

For a Fair World – Land Management as Basis for Sustainability

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Key note

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Sustainability

20 years after the release of the Brundtland Report sustainable development is one of the key issues on the political agenda: in our country, in Europe, and even in emerging countries like China. Plus, we will see this in the USA when the Administration will have changed later this year. The issue is at the top of the international agenda.

Energy and climate issues are the key issues. Climate change victimized us all. Nobody can hide from it. Nobody can simply buy protection.

Gro Harlem Brundtland, today the UN Special Envoy to the Secretary General of the UN, put it like this: “It is irresponsible, reckless, and deeply immoral to question the real danger of climate change.”

Climate change puts our understanding of justice and democracy to test. I agree with the statement of the German Chancellor, Mrs Angela Merkel, on carbon justice. Equal per capita rights for the emission of carbon dioxide are the upcoming dimension of international justice.

In times of asymmetric wars and failed states we must continue to what is today understood as “nation building”. This is unfinished business and the international diplomacy has still some long ways to go. But there comes a new and additional challenge along the way – by no means smaller or less important.

Mitigation Building

It is what I would like to introduce as mitigation building, in correspondence to the concept of “nation building”.

Indeed, we need to come up with a really new governance idea of burden sharing and common responsibility. We have to build up a new consensus about the urgency and the feasibility of serious mitigation of carbon dioxide. And my notion of “mitigation building” goes far beyond of what is seen as ambitious today.

I know: This is a vision.

For each person the same amount of CO₂-emissions. Some people say: This is unrealistic. My argument is a very simple one. In the history of mankind such far reaching visions have changed the world. The American Revolution started with the vision: “One man – one vote”. This vision was for a long period the guideline. In our country it took more than 100 years to bring this vision to reality; today it is regarded as a matter of course. But don’t forget: It took more than 100 years.

Regarding climate change – e. g. carbon justice - we do not have 10 years to change the course of the world. The window of opportunity in which we have to act is a very tiny one. This is because of the following:

- Far from slowing down, global carbon dioxide emissions are rising faster than before.
- Judged by sheer numbers, Kyoto has failed.
- Even the IPCC underestimates the increase in dioxide emissions.
- The carbon reality is counteracting the current diplomacy of emission goals.

And worse, up until this very day, our energy and climate policy is still dominated by single-silo policies. There is no such thing than an integrated approach. There is no such thing than a comprehensive all-options policy. We do not even harvest all the low hanging fruits if you look at the still untouched potential of energy efficiency.

And this is wrong.

We learnt from Sir Nicholas Stern that a deteriorated ecology is a tremendous damage to the global economy. He told us the simple economic truth: Inaction is more expensive than taking action now.

And this is dammed right.

As you know, the Governments of the world are negotiating the basics of a Kyoto-follow-up Regime. The climate diplomacy is loose.

Uncovered issues

But I doubt that there will be success when we follow the business-as-usual way. I think there are new issues that need to be covered to make a difference. This is mandatory for any substantial effort for a new, international post-Kyoto agreement.

And here, all of the sudden is the link to the topic of your conference.

Adaptation

I think we have to come up with a new approach to adaptation; and that means to land management and water management. I do not agree to those who pose adaptation in a contrary position to mitigation. I think we will need both.

I also think that we need to address the needs of emerging economies with a new technology program for low – carbon and carbon – free power plants. Otherwise there will be no success in mitigation and, given the existing level of carbon dioxide release, a program on adapting land and water use can not be avoided any longer.

I have a growing concern that the mainstream sustainability thinking is not coping with reality because we fail to deliver a seriously comprehensive sustainability approach.

I am being crystal clear. I support the climate objectives of our Government. But I think we are not doing enough and I think we are not doing the appropriate things. With an ever increasing global carbon load we urgently need to come up with an idea of how to cope with the challenge of adaptation and land management.

Plus, and this is true for Germany in particular, there are some home-grown problems adding up to the global situation and making the challenge even greater.

Biomass

The first problem I want to mention is on biomass production.

This year Germany will host the international summit on biological diversity. Biodiversity is a key concept for understanding why there is life on Earth and how human interventions impact on the natural life.

Species are dying out much faster than the natural extinction rate. There are many reasons for this. Just to name some of the main reasons for the extinction of species:

- Diversified landscapes are transformed into monocultures.
- New areas for housing are destroying habitats.
- Animals are endangered or wiped out by hunting and over-fishing.

Germany's role as host will be measured by how we address today's most important topic: increasing concerns about the ecologically harmful effects of biomass production for energy use.

For sure, we can not stay oil junkies for ever. Substituting oil with renewable energy from biomass seems to be a reasonable way out of the down cycle. But the production and utilisation of biomass could have effects opposite to those intended. This would especially hold true at global level, if the demand for farmed fuels in the industrialised countries led to ecologically distorting material flows, such as those associated with palm oil, soy and sugar cane production in Indonesia and Brazil and other developing countries.

There is a substantial conflict between valid economic, environmental and social objectives which is not easy to solve. The biomass energy economy is currently only in its infancy – in technological terms, with respect to quite new envisaged purposes such as decentralised energy supply systems, and with regard to its linkages with rural economic development, and second generation biofuels. So, we feel that we have to develop these technological options. On the other hand side, we already see some frightening impacts of the increasing demand on prices and food availability and security for people in some low-income regions especially. Some states are already closing down their food trade.

We, the German Council for Sustainable Development take those concerns very seriously. Early this year we came up with a policy paper addressing these issues.

We are calling on policymakers and the private sector to do more to ensure that the energy policy innovation of biomass conforms to the standards of our national sustainability policy. I

am grateful to our Ministers for the Environment and for Agriculture for putting a halt on the biofuel policies. Deeply repositioning our biomass options is what we need. We do not need to abolish them. We need to adapt our strategies to sustainability benchmarks.

As Germany is hosting of the 9th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, we also addressed the global link to biomass issues. We urge the German Government to make a major move towards the development of an international regime on sustainable biomass use.

Germany should initiate the negotiation process for a bioenergy protocol, in analogy to the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety.

Demography

With the world demography still pointing towards 8 or 9 billion people, Europe is different, and our country in particular. Demographic change in Germany means a significant decrease in population numbers, which will change our society.

Demographic change is strongly varying between shrinking and some still growing regions. It will add significantly to the already existing regional disparities.

All political thinking in modern Germany has been developed during times of growth. Now we have to add some new bright ideas on how to act in times of shrinkage. This is challenging social attitudes, such as solidarity, trust, mutuality, civic engagement and social interaction.

This change is about more than mere statistics. Behind sheer numbers demographic change challenges our way to think “future.

Shrinking regions and cities are asking for new concepts for social security, our concepts of mobility and urbanity, for land management and decentralised social cohesion, and for the construction business and the real estate industries.

I would like to be pretty straight forward at this point:

I strictly object to the notion that demographic shrinkage automatically translate into a catastrophe, into apocalypse – like predicting the appearance of the wolf in Remscheid. We can also benefit from the challenge of demographic change, in cities as well as in rural areas. What this all comes down to is the need to integrate land management and new forms of decentralised energy management:

- Like: developing rural warmth supply by biomass-to-gas strategies.
- Like: deliberately developing schemes for mini – schools in rural areas that enlarge their community outreach by acting as community centre beyond the limits of simply being a school in the traditional sense.
- Like: let new forms of social volunteering emerge (do not try to force them) along intergenerative social health and wellness services.
- Like: develop new social infrastructure framed by reinventing clear cut state responsibility and financing services.

It is still too often the case that the demographic discussion centres on aggregate figures, such as the effects of a decline in total population and the change in the age structure of the population as a whole.

Some years ago, the German Council for Sustainability came up with the recommendation to severely cut down the share of land consumed every day for the zoning of residential areas and for traffic purposes by 2020. We called it the *objective-30-ha*, the *Ziel-30-ha*, 30 hectare being one third of the today's average land consumption in Germany.

Then, what happened? Some experts lectured us and made the point that this goal is unrealistic.

They deeply misunderstood our message. We did not ask reality to be realistic. This is not my understanding of a council on sustainability. We rather came up with this goal to provide momentum, to change the game, to air some new thoughts and to bring some fresh people in the position to look for answers and approaches.

Therefore, we explicitly highlighted the impacts of demographic change and asked politics on the federal as well as on the state and community level to realign the net-costs of an ever growing infrastructure in times of decreasing demands. But our recommendation is not on numbers, nor on technical issues or on zoning laws alone – it is also, it is mainly on trust and respect between generation, on triggering self-learning communities, and on the ethics of social cohesion. To put it short: It is on Sustainable Development.

Our recommendation triggered Federal research initiatives and some remarkable action being taken on the local and regional level.

This is promising news. I appreciate that there really is some momentum.

That leads me to my last remark. We tend to underestimate the value of research and education for long term sustainability. It will rest on training, skills development, capacity building and awareness-raising for all citizens, not only for pupils in schools and universities. This will involve teachers, pupils, parents and governance generally, moving from innovative experimentation to some new forms of informed debate and educated cultural transition.

We need to create a caring and self-aware citizenry, with the skills and wisdom to manage for reliable futures.

Summing up

In this sense, I would like to end my talk. I made some remarks on the shortcomings of our carbon policies. I mentioned the need to design a full-fledged land management scheme for the purpose of climate adaptation. I raised the land implication of the biomass strategies. And, finally, I tried to show that the demographic change in Germany can be subject to a modernisation of society if the land management fully pitches in.

I raised all these issues in order to underline one thing. At the end of the day, sustainability is asking for integrated and future-proof thinking – this is exactly what I expect the universities to teach as a daily routine.

I now end my talk not without having said how much I appreciated your invitation. I congratulate Prof. Magel and his team for setting up this conference. And I thank the audience for your attention.

