



V Encontro Nacional de Conforto no Ambiente Construído e II Encontro Latino-Americano de Conforto no Ambiente Construído

Creation in Crisis: Relationships of Interdependence

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Vision

Within the context of our present lifestyle and its consequential environmental crisis we are approximately 35-40 years into the realization that many, if not most of our present economic and social structures are in need of revamping.

We are now able to conclude in experience that humanity has exceeded the regenerative capacity of the earth's resources.

Born within this historically unprecedented reality is the idea, challenge and goal of the concept of sustainability and the spirit of changing our lifestyle paradigm to a more regenerative lifestyle that mimics the natural cycles of our planet.

Question

How shall we meet our needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs?

Can we rob wisdom from our grandparents rather than resources from our children?

We do not know how to design a sustainable future environment. The definition of regenerative designs with its full circle solutions points to building a sustainable society.

Permaculture and its regenerativeness suggests both the design strategies of combining food, waste, water, energy and shelters into a community whole and has created successful experiments in living on our daily solar capital. It is a science an ethic and a lifestyle that values transgenerational as well as interspecies justice, a concept long understood by North American Indians in their planning for the seventh generation ethics.

In preparation for the U.N. Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, Rene Dubois and Barbur Wald stated:

"The two worlds of man--the biosphere of our inheritance and the technosphere of our creation are out of balance and potentially in deep conflict. This is the hinge of history at which we stand, the door of the future opening on a crisis more sudden, more global, more inescapable, and more bewildering than any ever encountered by the human species and one which will take decisive shape within the life-span of children who are already born."

When will we realize that we are all in this together? We have much to share and learn from each other. (I Proposed Declaration of Interdependence)

Thomas Berry, one of the foremost thinkers in *Re-visioning* human-relations for a more humane and sustainable future, defines the problem in this way:

"The issue now is of much greater order of magnitude, for we have changed in a deleterious manner not simply the structure and functioning of human society; we have changed the very chemistry of the planet, we have altered the biosystems, we have changed the topography and even the geological structure of the planet, structures and functions that have taken hundreds of millions and even billions of years to bring into existence. Such an order of change in its nature and in its order of magnitude has never before entered either into earth history or into human consciousness."

How shall we respond? How might we better understand our role in addressing the environmental crisis in the 21st Century?

The 1970's was an environmental watershed in the U.S.A. with our creation of the Environmental Protection Agencies, Earth Day, and numerous NGO's working for sustaining the cycles of natural systems.

So much has changed. So much has not changed. Today we experience the results of deforestation, increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide, diminishing concentrations of ozone, overfishing in the seas, erosion of coral reefs, exhausting aquifers, pollution of air and water resources, unprecedented human population growth and resource consumption, with plant and animal extinction resulting in diminished biological diversity. **Diversity that is indispensable for planetary health.**

Are we failing to act as trustees of the gifts of life and land?

We need some self-understanding to address this unprecedented environmental drama that raises the question of planetary health and stability in the threat and domination by human species.

Permaculture strategies and its design approaches respect the justice and regenerative capacity of the land itself. This land and the cycles that support life on it are a gift held in trust. Our future generations lay claim to our understanding of this freedom and it is the responsibility in our social and economic order to evolve to meet this challenge.

The consequences of greed and exploitation are everywhere; the magnitude is escapable. Will we not awake before the land vomits us up as a parasite or pathogen on the planet?

Since the 1970's, an environmental watershed, our attitudes have changed but our values have not.

During those first Earth Days, we looked at a few problems of pollution and thought we could stop some damaging projects and things would be fine.

In the 1970's we made a huge oversimplification. Pollution control emphasized gadgets at the end of production and life support systems. We focused on destructive developments and end-of-the-pipe solutions to solve our environmental deterioration.

Now we know the greatest environmental problems are not population growth or climate changed caused by our consumption habits, but the combination of these pressures. This points to an understanding that we cannot solve these problems one at a time. They must be challenged together for there is a negative synergy about our industrial methods. We need to redesign our civilization and all of us need to be involved. There is no room for simplistic answers. Complex problems need complex solutions. We are called to search for a complex relationship of understanding for this interdependency over time. Furthermore, the unexpected is happening-- **our environmental problems are built into our cities and landscapes that we have created.** The implications for the next century are deeper and more far-reaching than most of us imagined. We are still wrestling with reductionistic methodologies in our pursuit of knowledge and educational systems. Our challenge is that we need a new paradigm to view the dynamic flux of Nature and understand her more deeply and then reformulate our sense of place on the planet.

History reminds us that today's radical thoughts become tomorrow's conventionality.

Our state of the world globalization of economic and industrial orders suggests an alternative to the present deterioration of the health and dynamics of the earth's living processes.

Lester Brown in his 1999 World Watch article, "Crossing the Threshold," says we may be

near a breakthrough or threshold in environmental crisis impasse. He uses the analogy of water changing to ice. There comes a point when suddenly, even surprisingly, things change, such as water to ice. We may be nearing a threshold more revolutionary than the agricultural or industrial revolutions of the past. We may be nearing a sustainable social and economic order shift.

I suggest a cautious optimism. Progress over the last 40 years has created a proliferation of breakthroughs in wind, solar, conservation, food safety and health. Acceptance of the 5 R's of Recycling:

1. Refuse to buy, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Restore.
2. 32 nations are at zero population.
3. Concern about pesticides, fertilizers and health has created organic food production as one of the largest growth industries in the world.
4. Proliferation of 1000's of NGO's working for environmental health.
5. Many nations passing environmental protection laws, green taxing and resource recovery techniques.

How Do We Go From Here?

The following are some principles developed with John Tillman Lyle, the organizer of the Center for Regenerative Studies at California Polytechnic University, Pomona, California:

1. Never solve just one problem. Engineers and designers create other problems when they take a non-dimensional approach to solving problems. The example of John Muir saying, "Everytime you pull a flower, you find it hitched to the stars," is appropriate when we do our social-biological engineering.

2. People cannot be separated from their environment or life support systems. We have lost touch with how our livelihood is created--as the planet is destroyed so are we since we are connected and a part of the process. It is our culture and values that have separated us from these life processes.

3. The Regenerative Systems Model shows us that waste is a resource and death is the beginning of new life, forever in cyclic movement. Our model for Sustainability is Nature. All environmental design is based on how nature does things.

4. The way to the future is through design. Changing parts without redesigning lifestyle patterns will not work. We designed the Industrial Age of Rationalism and Humanism--we can design ourselves out of it. Someone will have to design these biocultural systems. It will not just happen. We need to think like an Ecosystem. Designs of the 20th century will not work--design must be in tune with Nature--understanding our ecological footprint.

5. Harmony with Nature is an invisible process. Nature flows regeneratively and cyclically.

Dean Freudenberger, a theologian and agriculturist at the Claremont College, has written on many of the concepts of linking sustainable issues to the faith community. He is actively examining the complex answers to some of these complex questions.

Progress over past 40 years:

1. There are a proliferation of efforts around the world pursuing the vision of sustainable society. Consider the breakthroughs in wind and solar power technology.
2. There has been a rebirth of the bicycle in Portland, Oregon, Village Homes in Davis, California, and many other cities.
3. A significant shift in lifestyle habits has developed around concern about food safety and healthy diets. Organic food production has become one of the largest growth industries in the USA.
4. 40 nations have reaching levels of stability, green taxing and tax shifting--Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom.

5. There has been a proliferation of 1000's of non-government organizations, such as World Wildlife Fund, International Union of Concerned Scientists, International Union of Conservation of Nature, GreenPeace, World Resource Institute, Worldwatch, Green Cross, working for "right livelihood."

These activities have transformed the global economy to one that may be more environmentally sustainable and socially just. These examples give us reason to be cautiously optimistic.

The following complex questions have complex answers and must be seasoned over time:

1. Look at our neglect to care for the earth and our reluctance to make personal sacrifices for the sake of others.
2. Renew our commitment to our historical role of shaping environmental, economic and technology policies and holding them subject to social control.
3. Move beyond the fragmentation of thought that has characterized the last two centuries of reductionism and work for an understanding of the dynamics of Relationship of Interdependencies.
4. Break out of compartmentalism of economics and ecology so that we can think through their relationships.
5. Overcome our reticence to examine the working assumptions of the "experts" and to engage in serious dialogue with them.
6. Renew our faith understanding from the perspective of a threatened biosphere and impoverished humanity.
7. Make great commitments to educate at all levels and in all places about the eco-justice crisis.
8. Practice the 5 R's in development of lifestyle frugality.
9. Work for new forms of both global and local governance that safeguards the health of communities of life and their futures.

Conclusion

Caring for creation is our expression of gratitude for our moment in the history of earth. Caring for creation, for each other, and for the many generations yet to be born is what makes us human. It is up to all of us to carry the light to all dark corners of our social practices and reinvent a culture that recognizes the obvious. We are all in this together and are part of a much greater process than we understand.