Seeking integral community
in an ecological age . . .


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The “Ecozoic Era” is a time of mutually enhancing relationships among humans and the larger community of life.

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The “Great Work” is living the promise of the ecozoic.

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In this issue: “De-Linking Growth from Sustainability” by Herman Greene; “Green Doesn’t Go Far Enough” by Tim Toben; and “De-Growth” by Herman Greene.

DE-LINKING GROWTH FROM SUSTAINABILITY

The Bruntland Commission Report to the United Nations of 1987, called Our Common Future, defined sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” While the report sought to limit economic growth (when not necessary to meet essential human needs) to that which was sustainable and called for sharing of economic goods equitably so as not to overstrain Earth’s productive capacity, the term has become one that everyone can love, or hate.

The two terms, “sustainable” and “development,” are somewhat in conflict with each other. The one term, “sustainability,” is based in environmentalism, and the other term, “development,” is based in economics, especially the economic growth model, and even more especially growth in GDP. Environmentalists stress sustainability, and businesses stress development. The already-developed global North ostensibly stresses sustainability (while seeking more development), and the not-as-developed global South stresses development (while still sustainable). The global South resists efforts of the North to impose environmental conditions and calls for assistance in repayment of the North’s “ecological debt.” The largest, most prosperous commercial, industrial and financial companies tout “sustainable development and their role in it.
The deep ecologist resists the term altogether saying that at best sustainable development is sustainable [human] development. “It’s hard to talk about sustainable development of snail darters,” said one deep ecologist. And deep ecologist Thomas Berry in *The Great Work* (pp. 108-09) wrote, “Movements toward ‘sustainable development’ must be recognized as efforts to avoid the basic issue.

If we were to talk only about sustainability, we “human” wouldn’t be a necessary implication. We could talk of the sustainable snail darter, just as we could talk about the sustainable human.

This two-word terminology—“sustainable development”--has, however, become pervasive. While we can make the point that we should be only speaking of sustainability, sustainable development will still dominate the public discourse, at least for now. Perhaps it’s better to redefine “development” if that is possible as the development of the whole human and the development of the idea of human community in line with sustainability.

“Development” as now used doesn’t mean this primarily. Development means growth in GDP and the dominant measure of social well-being is GDP per capita. Given this, Wolfgang Sachs in *Planetary Dialectics* called development “a ruin in the intellectual landscape.” He observed that in 1949, United States President Truman, in his inauguration speech, “defined the largest part of the world as ‘underdeveloped areas’. From this point on, the global south had a single name, underdeveloped. All the world’s peoples, despite their extensive diversity, could be understood in terms of a single measure—what their GNP per capita was; and all were to move along a single trajectory—toward development. Greater production and economic growth were the keys to peace and a better life for all. According to Sachs, however, in the face of the ecological predicament “[T]he two founding assumptions of the development promise have lost their validity . . ., first that development could be universalized in space, and second, that it would be durable in time.”

We will leave for another issue re-defining development and in the remainder of this article cite authors and movements seeking to de-link sustainable and development defined as perpetual growth of GDP on the macro scale.

Herman Greene

**Green Doesn’t Go Far Enough**

Tim Toben, a visionary green activist in North Carolina, co-developer of a LEED certified condo project (Greenbridge) and CES member, wrote an op-ed in the *Durham Herald*, on August 25, 2010 entitled “Green Doesn’t Go Far Enough.” Here are excerpts from that article.

Eight years ago, I turned my attention to green energy and green building. I was convinced that converting my farm to wind and solar power and building efficient green buildings

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2 Ibid., 3.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 75-76.
could help save the planet from climate destabilization and ecosystem collapse. I was wrong.

It turns out that no matter how many of us trade our SUVs for hybrids or move to homes within biking or walking distance from work and schools, we're still doomed by consumerism and our national appetite for GDP growth. The big picture has become clear—as GDP grows, restorative ecosystems shrink. . . .

On the current economic roadmap, all growth is good. An industry that pollutes the air, water, or soil extracts minerals from an indigenous community without adequately compensating it is as prized as a non-polluting industry that builds community or restores ecosystems. . . .

The financial system upon which the global economy is based fails to monitor and adapt to limits imposed by (1) finite natural resources, (2) the carrying capacity of ecosystems, and (3) the growing wealth disparity between nations and between the rich and the poor within nations. . . .

The material throughput of the economic system is breaching the boundaries of the biosphere. A condition known as "ecological overshoot" exists, whereby the global economy is now using up more than 1.4 times Earth's capacity to regenerate the natural capital upon which the system and all life depends. (Aug. 23, 2010, was the day this year that we exhausted our annual ecological budget.) This unintended consequence derives from the unexamined assumption that the resources and regenerative capacities of Earth are limitless, which, of course, is false.

More troubling than the four-fold increase in the human population during the 20th century was a 40-fold increase in GDP accompanied by a 16-fold increase in fossil fuel use, a 35-fold increase in fisheries catches, a 30 percent loss of arable soil in the past 40 years, draining of underground aquifers, melting of glaciers, accumulation of atmospheric CO2, degradation and warming of the oceans, and toxic chemical accumulation globally. We are shredding the fabric of life upon which the economy and all life depends. . . .

System scientists such as Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows and Jorgen Randers, Limits to Growth, and economists Peter Victor, Managing Without Growth, and Tim Jackson, Prosperity without Growth, conceive of a new way forward that portends near-term costs but long-term health and well being for people and planet. . . .

Tim Toben

DE-GROWTH

De-growth (or degrowth) is a substantial movement, especially in Europe. This movement holds that the world economy needs to shrink, in other words global GDP needs to decrease, not grow. CES Advisory Board Member, Wolfgang Sachs, was a co-organizer of the first international degrowth conference held in Paris in 2008 and called "Economic De-Growth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity." The second international degrowth conference was held in Barcelona in 2010 and was called (2d Conference for "Economic De-Growth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity." Copies of the proceedings of both conferences are available at http://www.degrowth.net/.


The degrowth movement is philosophically opposed to the concepts of sustainable development. Degrowth is explained in this excerpt from http://www.goodplanet.info/eng/Economy/De-growth/Degrowth/%28theme%29/2386 as follows:

Reconciling infinite growth and limited resources? This is impossible for those in favour of degrowth. This way of thinking which came about in the 1970s therefore advocates an end to the concept of always striving for more and suggests other ways of conceiving social and economic progress other than by measuring the Gross domestic Product (GDP). But this theory has been heavily criticised.

The Romanian economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen created degrowth. By thinking about how exhaustible resources and by studying economy with physics tools, he created the bioeconomy concept in the 1970s. He thus laid down the foundations for degrowth. His ideas follow those of the Meadows report. The report is named after its author, a young economist who wrote the report in 1972 following a request from the Club of Rome. Its conclusions: economic growth will lead to a serious crisis at a due date that is yet to be determined. This report was criticised very early on for its apocalyptic vision.

Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's text was translated into French by Jacques Grimevald who was the first to use the word 'degrowth'. About ten years ago, mainly in France, journals such as Silence, Casseurs de pub and La Décroissance updated the concept and made it current. The Institute of Economic and Social Studies for sustainable degrowth* was created in 2002 (Institut d'études économiques et sociales pour la décroissance soutenable, IEESDS).

Against sustainable development

For those in favour of degrowth, sustainable development is an oxymoron: the two terms are opposites, contradict each other and lead one to believe that we can continue to develop in a sustainable way whilst the Earth's resources are decreasing. They use degrowth as a «bombshell word» to call the consensus into question.

«Sustainable development, this contradiction in terms, is both terrifying and hopeless! At least with non-durable and non-sustainable development, one could keep hoping that this deadly process would come to an end, victim of its own contradictions, its failures, of its unbearable nature and the exhaustion of natural resources [...] Sustainable development deprives us of any perspective of escape, it promises development for all eternity!», writes Serge Latouche, one of the main thinkers on degrowth.

Herman Greene

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The mission of CES is to offer a vision, through dialogue, of an ecozoic society and contribute to its realization through research, education and the arts.

To become a member of CES, send a letter to CES at 2516 Winningham Road, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27516, USA, with your contact information and dues. Dues for each calendar year are US$35 (individual or family); outside USA, Canada and Mexico, add US$10. Sustaining Member US$135. You may also pay your dues online at www.ecozoicstudies.org. Contributions are welcome.