremony, this one-day discussion consisted of four panels, focusing on "Social-ecological transformation theory and socialist eco-civilization", "Socialist eco-civilization theory and practice in China", "Major case studies on socialist eco-civilization construction" and a "China Research Group on Socialist Eco-civilization: research issues and working rules". Altogether, more than 50 scholars, including 15 outside of Beijing, participated in this symposium.

As organizer of this symposium and one of the main speakers, I first reviewed Ulrich Brand's major ideas as well as his lecture series on "green capitalism and social-ecological transformation" in April, stressing the methodological relevance for Chinese colleagues to deepen the study of socialist eco-civilization in China. I then

discussed the stimulatory effect of eco-Marxist theory on eco-civilization institutional innovation. Xueming Chen from *Fudan* University generalized the four key points of the green-left position: 1) the logic of capital, rather than production itself, is the root cause of the current ecological crisis; 2) the contemporary world including China is now in the predicament of having to maintain economic growth and protect the environment; 3) helping the world move out of this predicament is the only way for China to show the rationality and legitimacy of its modernization development or the so-called "China Road"; 4) China should focus on dealing with the ecological crisis at its "root", meaning reconstruct the current mode of production and living. Yunfei Zhang, a professor of *Renmin* University of China, analyzed the different understandings of the term "social-ecological transformation" within the Chinese context, suggesting that the emphasis of dialoguing with international counterparts be put on promoting the study of socialist eco-civilization theory and practice in China.

This symposium also included the inaugural meeting of the "China Research Group on Socialist Eco-civilization". Participants in this symposium, with the support of RLS Beijing and RIM of *Peking* University, decided to set up this permanent research unit, which consists of 20 core members and about 15 expert members. Qingzhi Huan of *Peking* University is the chair of the CRGSE.

A basic consensus for all the CRGSE members is that socialist eco-civilization is a more radical or "green-left" version of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction, clearly proposing a combination of socialism (social justice) and ecologism (ecological sustainability) in dealing with the multi-challenges confronting China today. To put it differently, we believe that only by replacing the increasingly pro-capital institutional framework, as well as the underlying values and perceptions, with a new pattern of eco-socialist society can ecological problems be solved in a socially-just and sustainable way.

It is self-evident that constructing socialist eco-civilization is not just a process of adding some green elements to reality, as quite a lot of people still think. Instead, it means and necessitates a comprehensive or social-ecological transformation of the present Chinese society. Therefore, to make socialist eco-civilization our green future, we need to simultaneously work at three levels: identifying and defining a full set of key values or beliefs for socialist eco-civilization, such as social justice or equity, ecological sustainability, economic well-being or sufficiency, which should be mutually consistent or supporting; envisioning a real alternative institutional framework of socialist eco-civilization, characteristic of the ecologically civilized economy, politics, society, and culture that differ fundamentally from the capitalist ones; analyzing and encouraging all kinds of mechanism and practical approaches and experiments conducive to socialist eco-civilization, such as the demonstration areas of eco-civilization construction at the different administrative or spatial levels, introduction of the green evaluation index of economic and social development, and the multi-dimensional eco-compensation systems.

According to the above basis, the mid-to-long-term goal of the CRGSE is to develop into a research network, or a "red-green" think tank, which can play a flagship role in the theoretical study and practical promotion of socialist eco-civilization in China and organize regional and global exchanges and dialogues with international colleagues in the study of social-ecological transformation or "green-left" politics by focusing on three research fields: 1) eco-Marxist or eco-socialist theories (including Marx and Engels' ecology thoughts, eco-Marxism abroad, green-left theories in a broad sense); 2) socialist eco-civilization theory (especially focusing on its economic, political, societal, and cultural institutional components, as well the totality), 3) socialist eco-civilization practice (paying more attention to the major institutional and policy instruments and actuating mechanisms).

In 2015–2017, the CRGSE will concentrate its work on the following three issues: 1) eco-Marxism and socialist eco-civilization theory, 2) case studies of the eco-civilization demonstration areas in China, and 3) the Greater Beijing regional integration and eco-civilization construction. In order to achieve the above objectives, we plan to organize two annual workshops (2015/2016) and an international conference (2017), and hopefully the final results from these activities can be published in English during the concluding round of this project.

Concluding remarks

As was the case with the terms "sustainable development" and "green economy" (Brand 2012; Salleh 2012), eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction, the biggest buzzword among green thinking and policy discussions in China after the 18th congress of the CPC in 2012, risks being an ideologically and semantically ambiguous term. Among other things, one negative consequence of this situation is that, in practice, it makes critical academic study of, and international dialogue on, eco-civilization very difficult, if not impossible. One way to move out of this predicament, we as eco-socialists argue, is to reveal and explicate the political dimension of eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction by clearly proposing a green-left alternative, or politics of "socialist eco-civilization". Once again, it is not a minor change of just adding a modifier for eco-civilization or eco-civilization construction; rather, it indicates a much more radical green-left thinking and solution to the multi-crises of the contemporary world (Hollender 2015; Lang and Mokrani 2013) in which China is now becoming an integral part after more than 35 years of reform and openness policy. Of course, whether or not China can achieve the goal of socialist eco-civilization, and to what extent, is an open question. However, for both positive and negative reasons, China is one of the rare countries today that should begin, and is able to lead, such a historic shift of civilization.

Qingzhi Huan

ECO-CIVILIZATION CONSTRUCTION IN THE GREATER BEIJING AREA FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION: A PRIMARY COMPARISON

Abstract: Eco-civilization construction in the jurisdiction of Beijing as a whole has its obvious strengths and weaknesses: it is comparatively high in the indicators such as "social development" (or "social ecologicalization") and "coordination degree" (or "economic ecologicalization"), and comparatively low in "ecological vitality" (or "ecological health") and "environmental quality" (or "environmental livability"), which can only be better explained by considering the complicated interactions within a larger region. Thus, as a primary comparison of Miyun, Yanqing, and Tang County has shown, for the Beijing Municipal Government, an important dimension of promoting eco-civilization construction in the coming years is to utilize the recently initiated national strategy of *Jing-Jin-Ji* coordinated development, actively bearing more regional or "external" responsibilities in solving its own or "internal" ecological-environmental problems and experimenting with future-oriented environmentally friendly economic and social systems.

Keywords: Eco-civilization construction, the greater Beijing area, *Jing-Jin-Ji* coordinated development, regional integration, *Weiming* Commune

It is well-recognized that eco-civilization as an academic term goes back to agriculturist Qianji Ye, who created this vocabulary in his article first published in 1984 in *The Journal of Moscow University* (scientific socialism edition) which was then translated into Chinese the following year. From the late 1980s, eco-civilization *(shengtai wenming),* or sometimes eco-civilization construction *(shengtai wenming jianshe),* has been gradually incorporated into the Chinese academic circle, emphasizing that China should be tasked with developing a new pattern of civilization with the characteristic of a harmonious human-nature relationship. In practice, however, it was not until June 25, 2003, when the central committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council issued a policy decision on promoting the development of forestry, and October 12–18, 2007, when the CPC held its 17th national

congress, that eco-civilization was gradually adopted as a "flagship term" in national governmental policy (Hu 2007: 20). Owing to both internal and external impetuses, a political consensus that the time has come to seriously deal with environmental problems cumulated over the past decades is emerging. The 18th national congress of the CPC held on November 8–14, 2012, marked a new stage in eco-civilization construction in China. In the central committee of the CPC's working report, there is an independent chapter on "Vigorously promoting eco-civilization construction", which provides a much more detailed generalization of the theoretical and policy connotations of eco-civilization construction (Hu 2012: 39–41). In the Chinese context, it is not difficult to understand that such a top-down political mobilization will definitely lead to certain bottom-up responses at the different levels of administration.

When talking about eco-civilization construction in the megacities like Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai, a very important dimension of consideration is the efforts to reconcile or harmonize its relations with the neighboring areas, in which both the former's demonstrating or leading role and the latter's imitation or follow-up effects are indispensable. Therefore, from the former's standing point, how to perform a real leading or model role in eco-civilization construction practice and convince or attract neighbors to follow its policy initiatives is one of the key factors to make green transformation of the entire region sustainable. In this context, from my point of view, the recently initiated national strategy of regional integration or coordinated development of *Jing-Jin-Ji* (a combination of the abbreviations for Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province) offers us an interesting viewpoint of eco-civilization construction in Beijing as well as China.

Eco-civilization construction of Beijing and the regional integration strategy of "jing-jin-ji"

Generally speaking, "eco-civilization" refers to a more harmonious or even symbiotic relationship between human society and nature, which necessitates an ecologically sustainable natural system and a socially just economic-social-cultural system (Huan et al. 2014; Huan 2014; Lu 2013). Accordingly, that implies an ecological negation and transcendence of the current modern civilization, especially its capitalist version, and a shift toward a new pattern of civilization. "Eco-civilization construction", by comparison, is an umbrella term which covers all the major efforts or policy initiatives in line with that direction and/or targeting those goals (Xia 2007). It is thus reasonable to say that the main policy documents issued by the CPC as well as the Chinese government since its 17th national congress in 2007 are directly based on the latter concept rather than the former (Huan 2016), stressing that eco-civilization can only be the accumulation and sublimation of a long process of construction.

At least for public policy researchers, progress in eco-civilization construction at the different levels of administrative management can be measured and compared

in a scientific manner or approach. Moreover, a common consensus for most of them is that eco-civilization construction and its actual progress rests with or is embodied by improvements in the following five aspects: ecological environment (or "eco-sustainability"), ecological economy, ecological society (or "eco-habitat"), ecological institution (or "eco-politics"), and ecological culture (Huan et al. 2013: 21; Jia et al. 2013: 2; Lu 2013: 11), a thinking inspired, to a large extent, by the statement of "Five-in-one" (*"wuweiyiti"*) in the working report of the CPC's Central Committee for its 18th congress in 2012.

Among others, two representative quantitative evaluation index systems are those created by the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) in 2013 and the Beijing Forestry University (BFU) in 2010. The former evaluation index system focuses on the administrative levels of county and city (between county and province), has five second-level indicators (ecological environment, ecological economy, ecological society, ecological institution, and ecological culture), and 29 or 30 third-level indicators (MEP 2013), while the latter focuses on the administrative level of the province, has five second-level indicators (ecological vitality, environmental quality, social development, coordination degree, and transfer contribution), and 25 third-level indicators (Yan 2010–2015).[10] Another major difference between them is that the MEP system focuses more on the correct or appropriate measures which the county or city has adopted, whereas the BFU system pays more attention to what objective improvements have been achieved by the province.

Based on the data provided by the annual reports of the BFU, we can ascertain the detailed or quantitative performances of Beijing's eco-civilization construction, as shown in tables 1 and 2.

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9   *Wuweiyiti* ("Five-in-one"), according to the working report of the CPC's Central Committee for its 18th national congress, means putting the efforts of eco-civilization construction into all aspects and the entire process of economic construction, political construction, social construction, and cultural construction (Hu 2012: 39). In other words, these five policy fields constitute an integral whole of socialist modernization target and process.
10 The second-level indicator of "transfer contribution" appeared only in its 2011 and 2012 annual reports. Since then, the BFU evaluation index system has been using the other four indicators: ecological vitality (30%), environmental quality (25%), social development (15%), and coordination degree (30%), though some minor adjustments were also made in its 2014 report, such as the concrete name and measurement weight of third-level indicators.

Table 1: Comparative performance of Beijing's eco-civilization construction

2012	Score	2010	Score	2005	Score
Hainan	93.27	Beijing	105.63	Beijing	85.14
Beijing	92.10	Guangdong	104.17	Tianjin	83.52
Zhejiang	91.57	Zhejiang	100.43	Hainan	81.45
Liaoning	90.64	Tianjin	100.22	Fujian	81.37
Chongqing	90.11	Hainan	100.16	Guangdong	80.54
Jiangxi	88.60	Shanghai	97.12	Zhejiang	79.60
Tibet	88.53	Liaoning	95.28	Shanghai	77.61
Heilongjiang	88.17	Jiangsu	94.76	Jiangsu	77.46
Sichuan	87.05	Fujian	94.18	Jilin	75.89
Fujian	86.56	Chongqing	93.96	Liaoning	75.83

Resources: see Geng Yan (ed.), Report on China's Provincial Evaluation of Eco-civilization Construction (Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2010, 2012, and 2014).

Table 2: Concrete evaluation of results from Beijing's eco-civilization construction in 2012

Second-level indicators (total)	Score	Ranking	Level
Eco-vitality (41.40)	26.61	9	2
Environmental quality (34.50)	18.78	19	3
Social development (20.70)	20.05	1	1
Coordination degree (41.40)	26.66	6	1

Resources: Geng Yan (ed.), *Report on China's Provincial Evaluation of Eco-civilization Construction* (Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2014), p. 113.

Obviously, the eco-civilization construction of Beijing has a relatively high score or ranking in "social development" and "coordination degree", or "economic ecologicalization" and "social ecologicalization", and a relatively low score or ranking in "ecological vitality" and "environmental quality", or "ecological health" and "environmental livability". In other words, low environmental quality is the "short slab" of Beijing's eco-civilization construction, though it is definitely not the dirtiest city in the north part of China.[11] And an interesting question or "puzzle" from this fact is

11 For instance, according to the annual report of the MEP, Beijing was not one of the ten dirtiest large cities of China in 2015, while seven of the ten cities are members of the *Jing-Jin-Ji* region (Baoding, Xingtai, Hengshui, Tangshan, Handan, Shijiazhuang, and Langfang).

that although Beijing's industry has an almost ideal structure (0.6%:19.7%:79.7% in 2015), it did not provide much help for the air quality, and "the blue sky and white clouds" did appear once certain extreme administrative measures were taken.

A reasonable answer to this question, as the existing research has confirmed,[12] is the economic activities as well as their degree of ecologicalization in the neighboring provinces, especially the industrial structure of Hebei (11.7%:51.1%:37.2% in 2014) and Tianjin (1.3%:46.7%:52% in 2015), which are still very much industrialized economies. In other words, the relatively low environmental quality of Beijing is closely related with its neighbors.

That is exactly why the national strategy of *Jing-Jin-Ji* integration or coordinated development was formally initiated on April 30, 2015, with the approval of an official policy document by the State Council. The major theme of this strategy is to disperse the "non-capital functions" of Beijing into its outskirts and neighboring provinces, and environmental protection cooperation is listed as the third key policy area of priority – the other two areas also have a strong implication of environmental protection.

The practices of eco-civilization construction at Miyun, Yanqing, and Tang County

One of the major lessons or wisdoms which can be learnt from the analysis above is that an appropriate approach to promoting eco-civilization construction is to introduce a regional integration or "external" perspective. For Beijing itself, the following two points have crucial importance: the first one is to continue to take *Jing-Jin-Ji* as a regional ecological-environmental unity (as an integral part of it), and the other is to further its economic-social contributions to the whole region (as a provider for regional good). This implies that Beijing could not continue to take Hebei only as a location for providing an unlimited or free ecosystem service or natural resources, or consider it only as an output or transfer target for those backward economic capacities. Because it is already very clear that the low standard of ecological-environmental protection and the low level of economic-social development in its neighbors, like Hebei, is also both part of its own problems and a solution to those problems (Guo 2016; Wang H. 2015). Conceivably, practicing such a not-too-much altruist ecological wisdom will face lots of ideational and institutional obstacles in reality, and the primary breakthroughs most possibly occur in the various eco-civilization demonstration areas. Based upon this assumption, with the support of

12 How much responsibility the neighbors of Beijing should take for its poor air quality is quite a sensitive issue, but according to an official from the Beijing Bureau for Environmental Protection on April 17, 2014, of the PM2.5 resources, about 28%–36% comes from surrounding provinces like Hebei. A research report by the Chinese Academy of Science issued in late 2013 also recognized the substantial contribution from the neighboring regions to air pollution in Beijing. See Xinhua Net: www.xinhuanet.com, December 30, 2013.

the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Beijing and the Beijing Social Science Research Fund, our research group conducted three field studies on eco-civilization construction in Miyun, Yanqing, and Tang County, all of which belong to the greater Beijing area or the region of *Jing-Jin-Ji,* between September 2015 and July 2016. The following is a brief report of our empirical findings.

Miyun

Miyun, located in the northeast of Beijing, is now one of the 16 municipal districts. Its major features in terms of physical geography can be summarized as "eight mountains, one water and one field" *(bashan yishui yifentian).* Miyun Reservoir, built in 1960 and the main water source of Beijing, is the principal symbol. Largely because of this, the economic-social development of Miyun is relatively slow. In 2014, its total population was 478,000, GDP per capita stood at 44,419 Yuan (about US$7,231) – slightly higher than one third of the Beijing average – and the industrial structure was 7.6%:47.1%:45.3%. As a result, Miyun only changed its identity from "county" to "district" in 2015.

Given its favorable ecological environment, Miyun initiated its work on a national demonstration of "eco-county" as early as 2005 and of "eco-civilization construction" in 2008 under the guidance of the MEP, focusing on the protection of the water quality of the Miyun Reservoir as well as its surrounding ecological environment. In July 2013 and June 2014, it was also listed as one of the demonstration zones by the Ministry of Water Resources (MWR) and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

To revitalize the local economy, the Miyun government has recently adopted a strategy of combining the development of urban modern agriculture, the environmentally friendly equipment manufacturing industry (in collaboration w*ith Zhonguancun,* China's so-called "Silicon Valley", located in the downtown area of Beijing), the leisure tourism industry, and the headquarters economy (Zhou 2016; Jiang 2014; Liu F. 2009). An illuminating example in this respect is the "*Gubei* Water Town" project with an investment of 4.5 billion Yuan to better utilize the favorable ecological environment and historical cultural resource in that area (the *Simatai* Great Wall, for instance). "*Gubei* Water Town" started operating in October 2014, and has brought hundreds of employment opportunities to the local villages/people.

There is indeed some observable progress being made in eco-civilization construction in terms of a more balanced urban-county and center-periphery relation. For example, Miyun is now becoming a much more attractive part of Beijing for leisure, work, and residency.[13] However, one can easily find that achievements in this regard are largely realized within or restricted to the boundary of Miyun District. In other words, such

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13 It is quite a normal phenomenon that too many citizens living in the downtown area drive to Miyun on the weekends and, as a result, it is quite difficult to find a room in the village hotels.

an internal rebalancing or relation reconstruction are mainly undertaken through the main function zoning and administrative coordination of the Beijing Municipal Government. A good example here is that, according to a municipal policy document, since 2014 the Beijing Government has been annually allocating a special fund of 24 million Yuan to support its own 11 towns and 164 villages in the upstream area around the Miyun Reservoir to develop ecological agriculture and subsidize sewage disposal, but this policy does not cover or even consider the other upstream towns and villages of Hebei Province.[14]

Yanqing

Yanqing, located to the northwest of Beijing, is also one of the 16 municipal districts. Its major features in terms of physical geography are quite similar to those of Miyun: 73% of the total area are mountains. Thus, Yanqing has a wealth of ecological and tourism resources – the *Badaling* Great Wall is the most famous, but its economic and social development is even more "underdeveloped" than Miyun. In 2014, its total population was 316,000 and its GDP per capita was 31,584 Yuan (about US$5,144) – less than one third of the Beijing average, though it apparently has an ideal industrial structure: 9.7%:27.7%:62.6%. As a result, Yanqing could only change its identity – together with Miyun – from "county" to "district" in 2015.

Like Miyun, as the "back garden" of Beijing, Yanqing joined the national demonstration of "eco-county" as early as 2000 and "eco-civilization construction" in 2009 under the guidance of the MEP, focusing on water conservation, ecological tourism, and sightseeing and leisure agriculture. In October 2014, it was approved by the NDRC as the first round of a national eco-civilization pioneering zone.

In recent years, the local government of Yanqing has made great efforts to create a new pattern of administrative institutions and mechanisms in line with the requirements of eco-civilization construction, promoting pollution prevention and control, and environmental improvement based on a broader public participation, and vigorously developing the ecological agriculture and ecological economy (Dong 2016; Liu X. 2016). For instance, Yanqing set up the first professional tribunal for environmental protection of Beijing in 2010. In addition, by 2014, about one third of the total rural laborers there are employed in the ecological industry sector.

Following the further implementation of national and municipal strategies for promoting eco-civilization construction, Yanqing, as a pioneer in this regard, will surely have an even larger space for "green return" or "green growth". It is conceivable that to

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14 Of course, this situation is now changing very quickly. A local official only recognized the necessity of conducting a unified supervision and protection of the entire upstream area of Miyun Reservoir when I raised this issue with him there on September 10, 2015. Less than one year later, at another discussion at Yanqing on June 29, 2016, the same official told our research group that they are already trying to set up a coordinating mechanism for ecological-environmental protection with the neighboring counties.

maintain and improve its good performance in ecological-environmental indicators, Yanqing will receive broader and stronger institutional and resource support, and, accordingly, all the efforts and achievements in ecological-environmental protection and nurturing will be more effectively translated into "green benefits" for local people. In this sense, new development targets raised by the local government of Yanqing, such as building a world-standard eco-civilization demonstration area, is not only correct in terms of environmental policy, but also represents a practical approach of "green catch-up" for the regions which are very rich in ecological-environmental resources but less developed in traditional industries.[15]

A relevant question for the writing of this article is to what extent can the opportunities predicted above for Yanqing's eco-civilization construction or green development become a regional "benefit", crossing administrative boundaries. A proper example here, among others, is the 2022 Winter Olympics which will be co-hosted by Yanqing (Beijing) and Zhangjiakou (Hebei Province). From the author's point of view, this event offers a great opportunity for Yanqing (Beijing) as well as its major partner Zhangjiakou (Hebei) to comprehensively implement the national strategy of *Jing-Jin-Ji* regional integration or coordinated development – not just for achieving a larger regional economy in the traditional sense, but also for developing a real regional eco-civilization, prioritizing better ecological-environmental protection and a more inclusive or just regional economy (Zha 2016).

Tang County
In stark contrast to the cases of Miyun and Yanqing discussed above, Tang County, an administrative part of Baoding City, Hebei Province, is located 200 kilometers southwest of Beijing. Though with similar features in terms of physical geography – "seven mountains, one water and two fields" *(qishan yishui liangtian)* – and natural resources in abundance, Tang County is one of 39 "national poverty counties" in Hebei Province. In 2014, Tang County's total population was 510,000, the GDP per capita was only 13,059 Yuan, and its industrial structure was 26.9%:43.2%:29.9%. This general situation constitutes the main basis or context of conducting and/or promoting eco-civilization construction there, and unsurprisingly, from the outside, the "*Weiming* Commune" project plays a pivotal role.

"*Weiming* Commune" is a comprehensive development project financed by a Peking University-based corporation and aimed at combining the various goals of biological industry management, rural poverty alleviation, *Jing-Jin-Ji* coordinated

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15 It is necessary to point out that, at least from what we have found from our field study on June 29, 2016, at Yanqing, their ecological-environmental advantages cannot be in any sense overestimated. For instance, there is a quite serious water quality deterioration problem in *Xiadu* Park at the center of Yanqing District because of the continuous reduction of river water flowing into it, and due to a reduction of upstream river water flowing into it, Miyun Reservoir is also facing a problem of self-purification capacity decline.

development, and "beautiful village construction" *(meili xiangcun jianshe)* through the collaboration between large companies, local governments, and the neighboring villages or communities. By doing so, accompanied by the development of a modern biological industry park, the "*Weiming* Commune" composed of the 14 surrounding villages will gradually build into a "socialist new village" or "communist commune" characterized by "co-construction, co-management and sharing" *(gongjian gongguan gongxiang)* (Pan 2016; PKU Institute 2015).

Among this axis of cooperation, *Weiming* Corporate is the first major investor (fundraiser) to develop the "*Gubei* biological economy demonstration zone", and will then be authorized to manage the industrial development (3+X)[16] and regional planning for an entire area along the *Tongtianhe* River (including 14 villages). The local governments of Tang County and Baoding City are responsible for dealing with all the issues occurring in the above process and the daily management of the "Commune". All the residents will enjoy various rights or entitlements such as full employment, a liveable environment, a fair income guarantee, and welfare benefits, and also have certain duties or obligations as commune members.

Undoubtedly, if this project is fully implemented, it will bring about some dramatic changes – external investment not only aims at contributing to local poverty alleviation and economic development, but also tries to create a community of interests or "common destiny" in order to introduce certain revolutionary institutional innovations. Of course, for an experiment initiated only in late 2015, it is too early to draw any definite conclusions.[17]

From the perspective of a communist commune,[18] there are many questions to be further discussed: institutionalized protection of the peasants' entitlements in circulating their lands and thereafter (other than a more explicit guarantee for their economic and social benefits, also including a clearer description regarding how they participate in the distribution of the commune's future economic wealth); full implementation of the rural comprehensive renovation or "beautiful village construction" plan (including all the promised or necessary aspects such as planning, resources, projects, and management), a further clarification of the commune's future institutional framework (aiming at constructing a more just and democratic organizational

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16 According to its overall plan, industrial development of the "*Weiming* Commune" will focus on the three fields of biological medicine planting and processing, organic agriculture, and eco-tourism – a quite environmentally friendly industrial structure.

17 I fully agree with Prof. Christoph Görg, who visited the site on October 18–19, 2016, saying that it is a long chain from the good-will plan of the "*Weiming* Commune" to its full realization in the years to come.

18 As Dr. Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro has reminded me (2016), various production and consumption co-operatives such as the world-renowned Mondragon Co-operatives system in Spain, and Huaxi Village of Jiangyin City, Jiangsu Province, and Nanshan Village of Yantai City, Shandong Province, in China, which were developed after the introduction of the reform and openness policy in the late 1970s, cannot be inappropriately labelled as the communist practice or experiment because all of them do not attempt to transcend, or even challenge, the capitalist rule and logic for production, competition, and expansion.

framework among investors, original commune members, and factory workers), etc.[19] All these issues cannot be settled overnight, but recognizing the right direction clearly is a first step to keeping the "*Weiming* Commune" moving forward.

A comparative analysis and policy suggestions

As the descriptive analysis above has shown, after some successive efforts over the past decade, eco-civilization construction in the Miyun and Yanqing districts of Beijing are, to a large extent, at a stage of "normality" (Wang W. 2015), concentrating on a stricter protection of the favorable ecological conditions/heritages while attempting a more ecologically-rational and economically-efficient utilization of them as natural resources (for a "win-win" ideal). Considering a more favorable social-political environment for promoting eco-civilization construction, both nationally and locally, especially the national strategy of *Jing-Jin-Ji* coordinated development, these areas will surely achieve more progress in aspects such as local institutional and mechanism innovation in the near future. Regrettably, however, there is little evidence showing that Miyun and/or Yanqing are playing a model or leading role for their cross-boundary neighbors. Some rare positive signs in this regard are that regional/national development strategies and the mobility need of capital (as in the case of Tang County) act as the "first impulse", catalyzing a regional or external dimension of eco-civilization thinking and practice.

A policy initiative from this empirical finding is that, to promote a more comprehensive or healthier practice of eco-civilization construction, the Beijing Municipal Government needs to take stronger consideration of the regional or external dimension in its policy-making for the period of the "Thirteenth five-year plan" and thereafter. Concretely speaking, the following four points are crucial. Firstly, a combination of "internal potential *(neibu waqian)*" and "external actuation *(waibu cudong)*" should be further enhanced until it becomes the basic strategy for the eco-civilization construction of Beijing in order to solve the main ecological and environmental problems which affect the reputation of capital and citizens' quality of life while introducing certain substantial institutional reform measures for a green transformation in the fields of economy, society, and culture. On the one hand, as the relatively low ranking of "ecological vitality" and "environmental quality" indicates, there is still quite a large space for the greening of the economy, society and culture in Beijing. In any case, though a very high percentage of Beijing's local economy is in the service industry, it is still far from being a real ecological economy. On the other, the great gap or negative relevance between "social development" and "coordination degree"

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19 Our research group took a two-day field study on this project on January 11–12, 2016, and had a talk with the residents of *Yujiazhai* village. My impression is that they generally hold a supportive attitude toward this project, but do not know much about their own economic-social rights requirements as well as what this project has agreed or promised them.

and "ecological vitality" and "environmental quality" also shows a further large-scale improvement of Beijing's ecological-environmental quality does not only depend on their own social-economic policy efforts. What Beijing itself can do is consider and/or reshape its industrial structure from a much larger or regional perspective, or, in other words, the relationship between human society and nature.

Secondly, the key point of "internal potential" is to strictly follow an up-to-date version of the eco-modernization principle and approach. Capable governments, innovative technology, and a mature market mechanism are the indispensable elements of a unitary institutional framework for carrying out an eco-modernization strategy (Huan 2015; Jänicke and Jacob 2007). This implies that even the implementation of such a moderate strategy also needs some accompanying social-ecological transformation measures as well as a popular Green consensus. As far as the Beijing case is concerned, a key issue is to reconsider and redesign the structure of social-economic and social-ecological relations between the downtown areas and the outskirts, rather than only scrutinizing the capital or non-capital functions, as well as reexamining what should be dispersed into the outskirts or other provinces. In my opinion, only efforts and changes in this regard can create the general conditions which local eco-civilization construction demonstration areas like Miyun and Yanqing require to make some fundamental institutional innovations.[20]

Third, the key point of "external actuation" is to fully utilize the opportunity of the *Jing-Jin-Ji* coordinated development strategy, experimenting with various thinking and practices in line with the principles of "Five-in-one", "green development, circular development, and low-carbon development" and "greening of the ways of production, consumption, and thinking" within the trans- or cross-provincial space, and, accordingly, promoting or practicing eco-civilization construction will more often than not appear to be a kind of consideration or decision-making focusing on "space" rather than the "element" of it. This implies that Beijing will have a more favorable social-economic environment or competitive advantage to realize a partial "greening" of itself through a more convenient transfer of its dirty industries into the neighboring areas, on the one hand. On the other, it will face an ever-increasing external pressure for social justice and environmental compensation, also from its neighbors, to pay more for the social-ecological benefits which were just taken for granted before. A big challenge or opportunity for Beijing is thus to turn the "external pressure" into an "external push".

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20 For instance, as national demonstration areas for eco-civilization construction, there is a very different structure of governance in Miyun and Yanqing. For the former, the core of it is a relatively formal office for eco-civilization (its official name is the "Research Centre for Ecological Construction and Development"), while, for the latter, it is a Leading Group Office affiliated with the local bureau for environmental protection. And, conceivably, both of them are facing numerous difficulties in coordinating the governmental sectors and achieving policy goals.

Fourth, Beijing needs to more vigorously promote different kinds of demonstration zones as the "testing ground" for the institutional innovation of eco-civilization construction. The reason why Miyun and Yanqing were selected as the national demonstration areas for eco-civilization construction is, to a large extent, their position as the "back garden" of Beijing. And they have indeed achieved quite a lot in experimenting with the institutional, system and mechanism innovations in line with eco-civilization in policy fields such as water source protection and environmental compensation for key ecological function areas. Within a new context of implementing the national strategy of *Jing-Jin-Ji* regional integration, however, minor attempts such as those in Miyun and Yanqing are too small to make sense, and the same is also true of the recently approved "*Jing-Jin-Ji* Co-construction Area" which is composed of Pinggu (Beijing), Ji County (Tianjin), and Langfang (Hebei). Instead, a new and much larger experiment zone for eco-civilization, which covers the entire area of *Jing-Jin-Ji,* may be a more ambitious/effective choice.

Maris dela Cruz

PEOPLE FIRST: A LIFE OF DIGNITY FOR ALL AND A SOCIAL ASEAN[21]

Celebrating its 50-year anniversary in 2017, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has evolved from a cooperation comprising five countries in Southeast Asia with the aim of promoting peace and stability in the region into what many consider a successful intergovernmental organization in Asia. With ten member states and a total population of 622 million, the regional bloc has tried to strengthen integration by launching the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. However, this regional integration continues to lack a social dimension.

Social dimension is about people – their quality of life, needs and rights, and their participation in decisions and processes affecting their lives. There are indications of unabated poverty and inequality in the region despite integration and even touted economic growth averaging 5 per cent annually. Inequality in ASEAN has remained high, with a Gini coefficient of 42, where Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia's rates ranged from 46 to 48. ASEAN's disadvantaged population suffer most from hardships – in health, education, gender disparities in labor markets, and access to services such as water, sanitation, and electricity. Also, the percentage of those living in extreme poverty (earning less than US$1.51 a day) remains high – it is above 30 per cent in Laos, above 25 per cent in Indonesia and the Philippines, and above 20 per cent in Cambodia and Vietnam.[22] In 2017, Southeast Asia was the sixth-

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21 By Maris dela Cruz, co-convener of the Network for Transformative Social Protection in Asia and of the DIGNIDAD movement in the Philippines. She is also the contact point for the Working Group on Social ASEAN.

22 Kris Hartley, commentary: inequality looms beneath the shiny façade of Southeast Asia's growth, April 27, 2017, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/commentary-inequality-looms-beneath-the-shiny-facade-of-8743726

biggest economy;[23] it had the third-largest labor force in the world,[24] but more than half of this work force are in precarious jobs with wages insufficient to guarantee a decent life.

Marginalization, deprivation, and the social exclusion of millions of people in the region have persisted while governments have embraced neoliberalism or capitalism, models that cause poverty and inequality. Complicit with corporations, governments are implementing free market policies such as trade liberalization, privatization, and the deregulation of services and resources, as well as other measures to reduce, if not remove, government subsidies for public services. The market allows the private sector, particularly big businesses, to dictate the prices, and even the rules, to their benefit.

Sadly, social protection measures that should have helped prevent individuals from falling into poverty or address inequalities have remained inadequate. The average social protection expenditure in the region does not even amount to half of the 6 per cent of GDP (gross domestic product) recommended by the United Nations International Labor Organization in their social protection floor initiative. Only Thailand, the country in the region with the highest social protection expenditure, has a comprehensive social protection system that meets the ILO's minimum social security standards. In addition, people's participation in realizing adequate social protection for themselves is further threatened due to increasing authoritarianism in the region. Moreover, the poverty situation continues to be aggravated by climate change as Southeast Asia is most vulnerable to the worst effects of global warming – affecting people's livelihoods, food, and shelter – according to a 2015 study by Global Risk Insights.[25]

People's movements in Southeast Asia have thus struggled not only for jobs, social services, and social protection, but also to expose the negative effects of neoliberalism – the ideology and policy model at the root of these economic, social, and ecological tragedies. The movements are calling for system change towards a more people-centered, just, and ecologically sustainable development and a life of dignity for all.

Transforming lives and societies
The Network for Transformative Social Protection (NTSP), composed of multi-sectoral and issue-based people's formations and NGOs in Asia (especially in Southeast Asia), is, together with other social movements, aspiring for transformative change. It advances a campaign for a life of dignity for all that promotes the fulfilment of economic and social rights and the realization of social justice – with the redistribution of countries' income, wealth, and resources, as well as equal access and opportunities.

23 https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/05/asean-at-50-what-does-the-future-hold-for-the-region
24 https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/05/what-is-asean-explainer/
25 Laura Southgate, "This part of the world is going to see the biggest impact from global warming," Global Risk Insights, December 1, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/southeast-asia-impacted-most-by-global-warming-2015-12?pundits_only=0&get_all_comments=1&no_reply_filter=1

The campaign is a platform that can mobilize diverse people's movements and address inequalities and injustice, transform people's lives and societies, and advance people-centered and sustainable transformative development alternatives.

The NTSP believes that a universal, comprehensive, and transformative social protection system is a tool to achieving a life of dignity throughout one's life cycle, as well as socio-ecological transformation by promoting ecologically sustainable programs. It consists of work and livelihood, essential public services, food, and social security or adequate income support – demands that meet the rights and needs of workers, women, older people, children, persons with disabilities, and disaster survivors, among others.

The campaign is transformative as it addresses the structural causes of poverty, including the unequal power relations between and among social classes: it calls for industrial, economic, fiscal, political, agrarian, and industrial policy reforms; asserts people's involvement in the decision-making processes; and exacts accountability from the state. Furthermore, recognizing that the earth is in a critical condition, with its resources rapidly dwindling, the campaign integrates climate resilience/adaptation and mitigation into the programs it pursues, such as green or climate jobs, as part of work guarantee programs. Examples of green jobs include cleaning up air and water sources; waste reduction, reuse, and recycling; protection and rehabilitation of forests and coastal resources; generation of energy from renewable sources; and construction of energy efficient and climate-resilient socialized housing.

Some examples of socio-ecological transformation projects
Winning some struggles or specific campaigns could contribute to broadening and strengthening the movement as incremental gains could sustain the struggle with strategic objectives such as system change – that involves overhauling not only the social and political order, but also policies and values towards an ecologically sustainable society.

The *"90 Days for Mums – 1 Million Signature Campaign"* in Malaysia. This campaign aimed to increase the number of days of paid maternity leave from 60 to 90, amending the country's Employment Act of 1995. Surprisingly, while Malaysia is the third-richest country in Southeast Asia, social protection is still very much a concern of its workers. The campaign, started as a workers' initiative to realize their social and economic entitlements, later proved to have an ecological transformation impact as well. Inspired by the NTSP founding meeting in Manila in 2009, which highlighted the limited social protection framework and gaps in the region, the National Union of Bank Employees (NUBE) initiated this campaign from March to December 2010. NUBE argued that the entitlement for paid maternity leave is not a benefit, but a right of all female workers. Its leadership first united the bank union's entire membership in Malaysia and reached out to other trade unions, especially the Malaysian Trade Union Council, which readily supported the initiative. Later, it gathered the support

of stakeholders such as women, health organizations, doctors, opinion makers, and legislators. In arguing for this policy change, NUBE invoked the ILO Convention 183, an international instrument on Maternity Protection, stating a 14-week paid maternity leave, and cited other ASEAN countries with smaller economies that have 90 days paid maternity leave. At the end of the campaign, HSBC, Citibank, Malaysia Berhad, and Commerce International Merchant Bankers Berhad adopted a 90-day paid maternity leave policy. Two Malaysian states later agreed to implement this policy for public employees, while some private companies offered this to attract workers. It was noted in one report that political parties later jumped on board when they found out others were joining.

This initiative has contributed to making women more secure in their jobs while they look after themselves as well as ensure their child's health and well-being during pregnancy and after birth; they gained confidence in their workplace and in taking actions to improve their lives. This initiative has also had unintended ecological benefits, although they were not highlighted as much as claimed gains focused more on the rights and health of mother and child. For example, with longer paid maternity leave, a mother can breastfeed more, thus avoiding resource waste and pollution from the consumption of formula milk that requires packaging and, subsequently, disposal.

The campaign for a life of dignity for all in the Philippines by Kampanya para sa Makataong Pamumuhay (KAMP). This was a comprehensive campaign aimed at addressing economic, social, and ecological crises, as well as uneven power relationships or power imbalances in the country. When launched in 2010, the campaign envisaged bringing together democratic left groups for system change under a movement that is a convergence of groups and struggles on social, economic, and ecological justice challenging neoliberalism and enabling people to gain or increase political power in the process.

Through universal, comprehensive, and transformative social protection programs, the campaign for a life of dignity for all also aspired to expose neoliberal policies, particularly the privatization and deregulation of public services, and to present alternatives. It strived to promote an alternative model that builds on the collaboration of public and social enterprise, fiscal and budget reforms to guarantee people's entitlement to social services, food, and social security, as well as industrial and labor policies to guarantee decent work for all.

Through awareness-raising activities, public actions, and lobbying, KAMP pursued key demands, particularly in-city and on-site humane housing, as well as universal healthcare and decent work or an employment guarantee program (including climate jobs) which could also contribute to socio-ecological transformation. Led by its member from the urban poor sector – Kilos Maralita (Movement of the Poor) – KAMP began engaging government institutions in 2010 on a People's Proposal for in-city and on-site humane housing for the poor. The People's Proposal not only included land identification, design, and financing, but also the tapping of human resources from

informal settler beneficiaries for the construction. Integrated in the design were energy efficiency, fostering greater solidarity through community employment, livelihood programs, and efficient resource consumption and management by promoting waste reduction, reuse, and recycling. The struggle saw concrete results in June 2015 when more than 3,000 housing units were built following the government-approved People's Proposal in 2012. Two other proposals also approved by the government were nearing completion in 2017. Since 2015, the urban poor organizations have called on the government to adopt the people's proposal approach throughout the country. They demanded the inclusion of informal settler families (ISFs) in danger zones, in private and public lands (including those owned by national government agencies, government corporations, and local government units); families made homeless following a disaster; and any group of homeless citizens who are able to present their housing plans.

With some successes, the urban poor network has expanded – as more housing cooperatives were formed – and gained political capital that proved beneficial in the pursuit of other demands such as employment, healthcare, water, electricity, and pensions for older persons.

In February 2016, KAMP further broadened as it transformed into a national campaign movement called Buhay na may Dignidad para sa Lahat (Life of Dignity for All) or DIGNIDAD. A "coalition of coalitions", DIGNIDAD, with at least 32 movement-based organizations, is a lone broad multi-sectoral network spearheading a campaign on universal, comprehensive, and transformative social protection in the Philippines that has the potential to widely mobilize people and consolidate more groups on a social protection agenda that is legislated, institutionalized, and universalized. There are eight urgent demands on the agenda. These are: decent work and livelihood; free and quality healthcare; safe and affordable housing; free education up to the tertiary level; adequate, safe, and affordable food; guaranteed access to safe water and electricity; safe and reliable public transport; and living pensions for all senior citizens, as well as income support for persons with disabilities, the unemployed, and disaster survivors.

This comprehensive social protection program not only enhances human potential and enables everyone to have greater access to, and increased opportunities for, a better life, it also addresses economic, ecological, and governance issues to realize the rights of people and make this quality of life sustainable. The comprehensive campaign pushes for structural reforms such as a reversal of the privatization of essential services, progressive taxation, participatory budgeting, a repeal of the law on automatic debt servicing, and rechanneling of public funds for social services, pensions, and climate and disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures, as well as genuine land reform, among others.[26]

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26   Buhay na May Dignidad para sa Lahat (DIGNIDAD) agenda paper June 2016.

An alternative framework for transformative social protection in Indonesia. This was an awareness-raising initiative by NTSP networks in Indonesia to infuse more strategic perspective into the discourse on social protection in their country. Indonesia is home to 261 million people. It is the largest country with the highest number of informal workers in Southeast Asia. Between 2011 and 2013, more Indonesians increasingly became aware of social security at the height of public actions for reforms of the social security system in the country. The campaign paved the way for tactical unity among trade unions, civil society, and parliamentarians to push for social security reforms.

Through the Indonesian Working Group on Transformative Social Protection, the NTSP attempted to articulate a more progressive standpoint on the importance of the campaign on social protection. The Working Group, whose formation was facilitated by the NTSP with the hope of building a movement for transformative social protection in Indonesia, initially consisted of the Working People's Party, the Inkrispena research institute, and trade and peasant unions. These groups engaged trade unions, peasants, other informal workers, and faculty members in public forums and discussions, as well as government officials in dialogues. These discussions, aimed at deepening the discourse on social protection in 2011 and 2012, were deemed timely interventions in the debate over the enactment and implementation of national healthcare and social security insurance schemes at that time.

The alternative framework for transformative social protection that the Working Group is promoting asserts the state role in guaranteeing social protection to all Indonesians with the aim of preventing them from falling into poverty and rehabilitating those who have already fallen through the cracks because of economic crisis and the impact of neoliberal policies that exploit human and natural resources. It brought to the debate a notion that social protection schemes must be designed according to the needs of the working people and should take a life-cycle approach. At the same time, it criticized the government's social security system, which is formulated in a "top-down" approach, putting more emphasis on the economic and political interests of the elites and authorities – that is economic growth that benefits the owners of capital – and not on social justice for working people. Instead, it offers an understanding that is oriented towards transforming the lives of working people – to realize their full human potential free from political oppression and the economic-political control of the elites. For the Indonesian Working Group, this transformative social protection aims to: (1) serve as a political tool to dismantle economic and political structures that oppress working people, (2) ensure the economic and political struggle of the working masses for equality in economic and political power, (3) achieve a prosperous life and true justice for the working masses.[27]

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27   Anwar "Sastro" Ma'ruf, "Promoting Transformative Social Protection in Indonesia", July 2016. Confederation of Indonesia Peoples Movement (KPRI)

Asserting the Agenda for a Social ASEAN in the context of ASEAN economic integration. Many progressive civil society groups in Southeast Asia have regarded social protection as a minor issue before. This could be due to more popular notions on social protection as mere social safety nets or charity programs, targeting mostly the marginalized groups, particularly older people, children, persons with disabilities, and the poorest of the poor. Aware of this limited and negative perception, the NTSP proactively promoted the framework of universal, comprehensive, and social protection in broader civil society forums, especially at the regional level (such as the ASEAN People's Forum since 2009) and in other discussions and statements made by regional and interregional civil society addressed to the governments. The Network highlighted social protection as a human right that should be universal for all. As an economic and social right, social protection means the entitlement to jobs and livelihoods, social services (especially healthcare), food, and social security, particularly pensions.

In 2013, there was an opportunity to include this progressive framework on social protection in the first ASEAN document on the issue. Members of the NTSP engaged ASEAN officials in the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection before its adoption that year. Network members sent comments on the draft Declaration through their country's official representative to the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) that was in charge of finalizing the Declaration. The NTSP highlighted human rights, social justice, solidarity, and a life of dignity in the context of multiple crises, including climate disasters, in the region. Those involved in drafting the position paper were KAMP and the Philippine Alliance for Human Rights Advocates from the Philippines; HelpAge, Disabled Peoples International, and the People Empowerment Foundation from Thailand; Inkrispena in Indonesia; Action Aid in Vietnam; and Monitoring Sustainability of Globalization in Malaysia. NTSP members shared the position paper with the Secretary of Social Welfare of the Philippines, the Assistant Minister of the Social Welfare Ministry in Thailand, and at the SOMSWD (Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development) preparatory meeting through Disabled People's International Asia-Pacific and HelpAge International-Asia.

Generally, trade unions and civil society have been advancing respective social protection demands separately. But as the number of workers in the informal economy and of other marginalized groups demanding decent jobs with a living wage or an adequate income and social security increase, both civil society and trade unions realized the urgency to link up campaigns. Trade unions have recognized their declining membership as members were laid off or became contractual workers (temporarily employed) due to the economic crisis or labor flexibilization. A number of former trade union members who lost their jobs became workers in the informal economy and joined civil society formations or networks such as the urban poor organization, or water or housing cooperatives, or the home-based workers association. Both civil

society and trade unions, as well as other sectors like migrants, recognize that the problems or challenges they face have some common causes such as the neoliberal programs widely implemented in the region and globally.

In 2014, trade union networks, civil society groups, and a network of parliamentarians in Southeast Asia started discussing the convergence of campaigns in ASEAN and later called the body a Working Group on Social ASEAN as they worked towards drafting the Agenda for a Social ASEAN. The Agenda that was finalized in 2015 brought together not only the regional formations (trade unions, civil society including disadvantaged groups, parliamentarians, migrants), as well as the demands or recommendations of their respective constituencies. The Agenda for a Social ASEAN is a consolidation of people's aspirations in the region, adopted in various regional forums and interregional forums in recent years. The Working Group on Social ASEAN includes the Network for Transformative Social Protection, the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, the ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council, the ASEAN Trade Union Council, the Migrant Forum in Asia, Monitoring Sustainability of Globalization, the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, and the Trade Union Rights Centre, in cooperation with the Asia-Europe People's Forum.

Joblessness, poverty-level income, precarious working conditions, hunger, and lack of access to basic services such as healthcare, education, water, electricity, housing, and social security as well as gender inequality and democratic deficit are among the oppressive conditions in the region that the Agenda for a Social ASEAN aims to address. The people's networks recognize that the ASEAN Economic Community is not likely to address such woes. Poverty and inequalities could even worsen because the regional economic integration further institutionalizes the neoliberal policies privatizing public services, and liberalizing trade and investments in the region. The AEC envisions a single production base and market characterized by the free flow of capital, goods, services, and skills or human resources – which pose increased threats to people's survival and quality of life.

The Agenda for a Social ASEAN asserts that the needs and rights of people be prioritized in regional integration. It obliges governments in ASEAN to become more inclusive and accountable and to work for the fulfilment of the people's rights. The Agenda promotes social justice, environmentally sustainable development, gender equality, and participatory democracy. It pursues the ratification and implementation of ILO core labor standards to create the conditions to achieve decent work. Finally, it enables a life of dignity for all through guaranteed access to essential services, food, and social protection. The Agenda presents the need for an alternative development paradigm that addresses the structural causes of poverty and inequality, emphasizes the pursuit of full development of human potential based on equality, solidarity, and sustainability, and observes democratic and participatory processes.

The transformative aspect of the campaign is increasing the political base and power of the people as they advance the agenda together. They also realize the interlinkages

of their issues and the need to collectively challenge common enemies, such as neoliberalism and authoritarianism, that cause their suffering as well as environmental destruction. Under a campaign for Social ASEAN, sectoral issues and formations converge to advance a common Agenda that asserts a social dimension in regional integration and challenges processes and policies that further erode people's rights, widens inequality, and wrecks the environment. For instance, the trade union formations in the region such as ASETUC and the ATUC have long been raising the decent work agenda at the national level as well as at the regional level until they adopted an ASEAN Charter that promotes the Decent Work Agenda in 2005. Similarly, migrant networks, such as the Migrants Forum in Asia, have consistently raised the issues of migrant workers in the region, especially for domestic workers and human trafficking, and their social protection needs. Other formations representing vulnerable groups that have been actively engaging the ASEAN bodies separately are HelpAge International, the Disabled People's International, and the Women and Children's networks.

The Agenda for a Social ASEAN is a lobby document for engaging ASEAN leaders and policymakers as well as businesses, opinion-makers and development partners in the ASEAN countries. It calls on all ASEAN governments, socially responsible employers, trade unions, NGOs, and grassroots organizations to respect, promote, and realize the five core demands of the Agenda. These are to institute democratic, participatory processes at national and regional levels; ensure gender equality and protect vulnerable and disadvantaged groups; realize access to essential social services, especially universal healthcare, and social protection for all; fulfill the right to food and productive resources; and adopt all ILO core labor standards.[28] Under these demands, various groups work together and they become politically stronger in addressing inequality, challenging FTAs and neoliberalism, and in advancing a just and ecologically sustainable society with people-centered processes, the social and economic empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups, people's access to productive resources, and guaranteed essential services and social protection for all.

Linking up with regional and international sectoral and issue-based networks and campaigns

The Asia-Europe civil society discourse on social protection has developed in various biennial Asia-Europe People's Forums: from social protection as a response to the crisis, tackling the ILO's decent work agenda and social security, particularly pensions for the elderly, to social protection as a transformative project tackling unequal power relations and integrating the commons framework. The notion of universal and comprehensive social protection also introduced work, essential services (not only healthcare), social security, and adequate income guarantees and not only pensions

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28   Agenda for a Social ASEAN, published in 2016.

for the elderly (but also allowances for persons with disabilities, the unemployed, and disaster survivors). Furthermore, it highlighted the need to go beyond the social protection floor and take up a commons framework in the social protection campaign. "The commons paradigm is central to an alternative system the campaigners are pushing for: a system that provides for the needs of individual and society, taking into account the regenerative capacities of the environment."[29]

Global phenomena, free trade agreements, and climate change create a greater imperative for the convergence of people's campaign movements in order to address their threats to earth and humanity more strategically. Contrary to avowed claims by governments and corporations that these FTAs will result in economic gains for the country and its people, these agreements, including the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (under negotiation among ASEAN member states and six countries), will only negatively affect people's income, access to essential services, and social protection.

The potential harms of FTAs are greater than the benefits perceived by govern-ments: people are made even more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as natural resources are further depleted and increased commercial or business activities continue to change the landscape and contribute to global warming. For instance, with the increased production of goods, there will also be increased demand for electricity to manufacture these goods. Believed to be cheaper and quicker, yet environmentally harmful, sources of energy such as coal are often the easier solution for governments. A number of infrastructure and realty projects in the Philippines were among the causes of blocked waterways that led to devastating flooding in Metro Manila in 2009. Lastly, with land and housing being commercialized, the poor without social protection are pushed to settle or live in danger zones (such as on riverbanks, lakeshores, under bridges, along shorelines, or in breakwaters) where they can erect temporary or improvised shelters made of scrap cartons, plyboard, sacks, or plastics.

The FTAs will lead to further commercialization of land, including agricultural lands and services such as housing, energy, and water linked to the environment. These FTAs could also legitimize exploitative labor practices in order to increase profits, such as labor contractualization wherein they can avoid paying social security and other entitlements to regular workers including a living wage, thus many workers are poor and vulnerable to economic and climate shocks. The impacts of climate change such as loss of livelihood and shelter, and food insecurity are worse without social protection programs that address or anticipate these. As many countries in Southeast Asia such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Cambodia are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, the NTSP endeavors to link the social protection campaign with programs aimed at achieving ecologically sustainable communities.

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29 Network for Transformative Social Protection, "An ASEAN People's Agenda of Transformative Social Protection for All: Towards addressing chronic poverty and unprecedented inequality" concept note, July 2015.

Examples include developing climate resilient projects tackling jobs (climate jobs), housing (climate-resilient housing), food (addressing food waste and subsidies for small farmers with the aim of securing safe food, especially for children), and energy (using renewable energy for island communities' access to energy).

Aside from trade and climate issues, other issues or campaign networks that the NTSP has tried to link up with to broaden support for universal and comprehensive social protection are groups addressing tax, international financial institutions, commons, and MDGs/sustainable development goals.

Conclusion

Even though social protection has been on the agenda of governments, civil society, the private sector, and development institutions, the discourse on framework, financing, and coverage continues to evolve. Governments promoting free market and greater private sector participation are concerned with the high budgetary impact on them and also the added costs for the businesses, while some left or progressive groups remain skeptical about campaigning for social protection and prefer a direct social justice campaign instead. On the other hand, grassroots organizations are managing to put in place some specific social protection programs. Interestingly, broader social movements recognize the importance of having concrete gains or presenting best practices, as well as having a dynamic national campaign. These are important elements in increasing political capital for greater struggles like system change addressing governance, neoliberal capitalism, and the climate crisis. The value added of the NTSP in the national and regional campaigns is its proactive promotion of the framework, agenda and the political aim of movement building and attempting to converge not only movements, but issues/demands as well. However, there are many challenges that the NTSP campaign has to address. For instance, the skepticism of some progressive forces, strong adherence of governments to neoliberalism, and the shrinking democratic spaces in this era of increasing authoritarianism in the region. The other challenge is developing studies to better articulate the proposed concrete programs and alternatives, and the linkages with bigger issues like free trade agreements, climate change, and sources of financing, to name but a few. A better, more in depth, and wider articulation of links between climate change and social protection are essential, thus the network has to reach out to more environmental groups and those addressing disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM).

Lam Thi Thu Suu and Liliane Danso-Dahmen

THE SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION DEBATE AND GRASSROOT DISCUSSIONS IN THE LIGHT OF HYDROPOWER DEVELOPMENT – A CASE STUDY FROM VIETNAM

Introduction to the socio-ecological transformation debate in Southeast Asia

The term "socio-ecological transformation" (SET) is not used by many political actors and it is rarely used in Southeast Asia. Equally, the meaning of this term is not well-known within political and academic as well as philosophical debates in the region.

However, in the face of severe global crises, i.e. economic, ecological, and social crises, by searching for alternatives to hegemonic economic and societal development models, the institution for leftist political education worldwide, Germany's Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, has opened a space for political dialogue and activities under the title of "SET" with the aim of exploring questions and answers regarding this issue – in full awareness of the fact that socio-ecological transformation is not a political program and/or a clearly defined analytical concept. It originally has its roots in transformation discourses, which, for leftist actors such as the RLS, became even more relevant after the 2008 financial crisis. This event triggered these actors' awareness of the fact that the hegemonic development model produces not only a collapse of the economic system but will also lead to the collapse of social and ecological systems.

Furthermore, global trends of increasing nationalism and authoritarianism as a result of the erosion of democratic and liberal concepts through the implementation of austerity policies in line with a capitalist logic puts the impetus on leftist actors worldwide to look for answers to crucial questions, and explore what would present an alternative approach to these developments and under which circumstances.

Initially, the concept of "sustainable development" was a very attractive approach as it promised something that had eluded previous generations: namely, that one could have economic growth – perpetual economic growth – combined with social justice and environmental stability. However, left-wing critics of this concept argued that the promises of sustainable development were, in essence, misleading as they created

an illusionary "win-win-win situation". In fact, the sustainable development concept subordinated social and ecological questions to the need for permanent economic growth, which is inherent to the capitalist mode of production. In this way, the sustainable development concept fails to tackle the root of the crises. Furthermore, in the economic sphere, the augmentation of sustainable development leads to "green growth" policies, leaving issues of social justice and fair (re-)distribution behind.

In the view of RLS Southeast Asia, this is where the rationale of discussions and activities concerning SET among political actors struggling to find alternatives becomes relevant as most countries in this particular region – regardless of whether they are based on so-called "liberal democratic" thinking or "socialist" ideology, or characterized by authoritarian military political systems – follow the economic growth paradigm, which simultaneously constitutes the heart of the rationale of the global success of neoliberal convictions.

Descriptively, the socio-ecological transformation approach views the neoliberal growth and development model not as a "solution to" but, in fact, as the "source of" the ecological and social crises, which affect the poorest in Southeast Asia the most.

Next to the hazardous effects of climate change, such as intensified typhoons as well as floods and droughts in the region, grassroot activists in Southeast Asia such as the "Network for Transformative Social Protection" point out that despite the booming economies in the region, "many people remain jobless and poor, living in hovels with barely any access to basic services like water or electricity, health care or education; and most of those with jobs are underpaid with hardly any social security and social protection. For many Member States, including the Mekong countries, economic growth did not cure poverty and instead brought misery and more inequality and vulnerability among the people."[30]

Of course, the current and particular status of countries in Southeast Asia is very distinct and no general descriptions and/or assessments will lead to a comprehensive analysis that supports realistic alternative concepts toward a social-ecological transformation. However, concrete practice examples can show us what different shapes the growth paradigm can take in the region, what the effects for the people and for the environment are, what form approaches and types of resistance might take, and under which circumstances alternatives to this paradigm might be promoted.

In this article, we will show the way in which the expansion of hydropower dams to meet increasing energy demands as part of the growth paradigm presents a real challenge in the case of Vietnam. From our perspective, from the RLS SEA and its partners' perspectives, and that of the non-governmental organization "Centre for Social Research and Development – CSRD", the hydropower issue is not only a question for Vietnam but for the entire Mekong region as it has tremendous effects

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30 http://rls-sea.de/blog/2016/10/26/international-workshop-expanding-social-protection-for-vulnerable-groups-towards-addressing-inequality-under-asean-integration

on nature and on people's lives. Ironically, hydropower dam policies are also built on sustainable development strategies and, in the case of Vietnam, the government also approved the national strategy on green growth and considers it a pathway to a sustainable development target.[31]

Case study: hydropower development and social action in Vietnam

Located in Southeast Asia, Vietnam is experiencing rapid economic growth together with industrial development, urbanization, and an increasing energy demand. Since the economic reforms of 1986, 180 industrial zones have emerged all over the country with 72,012 factories operating in these zones to produce commodities for domestic use and for export. With infrastructure development and urban population growth of 34% per year, urbanization is taking place at a very rapid pace in built-up areas, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, in Hanoi and surrounding areas, and in medium-sized cities. The industrial concentration on manufacturing, together with ongoing urbanization, has led to Vietnam having one of the highest demands on energy volume in the Southeast Asia and Mekong region. In order to meet the demand, the Central Government of VN has approved its comprehensive energy plan up to 2020, in which about 30% of the national energy demand is met through the development of hydropower dams and plants.[32] With more than 2,732 rivers of different sizes, waterfalls, and steep upper river courses, Vietnam's landscape is convenient for building dams and reservoirs to generate electricity.

In Vietnam, the development of hydropower is not only used to meet energy needs but also to serve as a link between politics and the economy. The use of electricity produced by hydropower is crucial for the government of Vietnam in its efforts to set the country on the path to modernization and industrialization. Annually, hydropower contributes VNĐ 65,00 billion (equivalent to US$ 3,25 million) to the national budget in the form of taxes (Ministry of Commerce 2013).[33] In addition, the increasing number of hydropower dams and plants has been considered by the Communist Party of Vietnam to be a symbol of the political success and achievements of the objectives of a social-economic development strategy (Dao Nga 2011).[34] In the period from 1954 to 1975, during which the country was divided into North and South Vietnam, the Soviet Union helped North Vietnam to build the very first hydropower dam called Thac Ba dam on the Chay River. Meanwhile, the Da Nhim dam was first built in South Vietnam as part of emerging partnerships among the Mekong countries, such as Thailand, Cambodia, Laos PDR, and Vietnam. During

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31 http://www.mpi.gov.vn/Pages/tinbai.aspx?idTin=1450&idcm=194
32 http://vpcp.chinhphu.vn/Home/Dieu-chinh-Quy-hoach-phat-trien-dien-luc-quoc-gia/20163/18232.vgp
33 Bo Cong Thuong (2012). Tinh hinh xay dung, quan ly va van hanh dap thuy dien. Bao cao gui Quoc hoi so 144/BC ngay 12 thang 6 nam 2012.
34 Dao, Nga (2011). Damming rivers in Vietnam: A lesson learned in the Tay Bac (Northwest Region). Journal for Vietnamese studies, 6 (2): 106–140.

this period, several feasibility studies were implemented in an effort to further plan hydropower dams in many other rivers in these countries. After 1975, with technical support from the Soviet Union, the Hoa Binh dam was constructed on the Da River in the North with a capacity of 1,920 MW. The Hoa Binh dam was considered a major 20th-century undertaking as it was the biggest construction project in Vietnam and Southeast Asia at that time. Also completed with the support of the Soviet Union, the Tri An dam was constructed in 1979 in the South on the Dong Nai River with a capacity of 440 MW, and the Yaly dam (the second largest dam) with a capacity of 720 MW was one of the first dams to be built on the Sesan River. Together with the Serepok River and the Sekong River, these three water courses are the tributaries of the Mekong, originating in Vietnam before merging with the main stream in Laos and Cambodia. These three dams are considered to be the biggest successes of a nation undergoing a process of industrialization and modernization. They were identified as the top priorities of the national development strategy and the communist party's will. This political and economic achievement is recognized as a sign of pride by the national leaders and as a demonstration of the fact that human strength can conquer nature to serve human demands (Le Anh Tuan & Dao Thi Viet Nga 2016).[35]

The government of Vietnam continued to develop many more comprehensive energy plans for building more dams before and after the Doi Moi economic reforms. Especially after 500 kV of national grid lines were installed to transport electricity across the country and the government simplified the procedures for dam development, hydropower dam construction experienced a boom implemented both by public and private companies. According to the Ministry of Commerce in 2012, there are more than 32 big dams in operation or under construction on the ten big rivers, with capacities ranging from 64 MW in Quang Tri to 2,400 MW in Son La. In addition, more than 1,000 small- and medium-sized dams have been planned and approved by the government. According to the World Bank in 2015,[36] the 2012 record shows that 43% of the total electricity produced in Vietnam comes from hydropower.[37] Accordingly, the Ministry of Commerce (2011–2020), the so-called Quy Hoach Dien VII, ranks hydropower as the top priority in their national comprehensive energy plans. In this way, they hope to increase the total energy capacity produced by hydropower from 9,200 MW in 2011 to 17,400 MW in 2020. Over the past 20 years, many hydropower projects of different sizes and capacities have been planned and constructed in Central Vietnam. In provinces like Thua Thien Hue, Quang Nam, and Daklakor Daknong, tens of dams have been designed and

35 Le Anh Tuan và Dao Thi Viet Nga (2016). Phat Trien Thuy Dien o Vietnam: Thach Thuc và Giai phap. Trung tam Bao ton va Phat trien Tai Nguyen nuoc phat hanh. Nha xuat ban Khoa hoc va Ky Thuat
36 World Bank (2015) Electricity production from hydroelectric sources. Homepage: http://data.worldbank.org
37 World Bank (2015) figure quoted by the Ministry of Commerce, which shows documented production of hydroelectricity up to the year 2012. This means that from 2012 to 2020, the figure might fluctuate (see third footnote of this article).

many of them have been built and put into operation. The rapidly increasing number of hydropower plants in Vietnam has already raised many environmental and social concerns.

Dam impacts and communities' concerns

Hydropower dams have been causing vast social and environmental problems. There are still no solutions to these problems and they continue to have significant impacts on humans and nature. The dams cause the displacement of many communities, thus destroying their livelihoods. People in downstream areas also face many water-related issues and transboundary impacts, including flooding, water shortage, and water pollution. The dams also destroy the river and forest ecology.

Resettlement – impoverishment and the question of underwater icebergs

According to the founder and executive director of the CSRD (Lam Thi Thu Suu 2015),[38] increasing dam constructions cause the forced resettlement of thousands of impoverished people and ethnic minority groups and have a negative impact on their lives. Many individuals and communities have been forcibly displaced to make way for the reservoirs and dams. Originally, though they were poor, these people could sustain themselves by hunting and finding natural plants and animals in the river or in the valleys. They also grew their own food through traditional methods, used natural herbs for curing their health problems, and fished in the rivers to nourish themselves. When the dam projects were announced, they were displaced to new areas where they could not sustain their traditional livelihoods. Often, the assigned land given as compensation is smaller and in bad condition. A social impact study conducted by Dr. Nguyen Quy Hanh in 2015 and colleagues at the CSRD[39] shows that many people displaced by the A luoi dam are facing substantial food-related problems at the household level. Women are those who suffer the most. Affected people have to contend with a lack of food and fertile land. The study also projects that the impoverishment will continue over the next five years after the government's regular food subsidy ends. The projection highlights the risk that the middle-aged populace will move away from the region, leaving behind their children and the elderly. Or that those adults, who opt to stay in the resettled areas, will continue to carry out illegal

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38 Lam Thi Thu Suu et al. (2015) Hydropower dam in Central and Central Highlands: People's Concerns and Stakeholders' Accountability. Thuy dien Mien Trung Tay Nguyen: Quan Tam cua nguoi dan va Trach nhiem cac ben lien quan. Trung tam Nghien Cuu Phat trien Xa hoi (CSRD). Thuan hoa publishing house. Hue.

39 Nguyen Quy Hanh, Le Thi Nguyen, Bui Phuoc Chuong, Nguyen Van Que, Nguyen Le Van Phuong (2015). Tac dong Xa hoi cua Thuy dien A luoi len cong dong dia phuong. In Lam Thi Thu Suu et al. (2015) Hydropower dam in Central and Central Highlands: People's Concerns and Stakeholders' Accountability. Thuy dien Mien Trung Tay Nguyen: Quan Tam cua nguoi dan va Trach nhiem cac ben lien quan. Trung tam Nghien Cuu Phat trien Xa hoi (CSRD). Thuan hoa publishing house. Hue

logging to make ends meet. Le Thi Nguyen (2015)[40] reveals that more than 83% of the displaced people in and around the Binh Dien dam are not happy with the total area of land they were provided with by the government. On average, each household is allocated 1,000 square meters of land, which is too small for the needs of family farming. 100% of the displaced people said that the quality of the land provided is worse than the quality of the land they had lived on before.[41] Due to 22 hydropower projects in the Quang Nam area, a total number of 1,736 households have lost their livelihoods and been displaced. They said that in their previous location, people could grow both paddy rice on the wet rice fields located near the streams and rivers, and dry rice by practicing sustainable shifting cultivation on different plots of forest land. Besides rice, they could also grow casava, potatoes, vegetables, and fruits thanks to the fertile soil. In contrast, the land provided at the relocation sites is too small and in bad quality. Rivers are located too far from their residencies and many often have no access to water.

Nguyen Quy Hanh and Lam Thi Thu Suu (2016) argue that the gaps in the development of appropriate resettlement programs are causing the continuous impoverishment of those in the resettlement areas. The authors analyze the current resettlement programs provided by the dam companies, which mainly focus on the provision of compensation money and the building of infrastructures in the resettlement areas, which is called the "tip of the iceberg". Many of the constructed houses in the resettlement areas in Quang Nam do not take into account the traditional culture, customs, and habits of the indigenous people like the Mo Nong in Quang Nam, the Paco Van in A luoi, or the Ede in Daklak. Some houses are designed and constructed so poorly that many affected people cannot live in them (Lam Thi Thu Suu et al. 2015). Instead, these people have to make their own houses next to the new houses built by the government using their own designs and their own materials. Furthermore, many of the public facilities in the new resettlement areas are poorly constructed and not used by the affected people. The public facilities are also not suited to the real needs of those women affected because they were unable to take part in the planning process. The coordination between the investors and the functional departments of local governments for the planning and allocation of productive land during these processes was not transparent. This resulted in conflicts between the

40 Le Thi Nguyen et al. (2015). Nhung tac dong tu cong trinh thuy dien- thuy loi Thua thien hue den cuoc song cua cong dong dan cu o cac khu tai dinh cu. In Lam Thi Thu Suu et al. (2015) Hydropower dam in Central and Central Highlands: People's Concerns and Stakeholders' Accountability. Thuy dien Mien Trung Tay Nguyen: Quan Tam cua nguoi dan va Trach nhiem cac ben lien quan. Trung tam Nghien Cuu Phat trien Xa hoi (CSRD). Thuan hoa publishing house. Hue
41 Nhom nghien cuu tri thuc ban dia thon nuoc lang (2015). Mot so bien dong moi truong va cuoc song o khu tai dinh cu thon nuoc lang do tac dong thuy dien Dak Mi 4. In Lam Thi Thu Suu et al. (2015) Hydropower dam in Central and Central Highlands: People's Concerns and Stakeholders' Accountability. Thuy dien Mien Trung Tay Nguyen: Quan Tam cua nguoi dan va Trach nhiem cac ben lien quan. Trung tam Nghien Cuu Phat trien Xa hoi (CSRD). Thuan hoa publishing house. Hue

parties while the responsibility for the issue was shifted around among stakeholders. Although the government offered some vocational and technical training, not many people were able to effectively take part. Most of those who have been displaced are from ethnic minorities who received little education, and language barriers also make it hard for them to learn. Moreover, vocational training policies and job solutions still lack diversity and have not been designed to suit the practical conditions of the locality or the customs and habits of residents. Poor communities are being resettled on land that is not suitable for their traditional farming techniques. They have to learn different ways of cultivating the land and this will take time. Alternatively, they may try to return to the areas they once lived in near the dams in order to exploit the forest and use land for agriculture production. This causes many conflicts between those who have been resettled and the hydropower investors, the local authorities, and the local people. Nguyen Quy Hanh (2016) also highlights the importance of the so-called "underwater iceberg" in resettlement programs. This term refers to people's basic needs, a guaranteed food supply, the provision of public space, the preservation of indigenous culture and community connection, the human ecology, and alternative livelihoods. These factors are very often ignored by decision makers. Both Nguyen Quy Hanh et al. (2015) and Nga Dao (2011) highlight the lack of participation by the affected people during the creation and implementation of the resettlement programs as one of the main problems. Both the investors and the local authorities have implemented the resettlement schemes using a top-down approach, in which people (both men and women) had little say in the decision-making process.

Downstream and environmental impacts – concerns of governance
The other group affected by the dam operation were those living in the downstream area. When the rainy season comes, the dam operators sometimes flush the water without prior warning or at short notice. This means that people downstream do not have enough time to prepare for the flood, resulting in damages caused to their crops and houses. According to local research carried out by people living in the Quang Nam downstream area,[42] the change in the volume and quality of water has caused multiple problems on their farmlands situated near the riverside. Because of fluctuations in river flow, the riverbanks and their farmland are heavily eroded every year. Their farmlands have also become less fertile because there is less natural silt and

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42 Nhom Nghien cuu tri thuc ban dia xa Dai Hong (2015). Ket qua nghien cuu tri thuc ban dia ve mot so bien dong moi truong va cuoc song o xa Dai Hong, Huyen Dai Loc, Tinh Quang Nam do tac dong cua thuy dien. In Lam Thi Thu Suu et al. (2015) Hydropower dam in Central and Central Highlands: People's Concerns and Stakeholders' Accountability. Thuy dien Mien Trung Tay Nguyen: Quan Tam cua nguoi dan va Trach nhiem cac ben lien quan. Trung tam Nghien Cuu Phat trien Xa hoi (CSRD). Thuan hoa publishing house. Hue

sediment flowing downstream due to the dam. La Hung Anh and Do Van Tu (2016)[43] discovered that the multitude of dams on the Sai Gon-Dong Nai River are responsible for coastal erosion in the south due to decreased sediment in the water flows.

Many scholars (Le Tran Chan and Tran Thi Thuy Van)[44] revealed that hundreds of large and small hydropower projects have been causing a devastating loss of forest and biodiversity, which are difficult to restore. Electricity of Vietnam (EVN) reported that, particularly for the construction of the large dams of Son La and Dong Nai 3, more than 7,000 ha of forest have been cut down, and for each of the other medium- and small-sized dams, hundreds of hectares of forest were destroyed. Forest loss not only affects the water resources but also causes the loss of animals and plants. Many birds were killed or left the area because they lost access to food and their habitat after the construction of the Hoa Binh dam (Le Tran Chan, 1993b).[45] The A uong dam in Quang Nam in Central Vietnam and the Son La dam in the Northwest caused the loss of a substantial volume of wildlife and plants which were on the red list (EVN 2006).[46]

There are currently significant gaps and inconsistencies between the actual processes that have been undertaken in the recent past and government-decreed processes. The government of Vietnam has ordered that the natural environment be protected from the negative impacts of uncontrolled industrial development. The law on environmental protection issued by the Vietnamese government outlines the obligation to follow the environmental protection commitments and to include the participation of related stakeholders in the process. Under the law, a series of ordinances, circulars, and guidelines were developed to make sure the related ministries provided a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and that the investors provided an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and implemented an Environmental Protection Commitment (EPC). However, in practice, due to a lack of good governance, where the mechanisms of accountability and transparency should be present, many investors and their consultants try to cut down on costs incurred during EIAs. Many EIAs were therefore not carried out seriously by the investors and their consultants, and important impacts were ignored. The commitments to environmental protection detailed in the EIAs have not been fully observed by governmental authorities due to a lack of technical and financial resources. In addition, the participation and consul-

43 Le Hung Anh va Do Anh Tu (2016). Tac dong thuy dien cua du an thuy dien len thuy sinh van va phu sa vung ha luu. Trong Le Anh Tuan và Dao Thi Viet Nga (2016). Phat Trien Thuy Dien o Vietnam: Thach Thuc và Giai phap. Trung tam Bao ton va Phat trien Tai Nguyen nuoc phat hanh. Nha xuat ban Khoa hoc va Ky Thuat.

44 Le Tran Chan va Tran Thi Thuy Van (2016). Tac dong cua thuy dien le rung, dong chay va da dang sinh hoc. Trong Le Anh Tuan và Dao Thi Viet Nga (2016). Phat Trien Thuy Dien o Vietnam: Thach Thuc và Giai phap. Trung tam Bao ton va Phat trien Tai Nguyen nuoc phat hanh. Nha xuat ban Khoa hoc va Ky Thuat

45 Le Tran Chan (1993b) Nhung bien dong moi truong sinh hoc vung thuong du cong trinh thuy dien Hoa Binh. Bao cao hoi thao khoa hoc. Nhung van de moi truong sinh thai vung ho Hoa Binh. Tong cuc Khi tuong thuy van, 165–168.

46 Electricity of Vietnam (EVN) (2006). Environment Impact Assessment Report on Son La hydropower dam.

tation of affected communities have not been properly incorporated into the actual planning processes for planned hydropower plants. The official review on hydropower dams conducted by the National Assembly in 2011 admits that the dam investors have removed a large area of forest in order to construct reservoirs and infrastructure for the dam projects, and that actual cases of promised reforestation after completion were very low.[47] The practical governance of the hydropower dams is not only problematic in terms of planning but also with regard to operation and management. The government lacks the monitoring capacities and mechanisms to promote community monitoring during the process. In most of the projects, the dam companies have more power than the local people and in many cases the investors hold considerable power in decision-making processes during construction and operation, which aggravates many social and environmental impacts.

NGO and grassroot action on dam issues

The Centre for Social Research and Development (CSRD) – a long-term partner of the RLS Southeast Asia – has been active in hydropower dam issues since 2012. The CSRD seeks justice for vulnerable communities threatened by external change. We helped to support community resilience to threats caused by climate change, agribusiness, and industrialization. The CSRD has developed a long-term partnership with the RLS through a vision to develop a network of communities affected by hydropower development. In this network, people can exchange information and advocate for their rights, environmental protection, and for a sustainable outcome to development processes. The projects we have developed together mainly focus on amplifying the voice of people in the communities to ensure and encourage dialogue between all stakeholders. In addition, the projects aim at working on solutions that maintain the integrity of the environment and improve the situation of affected people by involving the communities, the government, and the dam owners.

Community empowerment as a key strategy for social and ecological transformation

Initially, the CSRD met with groups of affected people to raise their awareness of the value of the river for their lives and how this had changed due to the construction of the dam. A learning process between the CSRD and the affected communities has taken place on many levels and with different groups and individuals in different places. They not only learned about social and environmental issues caused by the dams but also about their rights and about legislation and laws in place to protect them. The individuals learned methodologies and skills to carry out their own research on the effects of the dam. The CSRD gave the community members cameras

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47   Quoc hoi (2013). Nghi quot ve tang cuong cong tac quan ly quy hoach, dau tu xay dung, van hanh khai thac thuy dien. Nghi quyet so 62/2013/QH 13 cua Quoc hoi ban hanh va co hieu luc tu ngay 27 thang 11 nam 2013.

to record their lives and experiences as well as matters that were important to them. Women understood their rights and their ability to take the initiative as well.

Following the empowerment process, an exhibition of photo-voices was created featuring more than 138 photos that were taken by community members. The photos told the stories of the communities and the ways in which their lives were affected by the dams. The exhibition was held in Tu Tuong Park in Hue City. The event obtained widespread media coverage, helping to disseminate this important message. In addition, the CSRD worked together with the communities to develop a collection of photo-voices. The photo-voices *"Hydropower – Voices from Communities"* widely shared the reflections of communities affected by the hydropower projects in the Srepok River, the Sekong River, the Vu Gia-Thu Bon River, the Huong River, and the Long Dai River in the Central Region – Highlands of Vietnam. The community voices reflect the impact hydropower projects in the region have on the environment and society.

The CSRD has also helped to develop a guideline and checklist that can be used as a manual by the community to monitor the impacts of the dams. The purpose of this manual is to help communities identify opportunities and ways to participate in the process of consultation and monitoring of the impacts of hydropower. Through a number of tools, guidelines, and checklists, the community can perform their own consultation and supervision in the most effective way.

Sharing gained knowledge and creating network links across the border of the Quang Binh, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Nam, the Daklak, and the Daknong Central Highlands provinces has helped to create strong communities. People were trained in methodologies and skills to undertake their own Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The evidence collected was recorded and ratified by scientists and independent consultants. The CSRD then mediated contact and dialogue with the relevant government departments and dam owners to address the issues. There have been some positive results. The affected groups have formed a network and fostered instruments for working with groups in newly planned dam areas to ensure the affected people know their rights and the possible negative outcomes if they are forcibly moved away from their current homes.

Media – a tool for influencing the decision-making process

There has been significant media coverage of the NGO and community actions, and this plays an important role in making changes. Since then, the CSRD has organized and mediated dialogues and people's forums annually so the affected people are positioned in a fair way to communicate with investors/dam builders as well as provincial and district authorities. Through initial coverage in 2012, the general public in Vietnam became aware of the issues and the negative impacts the dams were having on the Vietnamese environment. Some actions were then taken later on. Additional land has been made available to some of the affected communities. For example, 96

hectares have been given to resettled people in the Huong Thien Commune. This was given to individual households for the production of crops. A further 83 hectares have been allocated to groups in three villages: Hoa Binh, Binh Duon, and Hoa Thanh in the Binh Thanh Commune. 87 hectares of land were allocated to the people of the Bo Hon village in the Binh Thanh Commune.

Based on the documentation of data and figures, journalists cover the impacts in their daily news/coverage to call for action. The affected people also handed in an appeal on the issue of unsatisfactory land compensation and reported this process to the public through journalists. As a result, the local government has provided more land as compensation for the petitioners.

Every year the CSRD continues to organize a public forum on hydropower dams calling for better governance of the dam development. The forum works as a platform for dialogue among stakeholders in order to find solutions to problems related to transparency, accountability, participation, equity, and the rule of law in hydropower governance. The affected groups have formed a network and drawn up plans to work with new groups in hydropower dam areas with the goal of ensuring that affected people know their rights and the negative impacts that can happen if they are displaced.

Until today, work on this issue has helped develop a network of communities in Central Vietnam, the Central Highlands, and across the Mekong borders that creates awareness among affected people of the problems and enables them to raise their voices in order to influence the outcomes of the planned dams. This collective action can be used to achieve positive and sustainable change for the lives of the members of the affected communities. One expected/hoped-for outcome of this networking effort is that communities will influence the decision-making process of policy makers. This influence should lead to the implementation of a commitment to ensure that residents' lives change for the better or stay the same as before hydropower construction. On the other hand, these activities help connect the voices and actions of the communities affected by hydropower, encouraging them to share their experiences and ways to cope with the unwanted effects caused by hydropower.

Conclusion

The growth paradigm leads to an enormous energy demand, not only in Vietnam but elsewhere, which causes economic, social, and ecological crises in the long run, regardless of whether the prospective paradigm is "green" or not. The search for alternatives needs to involve the experiences of people in the communities and support to help them raise their voices. At the same time, we need to think of our personal expectations from life: what really matters to us? Is it the production of ever-greater means of production (in this case, electricity) or is it something else? In Vietnam, some of the populace affected by hydropower development expressed other factors that took priority for them, such as livelihoods that were "healthy" both environmentally and

socio-economically, and which can serve as a sound basis for their existence and for future generations, too.

The socio-ecological transformation is a perspective on the world that is focused on social struggle, and which may yet become a political project. Its goal is to bring together social and ecological movements and actors in opposition to the reigning capitalist growth and development model – based on the assumption that the latter is the cause of (and not the solution to) the multiple crises affecting the world.

The challenge remains to flesh out realistic elements of the SET concept toward exploring functioning alternatives on an international level. That is, to understand what goes beyond the everyday struggle of social and environmental movements, and which elements can be understood as working principles and/or criteria to promote alternatives to the growth paradigm, not only locally, in Vietnam or in Germany, but worldwide, and in the future, too.

Madhuresh Kumar

THE EFFECTS OF DEVELOPMENT AND STRUGGLES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ALTERNATIVES IN INDIA

The industrialization process followed by India post-independence involved setting up big steel plants, nuclear and thermal power plants, mining and mammoth river valley development projects by public sector enterprises in collaboration with industrialized western countries. These projects, established in the name of development and public purpose, followed the principle of "trickle down" theory and lacked any public involvement, resulting in large scale displacement, deprivation, and impoverishment of a population already living at the margins, along with massive environmental degradation in the absence of stringent environmental norms. Together, these projects have caused immense damage and the slow death of nature-dependent communities, especially indigenous communities (referred to as *Adivasis*) and scheduled castes (referred to as Dalits), which comprised 50% of the total development-induced displacement population between 1951–95. There is a lack of credible data at the national level, but on the basis of a survey completed in six states and other research, the number of displaced people between 1947 and 2000 is probably around 60 million. Medha Patkar, leader of *Narmada Bachao Andolan* [NBA, the Save the Narmada Movement], estimates a figure of 100 million today, given a sudden spurt in the growth of mammoth development and infrastructure projects since the 1990s.[48]

With the current neoliberal, market-based growth strategy, India's 1.2 billion population is soon going to face a massive ecological and social crisis perpetuated due to following a development trajectory ill-suited to the needs of the large number of the poor. Nearly 70% of India's population is dependent on the agrarian sector, which is in extreme crisis as evidenced by the large number of farmer suicides in many states

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48 Walter Fernandes, March 2004 – 'Rehabilitation Policy for the Displaced', in *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol 39, Issue 12, pp 1191–1193, Walter Fernandes, Vijay Paranjpye, eds., 1997 – *Rehabilitation Policy and Law in India.* Delhi: Indian Social Institute

in the past decade. Agrarian input costs are rising, farm holding size is decreasing, soil quality is degrading, rains are becoming more erratic, and, most importantly, corporate influence on agriculture is increasing, thereby linking farm produce prices with the international market, leading to a complete loss of sovereignty. This is fueling the industrial crisis, too, since the capital-intensive development model is dependent on the unsustainable extraction of "natural resources" leading to hasty depletion and pollution of air, water, soil, rivers, and life in general. India is currently witnessing jobless growth, with large numbers of medium, micro, and small industry units being shut every year and mega projects, like industrial corridors including the DMIC (Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor), Petro Chemical and Petroleum Investment Regions (PCPRI), large ports, highways, and numerous thermal and nuclear power plants, impacting people's livelihoods directly and creating a handful of jobs, not enough to compensate for losses in other sectors.

This paper discusses the development priorities of the Indian State, impacts it is having on its people and the response of the social and environmental movements as well as the challenges they face in articulating an alternative discourse to the dominant forms of development.

Corridoring development, subverting democratic institutions and processes

Successive governments at Center and State levels have experimented with different industrial development policies since independence. An earlier policy involved setting up bodies at the State level such as the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC), the Gujarat Infrastructure Development Corporation (GIDC), and the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO). These agencies acquired and developed land, and then handed it over to private companies under various schemes. However, the process did not achieve the desired results: in most cases, half of the land acquired remained unutilized, and many of the industries are either sick or defunct or have been converted to other purposes. In the government's assessment, this development failure was due to limited development of the basic connectivity and other trunk infrastructure. During the time of the NDA [National Democratic Alliance] government (1999–2004), major investments were made in creating the "Golden Quadrilateral" [a highway network connecting Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai] and communication, phone, and internet infrastructure, contributing to removing bottlenecks. The Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Act (2005) enacted by the United Progressive Alliance government (2004–14) was another step in the direction of attracting investment. However, SEZs became a symbol of large-scale land grabbing from peasantry by corporations, leading to stiff resistance from farmers and workers. The global financial crisis of 2008–09 also made sure that many SEZs could not start. As of December 31, 2016, the Ministry of Commerce has given formal approval to 405 and approval to 32 SEZs in principle, but of these, only 206 are operational, a mere 50%. Most large (1,000 plus hectares) SEZs are never

started. Among the notables, the SEZs of Raigad (in the state of Maharashtra) and Jhajjar (in the state of Haryana), both 5,000 hectares and promoted by the biggest Indian corporate house, Reliance, could not acquire the necessary land due to fierce opposition from farmers, and had to be finally abandoned. In its 2014 audit report, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India severely criticized the SEZ policy framework, pointing to land acquired for public purpose to others, a decline in the manufacturing sector in the SEZs, and no clear indication of these having contributed to employment generation, investment, exports, and economic growth.[49]

Industrial Corridors are now proposed by the government as the new model of industrial development, and the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) is the first such example. Apart from the DMIC, there is also the World Bank-supported Eastern Corridor (Amritsar Kolkata Industrial Corridor), the Mumbai–Bangalore–Chennai Corridor (with the support of the British government), the Vishakhapatnam–Chennai Corridor (supported by the Asian Development Bank), the Bangalore–Mysore Corridor and others, planned or at different stages of planning and execution. The basic idea behind these corridors is the need to create trunk infrastructure so that existing industrial areas can be made more accessible and it is easy for new ones to develop. The entire project is wide ranging and dispersed without any comprehensive social and environmental impact assessments done, credible planning, or public consultations organized. Consultants have been employed, Ministerial and Secretarial level meetings at the State and Central level organized, treaties with Japan and other countries and financial institutions signed, authorities and joint ventures set up, and so on. In short, the claim is being made that the purpose of the DMIC and other industrial corridors is to create infrastructure, provide land, water, power, skilled manpower, resources, road, rail, and other communication infrastructure, so that industries can be set up and existing zones and regions given a boost.

The DMIC, which affects nearly 12–13% of the total land mass of India, spans six States and two Union Territories and will impact nearly 17% of the population of the country. A major portion of the corridor falls within the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra. The process of fresh land acquisition for the associated Dedicated Freight Corridor, industrial area and investment regions, road network, multimodal hubs and nodes is in progress in many of these states. The five corridors together will impact roughly 40% of the total land mass and 50% of the country's population.

These kinds of development projects undermine democratic institutions, since there is a clear exclusion of the role played by local self-government institutions. For instance, the *gram panchayat* [local self-government at the village or small-town level] does not have any role in SEZs and a similar pattern seems to be followed here. For instance, in one area affected by the DMIC, the Navi Mumbai industrial area, people

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49 The full report can be accessed here: http://www.cag.gov.in/content/report-no-21-2014-performance-audit-special-economic-zones-sezs-union-government-department

have been issued a notification saying that all the powers which rest with their *gram panchayats* (village councils) have been taken away and now, for all land dealings, they will have to approach the Navi Mumbai industrial area authorities. Ulka Mahajan of *Sarvahara Jan Andolan* (community organization), who earlier led the successful fight against the 5,000-hectare Raigad SEZ and is now leading opposition to the development of the DMIC in the same area, pointed out that "there has been no talk of this project at the parliament or legislative assembly level. *Gram sabha* (village assembly) is still a long shot. When we started calling Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assemblies, they did not even know about DMIC. How can such a decision be thrust upon us without any discussion whatsoever?"

Similarly, there are concerns with regard to land and water grabbing, serious environmental impacts, the larger question of people's sovereignty, and so on, around the different corridor projects. The strip between Mumbai and Delhi is also the driest in the country. It is seriously water stressed as most of its groundwater has been withdrawn. This makes the question of water availability for the DMIC a pertinent question. "Leave alone rights, we're talking about survival," said Vikram Soni, an analyst, at the national convention against the DMIC held in Delhi on March 19, 2013, at the end of a 10-day long caravan from Mumbai to Delhi organized by the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM).

Energy-intensive development processes, resource grabbing, and impoverishment

Along with the industrial corridors, a large number of electricity generation projects in coming decades, with the intention to supply energy in the context of forthcoming high economic growth, is leading to massive infrastructure project development, an urban-centric growth model at the cost of rural India, and wanton appropriation of "natural resources" by public and private corporations through various privatization and reform measures. The current development paradigm in the country envisions an 8–10% growth rate. The Integrated Energy Policy of India, released by the Planning Commission of India, states: "India cannot deliver sustained 8% growth over the next 25 years without energy and water, and these two together shall, in turn, pose the biggest constraints to India's growth." Based on this assumption, it recommends that 2031–32 power generation capacity must increase to nearly 800,000 MW from the current capacity of around 3,04,760 MW as of July 2016, inclusive of all captive plants. The Integrated Energy Policy (IEP) projects an increase of 2,10,943 MW on July 2016 to 340,000 MW thermal (coal and gas) capacity and from 42,888 MW of hydro at current levels to 150,000 MW by 2031–31. In addition, it projects an increase of 5,780 MW on July 2016 to 63,000 MW from nuclear energy.[50]

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50 Even as we write, the NITI Ayog body, which replaced the Planning Commission of India, is in consultation with various stakeholders to formulate a new Integrated Energy Policy.

Such a huge increase in India's energy generation capacity will mean the large scale utilization of land, water, forest, and coal, as well as unforeseeable consequences for the planet's climate crisis. A study by the Prayas Energy Group,[51] Pune, suggests that, after the deregulation of the electricity sector in 2003–4 and entry of private corporations, there has been completely unplanned growth and capacity addition. Coal-based plants continue to see a massive rise. The overall generation in the country has increased from 1048.673 during 2014–15 to 1107.386 billion units during the year 2015–16. The category-wise generation performance evolved as follows: thermal increased by 7.45%; hydro reduced by 6.09%; and nuclear increased by 3.63%. However, even then, nearly 30% of households remain disconnected from the national electricity grid, and most of it goes back to the industry and large metropolises. Many of the same communities may have suffered or lost their lives and livelihoods for the construction of these energy projects or mines, which provide them with coal and other minerals, and this says a lot about development priorities.

Strikingly, many of the projects in the pipeline will be geographically concentrated in a few areas. Only 30 districts (or 4.7% of the total 626 districts in India) will have more than half of the proposed plants, with their capacity adding up to about 380,000 MW. Several of these districts are adjoining, hence the real concentration of power plants is even higher than that revealed by the district-wide figures. This is an indication of the larger lopsided and uneven development of the regions leading to centralization processes and raising the larger question of democratic development and planning.

In the last decade since the unveiling of the IEP, the State and central sectors have seen a gradual decline, with 62% from 82% in existing thermal power plants. Private sector participation is set to increase significantly and stands at 38%, with the private sector accounting for 73% of all projects in the pipeline. Furthermore, private interests are highly concentrated: 10 private corporate groups are planning to build about 160,000 MW.

The construction of large numbers of thermal power plants and dams for meeting the projected electricity targets will have multiple impacts on the environment and livelihoods and cause massive social unrest and conflict in India. Maharashtra alone has logged 60,750 farmer suicides between 1995 and 2014 – a fifth of the national total of 2,96,438 – due to a lack of irrigation and the poor financial plight of farmers, most of them from this region. Maharashtra has been the worst State for farmer suicides for the tenth successive year, reporting 3,228 as per the data available from

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51 Shripad Dharmadhikary, Shantanu Dixit, August 2011, 'Thermal Power Plants on the Anvil'. Prayas Energy Group: Pune

the National Crime Records Bureau in 2015.[52] A larger number of new thermal power plants in the region will further worsen the situation and increase the overall stress level. Many parts of the country are already facing severe shortages of water for drinking and agricultural uses. With a rapidly growing population and a penchant for additional large industries, there will be unmanageable demand for water in the years to come: this, coupled with a huge addition to coal power capacity, will result in a national crisis.[53]

Together with these, India's 7,000 km long coast is under attack from ports, coastal corridors, PCPIR, tourism, and massive construction, leading to the destruction of coastal life, biodiversity, mangroves, and so on, impacting traditional fishing communities, most often not seen as a relevant stakeholder in the planning of these projects.

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52 http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/maharashtra-saw-3228-farmer-suicides-in-2015/article8103696.ece

53 As a new Integrated Energy Policy is being developed by the Indian government, civil society, if apprehensive of the efforts, has suggested broad frameworks for the formulation of the policy itself. One of the leading power sector analysts, Shankar Sharma, in his letter to the NITI ayog dated August 6, 2016, writes the following:
a. The energy demand/supply scenario in the country for year 2025 or 2030 or 2050 cannot be viewed on the basis of business as usual scenario which prevailed all these years. It has to undergo a paradigm shift keeping in proper perspective the true needs of our communities, the limits to our natural resources and the fast-evolving Climate Change.
b. The growing population and aspirations have the potential to disrupt the best of demand/supply models unless adequate care is taken to contain the demand to a manageable level. The energy demand must be contained within the natural limits of our geographical borders, for all practical purposes. Even renewable energy sources (RE) have their own natural limits, which cannot be ignored.
c. The consumption of fossil fuels cannot continue at the growing rate seen now, which is undoubtedly unsustainable.
d. There are very many credible reports to indicate that the equitable and essential electrical energy needs of all sections of our society can be met with the present level of electricity generating capacity; only if we take necessary measures such as high efficiency, acceptable levels of conservation, and effective demand side management.
e. All or even one of these larger objectives cannot be achieved as long as we continue to link the demand for energy/electricity to the high GDP growth rate paradigm; because high GDP growth shall mean high demand not only for energy but also for other natural resources such as land and water with serious consequences on the pollution levels of land, air, and water. Instead of aiming to contribute to maximise the GDP, our energy policy should be aimed at determining and producing that minimum level of total energy in the country, which will pull the poor from the clutches of poverty, and to distribute the same most efficiently and equitably so as to conserve the critical elements of our precious natural resources.
f. Dam based hydro power plants, in tropical India, have a considerable GHG foot print in the form of Methane emissions and from the destruction of forests as carbon sinks, and hence should not be seen as an essential part of the solution to our energy problem.
g. Nuclear power plants, for a number of reasons, cannot have any true relevance to our energy scenario, and hence the enormous costs associated in building more of them should be eliminated at the earliest.
i. Large size RE sources, such as solar power parks and wind power parks, have the trappings of conventional energy sources such as diversion of lands for solar plants and for the associated transmission lines. Hence the focus should be on distributed kind of RE sources such as roof top solar panels, small size wind turbines and bio-energy plants at the village levels, etc.
j. For this and many other associated reasons, micro-grids, smart grids and off grid RE based solutions should get adequate priority in the electricity sector.
k. Definitive target years for "peak coal", and coal power elimination should be clearly identified with a clear road map in the proposed energy policy.
l. "Costs and benefits analysis" and "Options Analysis" from the perspective of the local community and larger society, along with effective public consultations, should become the fundamental decision-making tools in case of additional power capacity.

In short, the capitalistic development planning in the country suffers from being top-heavy, energy and capital intensive. There is a lack of participation of local self-governments, violation of existing environmental guidelines, appropriation of the people's rights, and a transfer of "natural resources" for private profiteering, very often termed as the development of crony capitalism. This poses a massive challenge for people's movements engaged in the politics of social and ecological transformation.

The rise of margins: social, political, and ecological assertions
In 1947, when India gained political independence, there were various pronouncements predicting that it would become a failed state and the breaking away of various factions due to its own internal contradictions, which were partly attributed to an attempt at establishing democracy with all its paraphernalia: parliament, universal franchise, independent judiciary, etc. Sixty-nine years later, India survives as a formal/liberal democracy and is touted as an emerging superpower. The reasons for this are many, but one of the important contributions to the democratization of the State power and social hierarchies has been made by numerous people's movements and a vibrant civil society, with limited support from the media and drawing upon the principles of rights, justice, and freedom enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

The subsequent decades after independence have seen a process of institutionalization of the liberal-democratic political society, but the class character of the state has remained feudal and hierarchical, with a clear continuation of the former colonial governance structures. However, simultaneously, those at the margins of social, political, and economic power (Dalits, landless farmers, marginal peasantry, women, Adivasis, workers) have challenged the power and legitimacy of the State while also emphasizing its constitutional responsibility. These movements have been anti-establishment, anti-party, anti-state, anti-colonial, anti-feudal, and, to a large extent, anti-capitalist in their orientation. They represent the rich diversity of the Indian land and its people in their form, content, methods, outreach, strategies, themes, and the nature of their struggle. These struggles have responded to the needs of the time, interest groups, and specific processes at the local, regional, national, and global levels, and, at times, expanded and given new meaning to the understanding of rights, justice, and freedom, as well as development itself.

Since the 1990s, a new wave of "modernization" has been underway in the name of liberalizing the economy which would "remove the chains shackling the Indian tiger", as claimed by the ruling classes. The welfare measures and social security achieved to date have come under severe attack. This process of neoliberal globalization has since led to great unease and political consternation among sections of society who are now refusing to live with oppression and inequality and are staking claims like never before.

These ripples of protest and resistance to the designs of ruling classes and capital, both national and international, are built on the wave of new social movements which emerged after the "Emergency" in the 1970s. During this time, the youth influenced

by the ideas of Gandhi, Marx, Mao, and Jayprakash Narayan left the comforts of their homes to organize and mobilize for social transformation in villages. In the context of the wider social and political transformations, both nationally and internationally, new social movements were born in the country. In some ways, the liberalization of ideas, political principles, human rights ideals, and a vision of an equitable and less consumptive society started during that time. The period saw the convergence of different political tendencies – socialists, Gandhians, Marxist-Leninists, Amdekarites, and others – giving birth to women's movements, the environmental movement, the new labor movement, the appropriate technology movement, radical Dalit movements, Adivasi movements, and the seeds of an urban movement. These movements challenged the established political forms of nationalism and developmentalism and pushed for an identity politics like never before: the questions of dignity and livelihood acquired a new significance. Unlike earlier, Dalits and Adivasis were raising the questions of dignity and identity on their own terms, a marked shift from earlier movements like the temple entry movement or the anti-caste movements organized by non-Dalits.

The women's movement similarly raised the question of equality and respect for women within and outside their homes and in every sphere of life. The movement challenged patriarchy and struck at its root, raising questions around centuries of oppression and subjugation, as was also done by Dalit movements. The environmental movement started dissecting development processes in the country and mobilized to redefine the development paradigm. On the other hand, as victims of an industrialization process, Bhopal gas survivors raised issues of corporate accountability, industrial safety, health issues, and many others. Together, these movements developed a new vocabulary of social transformation, going beyond the class framework of Marxian struggles.

Building alliances, critiquing development – reactionary?

Every social movement is a process of building alliances between diverse interests, people, ideologies, and energies, as well as developing a language of resistance, and, beyond that, giving shape to visions and dreams and developing alternatives to the existing social, political, and economic processes and systems. The visions and alternatives are not always explicit and do not always evolve in a day: they take years of practice and struggle.[54] The voices of those at the margins, politically and socially,

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54 One of the key examples of this is the struggle waged by Narmada Bachao Andolan, NBA, against the many dams being built over the Narmada River. NBA put together a coalition of large- and small-scale farmers, workers, Adivasis in the hilly regions, artisans, fisherfolk, and other project-affected communities and carved out a support base among students, the youth, lawyers, journalists, academics, and many other professional groups among the middle class in the 90s. The Narmada support and solidarity groups existed not only in India but also in European and North American countries, which finally led to the World Bank withdrawing its support to the Sardar Sarovar project. NBA's twin strategy involves the resistance to State-led destruction in the name of development and a focus on creating alternatives using the principles of decentralized development planning, and on undertaking activities that draw upon the Adivasis' knowledge and practices, as seen in the *Jeevanshalas* (life schools), farming, and setting up of small check dams for the electricity and water needs. More info at www.narmada.org

are manifested by the movements and are often heard only because they mobilize and collectivize themselves. The so-called margins of Indian society is, in reality, the story of the majority of its population – Dalits, Adivasis, informal and unorganized sector workers, minorities, slum dwellers, and others.[55] Systemic inequities ensure that resources in the society are grabbed by the powerful, who are a tiny minority. Movements are about making the society more equal, accessible, and just – about the struggles of the Adivasis, Dalits, forest dwellers, slum dwellers, and others to establish their right and control over natural resources: land, water, and forest.

However, the intensification of struggles for social justice since 1991 is usually portrayed (sometimes even by social and political movements themselves) as a *reaction* to the intensification of processes, such as unemployment and the casualization of work that are the outcomes of neoliberalism, the lack of access to markets, and the massive physical displacement that is taking place in the country as a function of major "development" projects and activities (and now of rapid industrialization) and, in particular, mineral exploitation. But the reality is that social struggles in India have intensified not only in terms of reaction but also as a result of rising assertion and growing contention. Today we are witnessing a rising voice, and a much stronger articulation of demands and actions by social and political movements across the country, and also because of a gradual coalescence (more correctly, of several gradual coalescences, in different parts of the country) that is taking place – towards greater collaboration and convergence of different movements and campaigns for social justice as part of this rising assertion. This intensification – which is learning from, and building on, processes that started back in the 70s and 80s – is manifested in many different ways: in terms of greater militancy; in terms of the number of locations of resistance across the country and of the kinds of issues around which the resistance is taking place; in terms of the range of proposals that movements are coming forward with in order to achieve greater social justice – not only for themselves but also more generally, and structurally; and, as above, in terms of greater sharing and solidarity. However, the character of these assertions is significantly different from before in the wake of 25 years of neoliberal reforms taking deep root in the country.

The new processes of industrialization and urbanization have brought into focus the question of livelihood and inequity, which are central to the questions of dignity and identity. Dalits and Adivasis are much more aware today of their rights than they were a few decades ago. Historically, Dalits did not have access to land and property whilst Adivasis did, but now they are both fighting on this front to gain and to retain access, respectively. In this process of struggle, solidarities are forged, not always with desired success but efforts continue.

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55 Scheduled Caste people/Dalits constitute 16.6% and Scheduled Tribes/Indigenous Peoples constitute 8.6% of India's population as per the 2011 Census. As per the government's own data, 93% of India's total working population is in the unorganized sector, of which nearly 60% is in the agriculture sector.

Challenging propaganda, challenges to struggles for alternatives

These protests and opposition to the infrastructure development plans of the Indian State over the past three decades have developed a critique of the state's development model, but the State continues to come up with new technological fixes for the "development deficiency". Apart from the industrial corridors, the plan to interlink rivers to deal with the drought and flood problems, which was shelved in 2004 after opposition from both communities and environmentalists, has once again been revived. The hydraulic solutions to the social and political problems are inadequate since the lack of water for irrigation, agriculture, and power needs are also social and political problems in a diverse country like India.[56]

Movements with a twin strategy of opposition and critical engagement have developed a critique of these plans and exposed the fallacy of the projected benefits and the hidden agenda of the market and corporations. In this context, it is worth mentioning the three-decade-old struggle of Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) against the Sardar Sarovar Dam, which raised fundamental questions about the development

paradigm itself – asking development for whom, by whom and at what cost – thereby developing a whole counternarrative to the prevalent development discourse.[57] This questioning shook the established notions of the Nehruvian model of top-down development by the State with the people asked to make sacrifices in the larger interest. Growing from the emergence of this alternative development discourse, new struggles came up over science, technology, and the control of information. In this context, it is important to mention the path-breaking critique of the Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, which exposed the fallacy and propaganda of crediting the Bhakra Nangal irrigation project with the green revolution in the country.[58]

This meant painstaking research and data collection and the need to counter state propaganda and expose the false claims of development. This was shown by the struggle

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56 This is evident in the interstate conflict over sharing of water from rivers like the Yamuna, Kaveri, Narmada, or the interstate dam projects like Mullaperiyar, Polavaram, Sardar Sarovar, and so on.

57 For more details, see *The River and Life* by Sanjay Sangvai, who was a journalist-activist with Narmada Bachao Andolan, published by Earthcare Books, 2002

58 Bhakra dam, built over the river Satluj in 1963, was credited with contributing to heralding the Green Revolution in India, making India self-sufficient in food production. However, 50 years later, research showed that large tracts of area were already being irrigated by a dedicated canal system, developed during British rule, that the actual contribution to the overall production of the food grains was inflated, and the surplus water availability led to the cultivation of water-intensive crops, leading to increased salinity and a massive decline in soil fertility, which has now led to a deep agrarian crisis in the State of Punjab. In addition, the claims of resettlement and rehabilitation of the people displaced by the dam project remain unsettled to date. See more details in *Unravelling Bhakra* by Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, April 2005. Accessible at: http://www.manthan-india.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Unravelling-Bhakra.pdf

of the Bhopal gas survivors,[59] Narmada Bachao Andolan[60] and, in recent times, by the People's Movements Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) against the Koodankulam nuclear power plant.[61] These groups came up with their own data, facts, and counter claims against the government's claim of power generation and other benefits or impacts of the tragedy and culpability of the corporations involved. They showed the enormous social, environmental, and financial costs associated with the construction of these gigantic projects. These revelations meant the government came under pressure and also had to be cautious and careful when it planned other such projects. These challenges from people's movements have not forced a complete abandonment of these projects, but they have surely got their implementers thinking and also led to a reduction in the numbers. Today it is no longer possible for the government to construct hazardous industrial plants like the one in Bhopal at the heart of an Indian city.

The struggle for proposing alternatives to government planning also meant that activists assume different roles. Their role is not only limited to organizing and protesting but expanded to acquiring scientific knowledge, analyzing data, arguing cases, writing articles and papers, and advocating their cause on national and international platforms, and proposing alternative policies and development practices. With the role of consultants and analysts becoming more pronounced in the new forms of governance, relying on expert knowledge for making crucial decisions rather than only depending on bureaucracy, the state now has far greater ability to co-opt the knowledge of progressive experts or academics. Hence, the greater need to develop the knowledge base and expertise of activists and movements, drawing upon other forms of knowledge and the experience of communities and cultures, and promoting alternative discourses.

These developments have contributed towards the existing vocabulary of protest and developed new idioms adopted by other ongoing struggles in the country. The heightened assertions by the people's movements also led to the enactment of a significant volume of rights-based legislation in the ten years of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) rule from 2004–14. The Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005 is a result of the struggles of these movements. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, MKSS (Workers Peasants Power Organisation) led the struggle for the RTI Act and used innovative means such as public hearings, using public data to unearth corruption,

59 The Bhopal gas tragedy is one of the worst industrial disasters in the world. It occurred on the night of December 3, 1984, leading to the instant death of 3,787 and causing injury to 5,58,125, with continuing deaths and third-generation children born with deformities. The accident happened due to a leak of Methyl isocyanate in the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal. The struggle of Bhopal gas survivors is documented at: www.bhopal.net

60 NBA supporters Suhas Paranjape and K. J. Joy came up with an alternative restructuring plan for the Sardar Sarovar dam in 2000. However, that plan was rejected by the government. See details at: http://www.indiatogether.org/stories/suhas-ssp.htm

61 S P Udaykumar, leader of PMANE, came up with "thirteen reasons why we do not want the Koodankulam Nuclear Power project" dated August 25, 2011: https://www.dianuke.org/thirteen-reasons-against-the-koodankulam-nuclear-power-project/

demanding accountability, and ensuring control over resources by the people impacting the governance at the bottom levels of administration. In addition, there is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of 2005, which mandates the government to provide 100 days of unskilled work to anyone asking for it at fixed wages, primarily in rural areas. This proved to be a face saver in times of drought and helped poor people. There are many problems with it, such as corruption, lack of funds, and resources, etc., but it is a program which is much needed. Then there is the Forest Rights Act (2006) which ended colonial rule of forest bureaucracy and handed individual and community rights over forested areas to forest-dwelling communities; the Right to Fair Compensation, Transparency in Land Acquisition, Resettlement, and Rehabilitation Act (2013) recognizes displacement as an issue and makes resettlement and rehabilitation a right; the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act (2008) was a significant addition to the labor protection legislation, given that 93% of India's labor force is in the unorganized sector; and the National Food Security Act (2013), since one third of the world's hungry live in India.

These pieces of legislation were a manifestation of the movement's own praxis emerging out of years of struggle and from traditional knowledge and community wisdom. These included belief in the concept of self-rule, equity, community rights, the principles of sustainability, decentralization, primacy of labor, and the role of humans in the conservation process. The underlying principles behind these pieces of legislation had those concepts at their heart, even though they were diluted due to the influence of other stakeholders and the political needs of business and the ruling classes. However, post-legislation, there was an important shift in the struggles and their strategies, relations with the government and on the movement dynamics, since the militancy of the movements, in many cases, was absorbed by the bureaucracies which arose on the path towards achieving this legislation. For some, these became an end to their struggles, which thus underwent a slow disappearance. Nevertheless, for many, the challenge in articulating alternatives remains, as does the wider question as to the relationships between the long-term agenda of the social transformation and the ongoing campaigns or struggles for implementation of these pieces of legislation for achieving rights and entitlements for the people.

In the past decade, global capital has suffered defeat at the hands of the people's resistance, like in Singur (against Tata Motors); Nandigram (against an Indonesian MNC); Raigad (against the Reliance Corporation); Niyamgiri (against Vedanta Mining); Lavasa (against the Hindustan Construction Company); and many in other parts of the country. These victories build on a counternarrative to the hegemonic development discourse and propose decentralized, localized, and less extractive development processes. Even then, they meaningfully and convincingly do not offer a vision to build just, equitable, and sustainable futures, respecting diversity and dignity, but seem to be more localized phenomena. Perhaps localization is the way, as opposed to the grand all-encompassing narratives?

Another challenge which remains in these changing times, and during the proliferation of alliances and networks, for those in non-party/independent movements for social justice is their relationship with the organized political parties and their affiliated organizations and movements, and especially of the left and the center-left, which are slowly ceding ground to the popular parties and politics. This question assumes importance, especially given the developments of the past five years, with the rise of new political parties, such as *Aam Aadmi Party* (Common Man's Party) coming out of the anti-corruption agitations and acquiring power.[62] This new party is popular in character, in line with similar developments across the world, and abhors adherence to any established ideology, but still it cannot fill the political deficit. Its failure to provide for an alternative form of politics poses the question as to whether there is a place for ideology in politics, or how far can social and political transformation be achieved through movements in today's age? In another way, the question of the transformation of the social movements to political movements is whether that will actually lead to credible and more progressive changes, going beyond the populist governments, which continue to hold sway in the country.

India, like other nations, is becoming a national security state, with unfettered powers of surveillance and repression, promulgating new laws in the name of the public good for fighting whatever the state labels "terror" and, on the other hand, abdicating all its reasonability in terms of the welfare state and veering more towards a regulatory state. This has resulted in various forms of social and physical repression – imprisonment, death, criminalization of leaders, judicial harassment, beatings, and so on. However, even as they continue to oppose the State's actions, many protest movements' demands remain targeted at the State and those in power: the discredited political parties. This poses a serious question for those struggling for alternatives and solutions beyond the rubric of the State structure and power.

The past two decades have also seen an assertion and rising prominence of another set of actors: the NGOs, big foundations, and now corporate philanthropies. They are playing a role in creating and manufacturing high decibel and visible campaigns, guiding discourses, and thereby facilitating take over of the movement space of negotiation by the foundations-supported civil society space. These are more palatable to the political elite. They impact the agenda setting, and adversely affect the general climate for raising poor people's issues in an already decreasing media and advocacy space due to increased corporate control. The challenge is being further compounded, since they have impacted the governance and service delivery mechanism and changed the terms of debate on the development paradigm, and are pushing forth their view

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62 For the past two years *(reference to 2011),* millions of common Indians have come out on the streets to fight against the biggest evil in our country today: corruption. This people's anti-corruption movement has exposed the ugly and greedy face of our politicians. No political party in India today works for the common man's needs. http://www.aamaadmiparty.org/why-are-we-entering-politics

of development and modernity, which is more in line with the market. These have led to a shift in the organizing trend and growth of the middle-class assertion, built on the back of the increased prosperity and deeper penetration of the means of communication and information.

These and many more such challenges lie ahead of the groups looking for an alternative to the development itself. These challenges need deeper interrogation and conversations through an enriching process of struggle and dialogue, which can strengthen collective struggles for a better world.

Ashish Kothari

TOWARDS RADICAL ECOLOGICAL DEMO-CRACY IN ASIA: LESSONS FROM INDIA[63]

A Grassroots Assertion

In the first few months of 2016, a series of events took place in India that should have made us all sit up.

On March 16, 2016, five *Adivasi* (indigenous people's) villages in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh (central India) unanimously vetoed the plans of South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL), a subsidiary of India's public-sector coal mining giant Coal India Limited (CIL), to mine their forests. These villages were Pelma, Jarridih, Sakta, Urba, and Maduadumar.

On March 23, the *Kamanda Gram Sabha* (village assembly) of Kalta G.P in Koida Tahsil of the Sundargarh district in Odisha unanimously decided not to give its land for the Rungta Mines, proposed by the Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation of Odisha (IDCO), south-eastern India.

On May 2, the National Green Tribunal directed that before clearance can be given for the Kashang Hydroelectricity project (to be built by the state-owned body Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd or HPPCL), the proposal be brought before the Lippa village *gram sabha* in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh in the Indian Himalayas for approval. The 1,200 residents of Lippa have been waging a seven-year struggle against the project.

And then, on May 7, the Supreme Court rejected a petition by the Odisha Mining Corporation seeking the reconvening of *gram sabhas* in the Niyamgiri hills to consider a mining proposal that the *sabhas* had rejected in 2013 (more on this below). The

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63   Parts of this article have been adapted from or based on Kothari, A., 2016, 'Beyond "development" and "growth": The search for alternatives in India towards a sustainable and equitable world', in Gareth Dale, Manu V. Mathai, and Jose Puppim de Oliveira (eds.), *Green Growth: Ideology, Political Economy and the Alternatives,* Zed Books, London. This article has benefited from comments by Sun Wei. Since this article was written in 2016, parts of it may be slightly dated by the time of publication.

court observed that the conclusion of the *gram sabhas* at that time was to reject the mining project, and the petitioner would have to approach an appropriate forum if it wanted to challenge this.

These events hold significance not only for the communities involved, but for India as a whole, and indeed for humanity, for they point to a more direct kind of democracy than has been practiced so far – one that locates power in the hands of ordinary people and questions the meaning of development by bringing in ecological and cultural issues. It is these implications that I would like to bring out in this essay, within the broad context of the ecologically unsustainable and deeply inequitable pathways that humanity has followed across the earth, and, more specifically, in India. Behind the glamour of the 21st-century urban pockets that India proudly showcases lie vast stretches of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, exploitation, inequality, and ecological ruin. In a recent book, a colleague and I have provided detailed facts and figures, and extensive analysis of these.[64] Growth in the post-1991 era of globalization in India, even when at fairly high rates, has not substantially increased net employment in the formal sector. India continues to occupy amongst the lowest positions in most global surveys of human development and social welfare, including the UNDP's Human Development Index, and various measures on the gender gap, malnutrition and undernutrition, and hunger. In such a "business as usual" scenario, there is an urgent need to search for alternatives.

Towards a radical ecological democracy
Across India, as elsewhere in the world, several rural and urban communities are exploring sustainable and equitable ways of achieving well-being in one or more sectors of life. These initiatives are a complex mix: of creating further spaces within the existing system and fundamentally challenging it, of retaining or regaining the best of tradition while discarding its worst, of synergizing old and new knowledge. Most of them point to a different set of principles and values than the ones on which the currently dominant economic and political structures are based. All of them have weaknesses and issues that need resolution, but they all show the potential for a different future for India. They point to a paradigm or vision of the future that can be called Radical Ecological Democracy (RED) or *eco-swaraj*:[65] a socio-cultural, political, and economic arrangement in which all people and communities have the right and

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64 Shrivastava, Aseem and Ashish Kothari (2012) *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India,* Viking/Penguin Books; For a short accessible summary of the book, see http://www.kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/Globalisation%20Brochure.pdf, accessed on June 22, 2015.

65 The term "swaraj" has a long history in India. Loosely translated as "self-rule", it is a combination of individual to community autonomy and responsible living; it was made known mostly by Mohandas Gandhi, including in his seminal work *Hind Swaraj*.

full opportunity to participate in decision-making, based on the twin fulcrums of ecological sustainability and human equity.[66]

Importantly, such a paradigm has emerged more from the lived experiences of grassroots movements and initiatives (many of which will be described below), though they do not use the term RED or *eco-swaraj* (some do use variants of *swaraj,* especially those with explicit or implicit roots in Gandhian thought and practice). This is not to deny the influence key ideologues, activists, and figures from Indian and global history have had both on me and on many of these initiatives, including Buddha, Gandhi, Marx, Ambedkar, Tagore, and tribal or other traditional revolutionaries and rebels. In my mind, RED is an eclectic mix of all these, plus strands of deep and social ecology from western thought and action. There is also a variation of this evolving as a framework of alternatives, in a process of countrywide gatherings of people working on initiatives in various sectors, called Vikalp Sangam or Alternatives Confluence.[67]

RED stands on five pillars: ecological sustainability, direct political democracy, economic democracy, social justice, and cultural diversity. I will briefly dwell on each of these below, except ecological sustainability, which, for the readers of this essay, is likely to be self-explanatory.

An alternative politics: power to communities

Direct or radical, embedded political governance goes well beyond the "representative" democracy that countries of the world have adopted. Decision-making starts from the smallest, most local unit, and builds to expanding spatial units. In India, the Constitution mandates governance by *panchayats* at the village and village cluster level, and by *ward committees* at the urban ward level. However, these are representative bodies, subject to the same pitfalls (albeit at smaller levels) that plague representative democracy at higher levels, including elite captures. It is crucial to empower the *gram sabha* (village assembly) in rural areas, and the area *sabha* (neighborhoods) in cities, or other equivalent bodies where it is practical for all members to participate in decision-making. All critical decisions relating to local issues should be taken at this level, with special provision to facilitate the equal participation of women and other marginalized sections.

The four events cited at the start of this essay are examples of a nascent or active radical democracy. Another, frequently cited, is Mendha-Lekha village in the

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66 An early treatment of this concept is in Kothari, Ashish (2009): 'Radical Ecological Democracy: Escaping India's Globalization Trap', *Development,* Vol. 52(3): 401–09; subsequent development is in Shrivastava and Kothari, *Churning the Earth,* Kothari, Ashish (2014a): 'India 2100: Towards Radical Ecological Democracy', *Futures,* Vol 56: 62–72, and Kothari, Ashish (2014b): 'Radical Ecological Democracy: a Path Forward for India and Beyond', *Development,* Vol. 57(1): 36–45.

67 Kothari, Ashish (2015) 'Confluence of hope: converging for a better world', India Together, March 11, http://indiatogether.org/vikalp-sangam-champions-of-alternative-sustainable-development-op-ed; see also www.vikalpsangam.org or www.alternativesindia.org

Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra state, which is self-governing under the principle of "our government in Mumbai and Delhi, but we are the government in our village". All decisions are taken by consensus in the village assembly, based on information generated by *abhyas gats* (study circles). A struggle against a big dam that was to displace Mendha-Lekha and dozens of other villages in the 1980s brought to the villagers the importance of self-mobilization.[68] Since then, the village has conserved 1,800 hectares of surrounding forest, and gained full rights to use, manage, and protect it under the Forest Rights Act 2006, reversing a couple of centuries of colonial and post-colonial top-down governance of forests.[69] It has moved towards fulfillment of all basic requirements of food, water, energy, and local livelihoods, including through the sustainable harvesting of bamboo from the forest. In 2013, it also turned all its agricultural land into village commons. Inspired by its example, several other villages in eastern Maharashtra are moving towards their own versions of self-rule.

In the state of Nagaland, a state government initiative called "communitisation", has devolved aspects of decision-making regarding health, education, and power (e.g. salaries and transfers of teachers) to village and town communities.[70] Another state-sponsored initiative, the People's Plan process in Kerala, attempted to create forums and the capacity for villages to carry out their own development plans, though it has suffered under inconsistent support from changing governments. Cities like Bengaluru and Pune are exploring participatory budgeting, with citizens able to submit their priorities for spending to influence the official budgets. While this has a number of pitfalls and shortcomings, such as local elite dominance, and the fact that citizens still cannot *determine* spending priorities, civil society groups see it as a step towards decentralizing and embedding political governance.[71]

But the local and the small-scale cannot by themselves create the change we need other than on some local issues. Many operations need to be coordinated and managed at much larger levels, such as the railways and communication services. Many problems (toxics and pollution, desertification, climate change) are at scales much larger than the individual settlement, emanating from and affecting entire

68   Pathak, Neema and Vivek Gour-Broome (2001) *Tribal Self-Rule and Natural Resource Management: Community Based Conservation at Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra, India,* Kalpavriksh, Pune/Delhi and International Institute of Environment and Development.

69   Pathak, Neema and Erika Taraporewala (2008), 'Towards self-rule and forest conservation in Mendha-Lekha village, Gadchiroli, India', Report of a consultation for a ICCA Consortium and IUCN TILCEPA-TGER project sponsored by the GTZ, Kalpavriksh, http://www.iccaforum.org/images/media/grd/mendha_india_report_icca_grassroots_discussions.pdf, accessed April 2013; Vasundhara and Kalpavriksh (2012) *A National Report on Community Forest Rights under Forest Rights Act: Status and Issues,* Vasundhara and Kalpavriksh in collaboration with Oxfam India.

70   Pathak Broome, Neema (2014) 'Communitisation of Public Services in Nagaland – A step towards creating alternative model of delivering public services?', case study for project on 'Alternative Practices and Visions in India: Documentation, Networking, and Advocacy', Kalpavriksh, Pune/Delhi, www.vikalpsangam.org/static/media/uploads/Resources/nagaland_communitisation_neema.pdf, accessed July 2015.

71   Menon, Sanskriti (2009) Participatory Budgeting. Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, http://www.desd.org/efc/Participatory%20Budgeting.htm, accessed March 2013; see also www.janaagraha.org

landscapes (and seascapes), countries, regions, and indeed the earth. In a RED scenario, such larger level governance is envisioned to be carried out as clusters or federations of villages and towns with common ecological features, larger landscape level institutions, and others that in some way also relate to the existing administrative and political units of districts and states (more on this below). Governance across states, and across countries, of course, presents special challenges; there are a number of lessons to be learnt from failed or only partially successful initiatives, such as the Kyoto Protocol, or sub-national regional initiatives, such as the river basin planning authorities in India.

Landscape and trans-boundary planning and governance (also called "bioregionalism", or "ecoregionalism", amongst other names) are exciting new approaches being tried out in several countries and regions. These are still fledgling in India, but some are worth learning from. For a decade, the Arvari Sansad (Parliament) in Rajasthan brought 72 villages in the state together to manage a 400 sq. km river basin through inter-village coordination, making integrated plans and programs for land, agriculture, water, wildlife, and development.[72] Its functioning has weakened in recent times, but it provides an important example to learn from. In the state of Maharashtra, a federation of Water User Associations has been handed over management of the Waghad Irrigation Project, the first time a government project has been completely devolved to local people.[73]

Though communities (rural and urban) will be the fulcrum of alternative futures, the state has a critical supporting and enabling role to play at least in the near future, especially to assist communities in situations where local capacity is weak, and to rein in business elements or others who behave irresponsibly towards the environment or people. Over time, however, nation-state boundaries may become far less divisive and important if genuine globalization (more on this below) is promoted; eventually they may become irrelevant. The increasing networking of peoples across the world, through both traditional means and new digital communications, could be a precursor to such a process. Cultural and ecological identities will become more important, but these too will be defined not so much as isolationist categories but as enriching diversity within the essential unity of humankind, a diversity to be celebrated, and with the openness of learning from each other.

Across all levels of decision-making above the smallest direct democracy unit, ways to ensure accountability of representatives have to be built in. Lessons could be

72 Hasnat, S.N. (2005) 'Arvari Sansad: The farmers' parliament', *LEISA India,* December, http://www.agriculturesnetwork.org/magazines/global/practice-and-policy/arvari-sansad-the-farmers2019-parliament, accessed April 2013; see also www.tarunbharatsangh.org

73 Paranjape, Suhas and K.J. Joy, Undated, The Ozar Water User Societies: Impact of society formation and co-management of surface water and groundwater, Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Pune, available at http://www.soppecom.org/pdf/Ozar%20WUA%20study%20report.pdf, accessed April 2013.

learnt from ancient Greek and Indian democracies, and from experiments in Latin America.[74] These include highly constrained "delegated" responsibility where representatives do not attain power independent of the constituency that has elected or selected them, but are subject to clear mandates given by the constituency, the right to recall, and having to report back. Referendums as a means of direct democracy at large levels, as is available in countries like Switzerland, can also be institutionalized.

Economic democracy and localization

Radical or direct democracy can only work with an economic system that acknowledges and respects ecological limits, democratizes production and consumption, and enhances local self-reliance for basic needs. One of the principles of responsible governance is subsidiarity, in which those living closest to the resource (the forest, the sea, the coast, the farm, the factory, the urban facility, etc.) should be empowered to manage it. This is because it is assumed that they would have the greatest stake, and often the best knowledge, to manage it. Of course, this is not always the case, for centuries of government- or corporate-dominated policies have effectively crippled community institutional structures, customary rules, and other capacities. A move towards open localization of essential production, consumption, and trade, and of health, education, and other services, is eminently possible if civil society organizations and the government sensitively assist communities.

Sustainable agriculture using a diversity of crops has been demonstrated by thousands of farmers (including the most marginal, caste-discriminated women farmers) where two community groups, the Timbaktu Collective and the Deccan Development Society, work in Andhra Pradesh and Telengana, by communities working with the Green Foundation in Karnataka, by farmers of the Beej Bachao Andolan, and by the Jaiv Panchayat network of Navdanya.[75] Sustainable pastoralism has been sustained or revived amongst nomadic or resident pastoral communities with whom the group Anthra works.[76] Community conservation of forests, wetlands, grasslands, and coastal/marine areas, and also of wildlife populations and species, is spread over several thousand sites in Odisha, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Nagaland, and other states.[77] Water self-sufficiency in arid, drought-prone areas has been demonstrated by hundreds of villages through decentralized harvesting and strict self-regulation of use, such as in the Alwar district of Rajasthan by Tarun Bharat

74 Muhlberger, Steve (1998) 'Democracy in Ancient India', http://www.nipissingu.ca/department/history/muhlberger/histdem/indiadem.htm#text20, accessed on 22 June 2015; Roper, Brian (2013) *The History of Democracy: A Marxist Interpretation,* Pluto Press; Lang, Miriam, and Dunia Mokrani (eds.) (2013) *Beyond Development: Alternative visions from Latin America,* Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung and Transnational Institute.

75 www.ddsindia.com; http://www.greenconserve.com/; http://www.navdanya.org/campaigns/jaiv-panchayat

76 www.anthra.org

77 Pathak, Neema (ed.) (2009) *Community Conserved Areas in India: A Directory,* Kalpavriksh

Sangh, and in Kachchh by Sahjeevan and other groups.[78] In Bhuj town (Kachchh, Gujarat), groups like Hunnarshala, Sahjeevan, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, and ACT have teamed up to mobilize slum dwellers, women's groups, and other citizens into reviving watersheds and creating a decentralized water storage and management system, manage solid wastes, generate a livelihood for poor women, create adequate sanitation, and provide dignified housing for all.[79]

But again, local is not enough. Parallel to political institutions at landscape and larger scales, there is a need to conceive of economics at scales different from the currently dominant structure. This includes trade and exchange conducted on the principles of democracy and fairness. Groups of villages, or villages and towns, could form units to further such economic democracy. For instance, in Tamil Nadu state, the Dalit panchayat head of Kuthambakkam village, Ramaswamy Elango, envisages organizing a cluster of between 7–8 and 15–16 villages to form a "free trade zone" or "regional network economy", in which they will trade goods and services with each other (on mutually beneficial terms) to reduce dependence on the outside market and government. This way, the money stays back in the area for reinvestment in local development, and relations amongst villages become stronger.[80] In the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu, the initiative Just Change has brought together producers, consumers, and investors to form a single cooperative, enhancing the localization of exchanges that are benefiting several hundred families.[81]

Communities across larger landscapes could get together and prepare land/water use plans. Such plans, for each bioregion, could be combined into state and national plans, permanently putting the country's ecologically and socially most fragile or important lands under some form of conservation status (fully participatory and mindful of local rights and tenure). Such a plan would also enjoin towns and cities to provide as many resources from within their boundaries as possible through water harvesting, rooftop and vacant plot farming, decentralized energy generation, and so on; and to build mutually beneficial rather than parasitic relations with rural areas from where they will still need to take resources.

Such approaches provide massive opportunities for livelihood generation. There needs to be a renewed emphasis on labor-intensive industries and infrastructure, including handlooms and handicrafts, local energy projects, local access roads and communication lines, and others that people can be in control of, building on their own traditional knowledge or with easily acquired new skills. Jharkhand's state-created

78 www.tarunbharatsangh.org; http://www.sahjeevan.org/ta_drinking_water.html

79 www.hunnar.org/iup.htm; http://www.sahjeevan.org/ta_urban_initiative.html

80 R. Elango, personal communication, January 2013; Cajka, Adam (2014) 'Kuthambakkam', case study for project on 'Alternative Practices and Visions in India: Documentation, Networking, and Advocacy', Kalpavriksh, Pune/Delhi, www.vikalpsangam.org/static/media/uploads/Resources/kuthumbakkam_1st_july.pdf, accessed July 2015.

81 www.justchangeindia.com

initiative, Jharcraft, has in less than a decade enhanced the livelihoods of over 300,000 families with relatively simple inputs to empower the producers of silk cloth, cotton handlooms, metalcraft, tribal art, leatherwork, bamboo and cane furniture, and so on.[82] Another state government initiative, Kudumbashree in Kerala, has provided or enhanced livelihoods for 400,000 women in various local production or service units, though, like many such successful large enterprises, there are tensions created by political parties vying for control and unequal empowerment.[83] The social enterprise SELCO has enhanced the livelihood and social conditions of over 150,000 families through decentralized solar power, provided by ensuring financial linkages that help the families ultimately pay for it themselves.[84]

India also has several dozen producer companies and cooperatives of farmers, craftspersons, fishers, pastoralists, and others; many of them run along democratic lines of decision-making and revenue-sharing. Apart from the Just Change initiative mentioned above, this includes the Nowgong Agriculture Producer Company Ltd (NAPCL) in Madhya Pradesh, the Aharam Traditional Crop Producer Company (ATCPC) in Tamil Nadu, and the Dharani Farming and Marketing Cooperative Ltd in Andhra Pradesh, all examples of farmer-run companies encompassing several settlements that enable producers to directly reach their markets; Qasab – Kutch Craftswomen's Producer Co. Ltd in Kachchh does the same for women working on embroidery, appliqué, and patchwork.[85]

At several places in India where the above initiatives are active, rural-urban migration has slowed down and been reversed. Similar results have been seen in villages like Ralegan Siddhi and Hivare Bazaar in the state of Maharashtra, in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh where Samaj Pragati Sahayog is active, the village Kuthambakkam in Tamil Nadu, and others.

A close corollary to the discussion of economic localization is the nature of money. It may remain an important medium of exchange, but it needs to be much more locally controlled and managed rather than anonymously by international financial institutions and markets. Considerable local trade could revert to locally designed currencies or bartering, and the prices of products and services, even when expressed in monetary terms, could be decided between givers and receivers rather than by an impersonal, non-controllable distant "market". A huge range of local currencies

82 Dhirendra Kumar, MD, Jharcraft, personal communication, February 2013; Kothari, Ashish (2013a) 'Being the Change', *The Hindu,* April 21, http://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/being-the-change/article4636561. ece, accessed April 2013.

83 Devika (2014) Don't Let the Magic Fade: Thoughts on Kudumbashree's Sixteenth Anniversary, *Kafila,* August 16, http://kafila.org/2014/08/16/dont-let-the-magic-fade-thoughts-on-kudumbashrees-sixteenth-anniversary/, accessed November 2014; see also www.kudumbashree.org

84 Bidwai, Praful (2009) *An India That Can Say Yes,* Heinrich Boll Foundation; SELCO (undated) *Access to Sustainable Energy Services via Innovative Financing: 7 Case Studies,* SELCO

85 Avani Mohan Singh, NAPCL Board, pers. comm., 2009; http://www.timbaktu-organic.org/aboutdharani.html; http://www.facebook.com/pages/Qasab-Kutch-Craftswomen-Producer-Co-Ltd/120970047978656

and non-monetary ways of trading and providing/obtaining services are already being used around the world.[86] Reviving public control of the monetary and financial system, and reorienting financial measures such as taxation, subsidies, and other fiscal incentives/disincentives to support ecological sustainability and related human security and equity goals is critical; key elements of this were laid out in India's draft National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan produced in 2004 and shelved by the government.[87]

Towards a just society

For localization to succeed, it is crucial to deal with the socio-economic exploitation and inequities embedded deep in the daily lives of Indians, arising both from tradition and from modernity, including in relations of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, and others. Such inequities can indeed be tackled, as witnessed in the case of Dalit women gaining dignity and pride through the activities of the Deccan Development Society in Andhra, Dalits and "higher" castes interacting with much greater equality in the Kuthambakkam village of Tamil Nadu where mixed housing has also been promoted, and Adivasis gaining recognition and equal status through "self-rule" and other movements in central India. Initiatives like that of Maati Sangathan in Uttarakhand have mobilized and empowered women to resist domestic violence, gain independent livelihoods, and challenge male-dominated political processes. The group URMUL in Rajasthan has succeeded in enabling girls to access education and other services earlier denied to them by a highly patriarchal society.[88] Associations of waste pickers and hawkers, such as the KKPKP in Pune and Hasirudala in Bengaluru and the National Hawkers Federation, have provided substantial dignity to people otherwise socially shunned by the rest of society by enhancing incomes, building relations with middle-class households, and showing that they are an essential part of the city.[89]

Cultural diversity and knowledge democracy

India boasts enormous socio-cultural diversity (including nearly 800 distinct languages, according to a recent People's Linguistic Survey led by Prof. Ganesh Devy),[90] with close links to its biodiversity. Development and modernity have wiped out substantial parts of this diversity, but a number of initiatives aimed at alternative living are successfully resisting this. The women of the Deccan Development

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86 http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/ijccr/index.html, accessed on June 22, 2015; http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/ijccr/pdfs/IJCCR%20vol%2012%20(2008)%201%20deMeulenaere.pdf

87 Kalpavriksh and TPCG (2005) *Securing India's Future: Final Technical Report of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan,* Kalpavriksh, available at http://www.kalpavriksh.org/index.php/conservation-livelihoods1/72-biodiversity-and-wildlife/national-biodiversity-strategy-action-plan/224-nbsap-final-technical-report.html, accessed April 2013.

88 www.urmul.org; see especially http://www.urmul.org/?product=beyond-novella-memories-of-change

89 http://www.wastepickerscollective.org; http://www.swachcoop.com; http://www.hasirudala.in

90 http://peopleslinguisticsurvey.org/

Society, for instance, regularly celebrate festivals and occasions related to all religions (including highlighting the links between cultural and biological diversity).

The generation, transmission, and use of knowledge and of ethical perspectives are crucial pillars of any society. RED envisages the dissolution of several boundaries that currently dominant forms of education, learning, and research have created: between the "physical", "natural", and "social" sciences, between these sciences and the "arts", between "traditional" and "modern" knowledge, and so on. A number of alternative education, learning, and research initiatives attempt to do this: schools like *pachasaale* of the Deccan Development Society in Andhra Pradesh, the *jeevan shalas* ("life schools") of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, struggling to save the Narmada valley and its inhabitants from a series of mega-dams, and the Adharshila Learning Centre in Madhya Pradesh; colleges like the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat; open learning institutions like the Bija Vidyapeeth in Dehradun in Uttarakhand, Bhoomi College in Bengaluru, and Swaraj University in Udaipur.[91]

Many of the initiatives on alternative living also attempt to synergize various knowledge systems, emanating from local communities, formal scientific institutions, and others. Sustainable food production, water harvesting, appropriate shelter, and so on, are successfully achieved with such knowledge mixes. Several groups are working on public health systems that empower communities to deal with most of their health issues through combining traditional and modern systems, and through strengthening the links between safe food and water, nutrition, preventive health measures, and curative care. Also crucial in all this is that knowledge remains in the commons, instead of being privatized through IPRs; various creative commons, open source, and other movements are examples of this.

Finally, and equally important, RED would also promote, and in turn be strengthened by, a freeing of the personal and community spirit from the bounds of materialism and bigoted religiosity. Quests for improving oneself through spiritual means would be reinforced by the spirit of living and working in communities, and would, in turn, reinforce the community. The balance between the individual and the community is always delicate and has to be carefully nurtured. Here too the notion of *swaraj* is important, for it contains the principle of individual autonomy and freedom carefully balanced with the responsibilities that such an individual has towards the collective; Gandhi could perhaps be read as an anarchist in his emphasis on individual autonomy, but also as a socialist in his focus on the collective. Many traditional

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91 http://www.ddsindia.com/www/psaale.htm; http://www.ddsindia.com/www/Education.htm
    http://www.narmada.org/ALTERNATIVES/jeevanshalas.html
    http://adharshilask.tripod.com/aboutadh.html
    http://www.Adivasiacademy.org.in
    http://www.navdanya.org/earth-university
    www.bhoomi.org
    www.swarajuniversity.org

societies were perhaps too heavily tilted on the side of the collective, modern society is clearly too individualistic, and it is the balance between the two that has to be achieved.

Meaningful globalization

RED is not to be construed as an argument against globalization per se. Throughout human history, the flow of ideas, persons, services, and materials amongst the regions of the world has often enriched human societies. With its focus on localized economies, cultural diversity, and ethical lifestyles, and the elimination of the homogenizing, steamrolling effect of global finance and development hegemonies, RED would actually make the flow of ideas and innovations at the global level much more meaningful, leading to the enrichment of all cultures rather than of a few at the cost of the most. To paraphrase Gandhi, globalization of this kind would enable the winds of all cultures to blow freely across peoples and regions, but not allow any one to sweep another into oblivion.

A most urgent need of such a global exchange is to share the various ideas and visions of alternatives that are being discussed or practiced across the world. India's *Adivasis* and other local communities may find much that resonates with their own resistance modes and alternative worldviews in the various versions of *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* ("good living") as articulated by the indigenous peoples of South America. The rich in India could learn from some of the *décroissance* or "degrowth" processes or "voluntary simplicity" initiatives in Europe and the USA.[92] More practically, India needs to build much better relations with neighboring countries, based on our common ecological, cultural, and historical contexts. Transboundary landscape and seascape management would be an example, including "peace zones" oriented towards conservation where there are currently intense conflicts (e.g. the Siachen glacier between India and Pakistan). The Sustainable Development Goals framework, though flawed on a number of counts, could provide some opportunities for global relations.[93]

In moving towards this transformation of the nature of globalization, we will need to explicitly reject the "nationalism" tendencies that are cropping up in many parts of the world (including in India), which are xenophobic and intolerant of "outsiders". It is precisely the negative impacts of economic globalization that have created such tendencies, as ordinary people everywhere see their lives uprooted and their economic opportunities becoming limited (making it easier to blame "outsiders" for the

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92 Gudynas, E. (2011) 'Buen vivir: Today's tomorrow', *Development,* Vol. 54(4); Lang and Mokrani, *Beyond Development;* Demaria, F., F. Schneider, F. Sekulova, and J. Martinez-Alier, 2013, What is degrowth? From an activist slogan to a social movement, *Environmental Values,* Vol. 22: 191–215

93 Kothari, Ashish (2013b) 'Development and Ecological Sustainability in India: Possibilities for a Post-2015 Framework' Oxfam India, Delhi, available at: http://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/Working%20 paper%2016%20-%20Dr.%20Ashish%20Kothari.pdf, accessed March 2013.

situation). With more localized, self-reliant economies, a focus on meaningful livelihoods and employment, and with the revival of dynamic social and cultural patterns, people of one region will hopefully be far more open to exchanges and relations with people from other regions and cultures, and indeed multiculturality may become the norm.

Principles and values

It is important to deduce the principles and values that emerge from ongoing initiatives in alternatives, which would form the bedrock for the RED framework, and show just how different it is from today's capitalist or state-dominated economic and political systems (including their "green economy" and "green growth" narratives, which remain trapped within the status quo) especially when they are all taken together:[94]

– Respecting the functional *integrity and resilience of ecological processes and biological diversity,* enshrining the *right of nature* and all species to thrive in conditions in which they have evolved.
– *Equitable access* of all people, in current and future generations, to the conditions needed for human well-being.
– The *right of each person and community to participate* meaningfully in decision-making, and the *responsibility* to ensure this is based on ecological integrity and socio-economic equity.
– Respect for the *diversity* of environments and ecologies, species and genes, cultures, ways of living, knowledge systems, values, economies and livelihoods, and polities.
– *Collective and cooperative thinking and working* founded on the commons, respecting individual freedoms and innovations within such collectivities.
– Social and human *resilience* in the face of external and internal forces of change.
– Mindfulness towards *interconnectedness* amongst humans, and between humans and the rest of nature.
– *Simplicity* and *enoughness,* with *satisfaction* and *happiness* derived from the quality of relationships.
– Respect for the *dignity and creativity of labor and work,* with no occupation or work being inherently superior to another, and the need for work to be dignified, safe, free from exploitation, and enjoyable.
– *Non-violence, harmony, peace.*

These values will continue to evolve as frameworks like RED are explored, modified, and adapted for the diversity of life on earth.

94 For more details, see the People's Sustainability Treaty on Radical Ecological Democracy, http://radicalecologicaldemocracy.wordpress.com/, accessed January 2013.

Challenges and opportunities for transformation

For its wider implementation, RED calls for massive mindset, structural, and behavioral shifts. It faces serious challenges, including inadequate understanding of the impacts of human activities on the environment and of the workings of nature, continuing tension between various knowledge systems hampering synergistic innovation, a political and bureaucratic leadership that, for the most part, lacks ecological literacy, unaccountable state and corporate power, an entrenched patriarchy, corruption of various kinds, continued militarization, and a feeling of "helplessness" amongst the general public.

But in India, as in many other parts of the world, the above-mentioned and thousands of other initiatives are signs that a transformation is possible over the next few decades, especially in conjunction with strong resistance by communities and civil society against the imposition of destructive "development" projects and processes, and the commercialization of life and knowledge. Aiding the above are the occasional progressive policies of governments, and technological innovations that make human life not only less dreary but also more ecologically sensitive – in industrial and agricultural production, energy, housing and construction, transportation, household equipment, and others – often building on traditional technologies.

Who will lead the way to a RED future? People's movements and civil society organizations, mostly in the non-party political sector (including progressive worker unions in the formal and informal sector), are likely to continue being the main change makers into the near future. At times, sections and individuals within government, political parties, and academic institutions have taken the lead, or helped communities and civil society organizations, and it is important to continue to push for more radical changes within such institutions. But in India, as in some other parts of the world, there is a long historical tradition of bottom-up resistance and reconstruction (as seen prominently in response to the macro-economic and political forces of domination during both colonial and post-colonial times, implying civil society activism for at least 200 years), the continuation in some (even if weakened) form of several thousand years of knowledge and wisdom, multiple forms of enlightened leadership from amongst "ordinary" people as also amongst elite sections, a relatively independent media and judiciary, and the opportunities provided by a democratic set-up, howsoever flawed it might be. Additionally, Indians now have a much greater chance of interacting with people around the world, building networks of resistance and alternatives, learning from each other (and at the recent International Degrowth Conference in Budapest in September 2016, I proposed a Global Alternatives Confluence, building on the process of the Vikalp Sangam in India mentioned above). It is this complex of phenomena that will, hopefully, make RED-like trends prosper in the coming decades, not only in India but globally.

Philip Degenhardt

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION –
A DISCURSIVE CLASSIFICATION

1 Introduction

Arguments in support of socio-ecological transformation often begin with critiques of current understandings of sustainable development. However, this should not be taken as implying that these arguments seek to question the basic ideas behind this issue. Rather, they focus on the "real capitalist" character of the way in which sustainable ideas are currently being implemented (see Dellheim 2008: 234–235; Brand & Wissen 2011a: 21–23; Adler & Schachtschneider 2012; Brangsch et al. 2012: 15). In terms of a theoretical understanding, sustainable development needs to combine three basic factors: economics, society, and ecology (Bethge et al. 2011: 15). Supporters of socio-ecological transformation often argue that project implementation in sustainable development normally prioritizes economic over social and environmental factors. This is reflected in the fact that proponents of social-ecological transformation also tend to view the Rio92 process[95] as a failure. They argue that the multilateral rounds of negotiations that took place in Rio with the aim of solving climate change did not result in any significant changes to international energy or resource policy (see Wahl 2012). Moreover, greenhouse gas emissions are continually rising, fossil fuels are now being extracted with new ecologically damaging methods, and social problems are worsening. Despite this situation, current debates continue to tout economic growth and increased efficiency as universal remedies; it seems to have become impossible to conceive of a future without sacrosanct economic growth. In reality, however, the need for growth is enshrined within the system of capitalist value creation and its reliance on the continued production of added value.

Although scientists and experts have demanded that restrictions be placed on CO_2

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95 The Rio92 process refers to the United Nations Earth Summit that was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and its follow-up conferences; it strongly influenced the global discourse on sustainability.

emissions, reductions to fishing quotas, increased protection of biodiversity, and other much-needed regulations, these have only been integrated into national and international law to a limited extent.

"In short, properly dealing with the environmental crisis means changing the socio-economic conditions that primarily caused this crisis, in other words, industrialist-fossilist capitalism" (Brand 2011 46).

In recent years, a paradigm shift has taken place at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung: a shift away from sustainable development and towards socio-ecological transformation. It is important to realize that socio-ecological transformation is not a new, revolutionary idea. Rather, the concept combines alternative approaches and understandings of development. As the name suggests, it also attempts to bring back into focus the neglected aspects of sustainable development, i.e. social and environmental issues. Finally, the way in which the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung applies socio-ecological transformation as a working concept has similarities with other critical approaches embedded within the discourse of degrowth.

2 The emergence of socio-ecological transformation as a concept

The emergence of socio-ecological transformation as a developmental policy paradigm can be traced back to socio-ecological research and social ecology. Social ecology, as developed by the Frankfurt School at the Institute for Social-Ecological Research (ISOE), has been particularly influential and the ISOE is constantly referred to in the debate in Germany about the meaning and direction of socio-ecological transformation (see Wissen 2010: 107; Brand & Wissen 2011a: 15; Brand 2012: 60–61).

2.1 Socio-ecological research as an academic foundation

"The environmental crisis provides the background for a new form of politically and ethically motivated critique of science that began in the 1970s and 1980s. The movement against the construction and operation of nuclear power plants was particularly important in its rejection of the complicity of science and industry and their involvement in the self-destructive dynamics brought about by unchecked scientific and technological progress. Moreover, the anti-nuclear movement called for environmental alternatives to a form of science that promoted the ideologies of progress and the domination of nature" (Becker & Jahn 2006: 13).

In this view, the crisis-ridden dysfunctional relationship between the individual, society, and nature has caused the environmental crisis. This leads to a number of central issues within socio-ecological research; this particularly includes a focus on the structures, reciprocal relationships, and the relationship between individuals, society, and nature (see Becker 2006: 34–36). Becker emphasizes that the historical and scientific handling of these interwoven relations led to a crisis in science that was viewed as justifying the need for a new scientific discipline. The division of the scientific landscape into the humanities and the natural sciences meant that it was no longer

possible to resolve the complex problems caused by the dysfunctional relationship between society and nature (see Becker 2006: 42–50). In order to solve and describe these problems, a new, trans-disciplinary approach was needed. The emerging social movements of the 1970s and 1980s were an important driving force behind the formation of this discipline in Germany[96] and they led to the politicization of nature. From this point on, nature was no longer seen as an environmental category, but as a political category in need of discussion. This understanding made it possible to develop new ways of dealing with the intertwined relations between society and nature (see Becker 2006: 51–53).

In order to define more clearly the interactions within this mesh of relations, social relationships with nature were introduced as the epistemic object of socio-ecological research. Social relationships with nature:

"conceptually represent the dynamic patterns of relations between the fields of 'society' and 'nature'. Society's relationships with nature are materially regulated and culturally symbolised" (Becker & Jahn 2006: 489).

The scientific objective of socio-ecological research involves providing early predictions of crises in social relations with nature, and developing strategies as well as uncovering the consequences, such as the relocation of a problem to a different social, environmental, or economic sector. Problems that develop out of a solution to an existing problem are known as second-order problems (see Becker & Jahn 2006: 58). Because second-order problems are related to other issues that influence the economic, ecological, social, and political spheres, they form part of the complex socio-ecological problems that need to be solved (see Becker et al. 1999: 4). When politics, the economy, civil society groups and other actors attempt to intervene and regulate socio-environmental problems, structural changes to social relationships with nature can take place. In social ecology, these transitionary processes are known as socio-ecological transformations (see Kluge & Hummel 2006: 259).

2.2 The term "transformation"

Transformation is currently being discussed within diverse debates and discourses. The term itself has been particularly marked by Polanyi, who, as part of his discussion of the "Great Transformation", describes the decoupling of economies and societies (see Polanyi 1995). Similarly, other actors, such as the German government's Advisory Council on Global Change, are calling for a "social contract for a great transformation" (see WBGU 2011). Furthermore, the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has proposed "A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development" (see UN 2013) and Thomas Silberhorn, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal

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96 A similar process started in other countries, such as the US, slightly earlier (see Becker 2003: 3).

Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), speaks of a global transformation:

"We want to formulate global goals for sustainable development for the period after 2015. In doing so, we are faced with the highly complex task of agreeing on a coherent system of objectives that would set the path towards a global transformation and sustainable development, eradicate absolute poverty and secure the livelihoods of current and future generations" (Silberhorn 2014: n.p.).

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung builds on Polanyi's ideas and calls for a "second great transformation" (see Reißig 2009; Klein 2010; and for a discussion of the left-wing transformation debate, see Brie & Candeias 2012; Brie 2014). The use of the term "transformation" within the left-wing spectrum results from, among other aspects, the negative connotations associated with the alternatives: terms such as "revolution" or "reform" are no longer appropriate. At the same time, a term was needed that could unite the diverse stakeholders and alliances (see Demirović 2012: 34).

When defining transformation, it is also important that it is distinguishable from transition, development, and structural change (see Luks et al. 2007: 116; Brand 2012). This article uses the definition of transformation provided by Brand:

"Transformation […] is understood as a comprehensive socio-economic, political and sociocultural process of change, which, although it involves controls and strategies, cannot be reduced to them. Transformation is used analytically and is not reducible to normatively justifiable positions on change or to a solidarity-based sustainable society" (Brand 2012: 52).

3 Socio-ecological transformation: a left-wing intervention in sustainability discourse

According to Becker, socio-ecological transformation involves "structural changes to social relationships with nature" (2003: 26). However, this is not enough to anchor socio-ecological transformation as a development paradigm.

Outside of the German party-political landscape and academic debates, discussions about socio-ecological transformation are particularly common within a left-wing environment. The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, a foundation associated with DIE LINKE, is a particular driving force, having produced publications on various aspects of socio-ecological reconstruction/socio-ecological transformation (see Brie et al. 2007; Dellheim & Krause 2008; Wittich & Meier 2010; Brangsch et al. 2012; Brand et al. 2013; Klein 2013; Brie 2014; Brie 2015).

Although DIE LINKE generally discusses transformation in terms of "socio-ecological restructuring", and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung prefers "socio-ecological transformation", both concepts refer to the same issues. Socio-ecological transformation describes the process, whereas socio-ecological restructuring can be defined as the goal behind this process (for a discussion of this point, see Wolf 2008). Nevertheless, there is normally very little to distinguish between the two terms.

Schmelzer, for example, views socio-ecological transformation as the goal of all degrowth discourses (see 2015: 116). Asara et al. define "socially sustainable degrowth as socio-ecological transformation" (see 2015). In this article, socio-ecological transformation is understood as the approach discussed at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung and within the discourse of degrowth (for a further delineation of terms, see Chapter 3.1.2).

3.1 Embedding in the current discourse on sustainability

The view that the products needed to produce our food, and our food production itself, our relationship with nature, our modes of production and our lifestyle all need to become sustainable or more sustainable has become the focus of worldwide attention. The answers that have been put forward, and the consequences that have been drawn from this understanding, however, have been very different.

Although a large amount of criticism has been voiced over the hegemonic orientation of the sustainability discourse, socio-ecological transformation as a concept can still be traced to this discourse. Hopwood et al. have developed a matrix to summarize the differences between sustainability discourses (see Figure 1) and placed socio-ecological transformation within the most progressive discourses. They classify sustainability discourses according to their socio-economic positions on issues such as well-being and equality, but also comparatively analyze them in terms of their positions on environmental issues (see Hopwood et al. 2005. 41, Figure 1). The discourse of socio-ecological transformation is related to the anti-capitalist, socio-ecological eco-feminist, eco-socialist, and indigenous movements. All of these discourses are strongly critical of hegemonic neoliberal discourses of growth and share a focus on securing a "real" socially and environmentally sustainable future. Moreover, they avoid prioritizing the economic sphere with regard to the three factors constituting sustainability: economics, society, and ecology.

When it comes to distinguishing between weak and strong sustainability (for a definition, see Michelsen & Adomssent 2014: 32–34), socio-ecological transformation falls under the scope of very strong sustainability, as it treats nature as something of irreplaceable value (see Michelsen & Adomssent 2014: 33).

Figure 1: The position of socio-ecological transformation within sustainability discourses (based on Hopwood et al. 2005: 41)
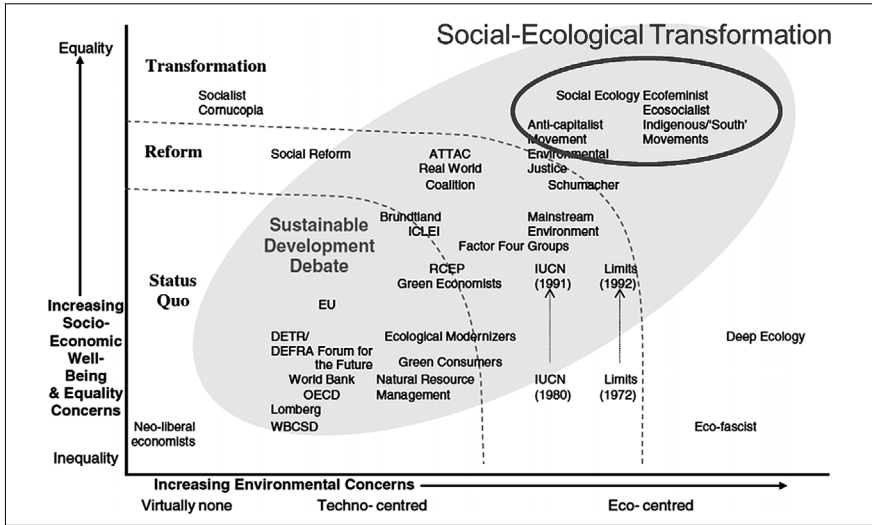
The following discusses the links and differences between influential sustainability discourses that are closely related to socio-ecological transformation.

3.1.1 The critique of ecological modernization and the Green New Deal

It should be clear by now that the ideas behind socio-ecological transformation cannot be equated with approaches to sustainability that are based on efficiency and economic growth (such as those espoused by the World Bank and the OECD, etc.). However, it is still important to discuss approaches to sustainability that aim for a green restructuring of the economy. These approaches are based on ecological modernization[97] or the Green New Deal[98] and have garnered wide support among international organizations and political parties. This also includes the "Green New Deal" proposed by the German parliamentary group Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, as well as the European Union's "Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" and the United Nations Environment Programme's "Green Economy" (see EU 2010; UNEP 2011; Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2013). All of these concepts are united by the

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97 "The basic idea behind concepts of ecological modernisation is: in the industrial society, the dimension of environmental destruction has become a priority problem for the universal population. It can and must be solved by science and technology/technologies through eco-efficiency. It is primarily about resource efficiency – about consistency and sufficiency – this means a profound transformation of industrial production processes, and, as such, their ecological modernisation" (Brangsch et al. 2012: 145).

98 Concepts such as Green Growth and Green Economy are also situated under the heading Green New Deal.

belief that sustainable modes of production and lifestyles could be developed through a "green", ecological transformation of the economy.

From the perspective of socio-ecological transformation, ecological modernization is particularly problematic because it hardly ever mentions, let alone critically questions, the actors behind the multiple crises or the context in which their actions take place, which, of course, is an inherent aspect of the system within which they operate. Furthermore, proponents of ecological modernization do not see capital oligarchies or the six destructive components[99] as the root of the problem. On the contrary, they view the actors behind the six destructive components as the solution to the worsening multiple crises (Brangsch et al. 2012: 150). As such, ecological modernization neither focuses on the causes of the multiple crises, nor aims to do away with the existing constellation of power. Rather, its supporters merely hope that capital oligarchs will demonstrate enough insight and goodwill to do "the right thing" (see Brangsch et al. 2012: 138, 151). Moreover, ecological modernization also ignores rebound effects, second-order problems, and the associated possibility of further expanding the environmental footprint (see Ludewig 2014: 3, Brangsch et al. 2012: 143). It also focuses on the upper and middle classes of industrial countries as the actors of sustainable change and thus disregards the majority of the world's population. Its neo-colonial mind-set means scandalous, inhumane working conditions, such as those found within the rare-earth mining industry in the Global South, are rarely discussed; it seems the social needs of the global poor are less important than the environmental interests of people in industrialized countries. Finally, the influence and importance of an active civil society and the checks and balances it provides are not represented strongly enough in the concepts of green capitalism (see Brangsch et al. 2012: 148, 150–151). Instead, the focus remains on increasing economic growth, albeit in a green manner. This means that the fossilist-capitalist mode of production and its accompanying lifestyles that caused the multiple crises are only questioned on the periphery:

"Green capitalism is to be rejuvenated through accelerated technological revolution, the energy transition, the circular economy, and the tendency towards the complete restructuring of the material and technological basis of production. Indeed, this is to be done through the aspect which capitalism has always been best at – the constant upheaval of productive forces. The basic social structure, even the dominant social conditions, the distribution of income, the current model of consumption, and the 'imperial lifestyle' (Ulrich Brand) of the North, etc., remain untouched" (Schachtschneider 2012: 5).

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99 Brangsch et al. argue that in order to promote socio-ecological transformation, the "destructive quartet" (2012: 17) consisting of the energy sector, the transport sector, agriculture and agribusiness, and the security sector/the military-industrial complex will have to undergo reconstruction (see Brangsch et al. 2012: 18). In particular, their interconnections and relations to the financial sphere and the high-tech sector are blamed for the current multiple crises, leading them to be described as the "six destructive components" (2012: 105; see Brangsch et al. 2012: 105–126).

The various concepts that can be unified under the banner of the Green New Deal also need to be considered critically. The "New Deal" refers to the reforms initiated in the wake of the Great Depression during the 1930s by President Roosevelt in the US. The "Green New Deal" is part of the same mind-set but relies on green technology and innovation to reform the capitalist economy (see Schachtschneider 2012: 6). Fücks (a member of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's executive board since 1996) describes the common features of the Green New Deal in the following manner:

"As different as the concepts may be that sail under this flag, they have a common core: first, they involve a great leap towards a sustainable economy. This includes the development of public transport, environmentally friendly restoration of buildings, large-scale promotion of renewable energy and environmentally friendly technologies. Second, they involve equal opportunities for all and social participation, particularly through massive investment in education and vocational training. Finally, they seek to integrate global capitalism within a global regulatory environment and prevent a relapse into protectionism and nationalism" (Fücks 2009: 3).

Dellheim & Wolf are critical of this view:

"Fücks' 'inventory of the New Deal' is superficial. However, his reasoning is logical if his intention is to balance the interests of the 'economy', social interests of the majority population and environmental requirements, and to do so in a manner that preserves (and improves) natural living conditions without posing structural questions about the existing social relations of domination. An approach that is not aimed at changing anything about current power structures will inevitably marginalise the interests of vulnerable groups, have to accept social inequality and be left to largely search for solutions to environmental problems through technical and technological improvements. Anyone who is unwilling to take steps towards a new form of society – in which the capitalist mode of production rules without challenge – will be unable to solve the social, environmental, cultural and economic problems that have accumulated and gained traction through the current crisis constellation" (Dellheim & Wolf 2009: 3).

Nevertheless, Dellheim & Wolf do see similarities between the Green New Deal and socio-ecological transformation during the initial phase of socio-ecological reconstruction. Therefore, left-wing actors and proponents of socio-ecological transformation need to find points that link their work with the broad spectrum of Green New Deal projects. Nevertheless, from a socio-ecological perspective, it is important to criticize these projects because they still do not treat the fossilist-capitalist mode of production and lifestyles or the prevailing capitalist relations of production as overarching global problems (see Dellheim & Wolf, 2009: 3–4).

Brangsch et al. point out that some, but not all, Green New Deal projects essentially involve little more than ecological modernization. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between Green New Deal projects when deciding how strongly they are linked to socio-ecological transformation (see Brangsch et al. 2012: 157–158, for

further discussion of Green New Deal projects, see Dellheim & Wolf 2009; Brangsch et al. 2012 153–157; Müller & Passadakis 2008).

3.1.2 Location within the discourse of degrowth

Now that it has been possible to link socio-ecological transformation to Green New Deal projects using various arguments and practical approaches, we can define the location of socio-ecological transformation within the sustainability discourse and differentiate it from other sustainability discourses that are critical of growth, as well as from other post-growth discourses. Schmelzer divides degrowth discourses into conservative, social reformist, sufficiency-orientated, capitalism critical, and feminist approaches (see Schmelzer 2015: 118, Table 1).

Schmelzer argues that all degrowth discourses, and this would also apply to the approach developed by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, share two common features: first, "they share a critical view of the technological optimism that characterised the 1990s […] second, they attempt to portray concrete utopias as an alternative to the growth diktat and connect this to practices of resistance" (Schmelzer 2015: 116).

In accordance with Schmelzer, the approach drawn up by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung belongs to the anti-capitalist post-growth school of thought. Conservatives and social reformist approaches do not go far enough, as they fail to call for a clear transformation of fossilist-capitalist modes of production and lifestyles. The sufficiency degrowth approach, which has been particularly influenced by Paech (see 2012), has more in common with that of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung than the other approaches. Both approaches argue that a fundamental cleavage from economic growth is unavoidable. However, the sufficiency approach to degrowth treats the actors of transformation as individual "prosumers" instead of members of reinvigorated social movements (see Schmelzer 2015: 191–121). The feminist approach is also discussed on the peripheries at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (see Knobloch 2008; Gottschlich 2013).

Table 1: Degrowth and schools of thought (based on SCHMELZER 2015: 118)

	Conservative	Social reformist	Sufficiency oriented	Critical of capitalism	Feminist
Diagnosis	Growth has natural and social limits because citizens and the state "are living above the level that circum-stances allow"	Policy focused on GDP growth leads us into environmental crisis	All forms of growth use up resources: it is impossible to decouple consumption from GDP. Over consumption in the North is occurring at the expense of the Global South	**Capitalist growth causes multiple crises. The "imperial way of life" (Brand) in the North is damaging the Global South (climate debt)**	The growth economy leads to exploitation and impoverishment of subsistence (housework, the Global South, nature) and endangers reproduction
Drivers of growth	Consumption, welfare state spending, debt, greed, decadence	All economic sectors dependent on growth. Institutions and structures.	Consumerism, fixation on foreign supply, interest	**The capitalist system, its property and domination relationships, privatisation**	Capitalist accumulation, the separation between production and unpaid, devalued mostly female reproductive work
Necessary steps	Changing values and forgoing consumption, easing burden on social systems	Detachment of existing institu-tions (social security systems, etc.) from growth; sustainable liberalism	Sufficiency and forgoing consumption, less foreign provision/supply, more localized (self-)provision	**Commons, solidary economy, climate justice, more democratic elements in business and government**	De-commercial-isation, defence of the commons, construction of non-hierarchical local structures
Instru-ments	Reduction of the social state, more "personal responsibility". Donations instead of redistribution. Strengthening the family and patriarchal division of labour	Environmental tax, sufficiency policies, solidary citizen insurance, sustainable consumption, development, prosperity, alternative welfare indicators	Expansion of subsistence and regional economies. Redistribution of working hours, money and land reform.	**Model projects, economic democracy and steering of investment, reduction of working hours, basic and maximum income, state regulation**	Re-appropriation of the commons. Promotion of smallholder agriculture, local economy and non-monetary forms of subsistence
Aim	Unavoidable shrinkage	A-growth, liberation from the growth dogma	Degrowth (shrinkage)	**Degrowth (shrinkage)**	Compatible with degrowth (shrinkage)
Agents of change	Consumers and politicians	Politicians and civil society	"Prosumers", alternative economic projects such as transition towns, community gardens etc.	**Social movements, climate camps, unions, alter-native economic projects**	Social movements against privatisation and for the commons, smallholder subsistence farms
Initiators	Meinhard Miegel, Kurt Biedenkopf, Denkwerk Zukunft	Angelika Zahrnt, Irmi Seidl, environmental organisations, parts of the EKD	Niko Peach, VÖÖ, Netzwerk Wachstumwende	**Attac, Social Innovation, Initiative eco-socialism**	The Bielefeld School

Socio-ecological transformation also has parallels with indigenous debates in Latin America that deal with the issue of a "good life" *(buen vivir)* (see Prada Alcoreza 2013). As the debate over post-extractivism has been particularly conducted in Latin America, it approaches the degrowth debate from the perspective of commodity-exporting countries and therefore provides an important footing with which to develop a global degrowth debate (see Dietz 2014).

At the same time, there are also overlaps between degrowth and post-development discourses that enable the problematic fixation on economic growth to be discussed from diverse positions. There are also similarities between socio-economic transformation and discussions about sufficiency, self-sufficiency ("the commons") and the glorification of capitalist processes of modernization (see Thiele 2015 n.p.).[100]

It should also be noted that critiques from a degrowth or post-development perspective often have similarities; however, they do not necessarily provide support for each other's positions. For example, conservative degrowth ideas are not necessarily critical of the unrestricted dominant ideas in development, whereas alternative ideas to Eurocentric development cooperation, such as how they have been developed by Müller & Ziai, demonstrate further similarities with socio-ecological transformation (see 2015: 14–15).

However, as is generally the case with debates between progressive actors, similar approaches can often be found behind the various positions. If the Left is to be progressive and implement social change, it needs to search for these shared positions and use such links to fight together towards the common goal of achieving socio-ecological transformation. As such, it is important that progressive left-wing perspectives are merged and that we search for similarities:

"In this sense, it is essential to take up all of these moments from the 'right' and 'wrong' sustainability strategies that provide four directions of opportunities: encouraging civil society action against social and environmental destruction and for just solutions; opening up new possibilities for action that are in the interests of vulnerable people throughout the world, and the struggle against global warming and loss of biodiversity; the development of specific solutions to problems; the development of strategies that reduce and reconstruct the destructive quartet and the six-destructive components – from strategies to socio-ecological reconstruction and the beginning of socio-ecological transformation" (Brangsch et al. 2012: 153).

100 For further discussion of post-development in development theory, see Ziai 2006a, 2006b; Neuburger 2013; and McEwan 2009 on post-colonialism and development.

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The Socio-Ecological Transformation (SET) is a question of survival for mankind. The reason for this dramatic statement is simple. The capitalist mode of production and the lifestyle it engenders are not sustainable, either socially or ecologically. However, the regions of the world, the people who live there, and the different classes are unequally and unevenly affected. As the OECD noted in a recent report on Southeast Asia, China, and India, the former is among the regions of the world most strongly impacted by climate change. At the same time, the high economic growth in Asia is accompanied by a steadily rising (fossil) energy demand. The effects on ecosystems are well known – but nevertheless not commensurately taken into account, either in daily life or in political decision-making.