The human rights principle for sustainable development governance

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Abstract

Sustainable development is impossible without a continuous care for the implementation of human rights as made explicit in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the human rights-related principles of the Rio and Rio+20 Declarations. However, a full implementation of human rights would not automatically lead to sustainable development. As an exercise in coordinating complex systems of interlinked socio-economic processes in a dynamic of increasing globalisation, fair and effective sustainable development governance will always be troubled by cognitive complexity and moral pluralism. Even if we would all agree on the knowledge base of a sustainable development related problem, then opinions could still differ about the acceptability of solutions. The natural and social sciences can inform us about the character of options, they cannot always clarify the choice to make.

Advancing from this rationale, the paper argues that, added to the fields of human rights concerning a fair socio-economic 'organisation' of our society, fair and effective sustainable development governance implies the right for every human 'to contribute to making sense of what is at stake'. In practice, this social justice based concern for human intellectual capacity building translates as a concern for free and pluralist advanced education, inclusive and transdisciplinary knowledge generation and inclusive, deliberative multi-level decision making.

The paper concludes with the argumentation that a rights-based approach to intellectual capacity building, supporting 'the right to be responsible' for every human, is the only way to enable the possibility of global sustainable development governance in a complex and pluralist world.

This paper

This paper is a discussion text that introduces at the same time the research project 'The Possibility of Global Governance' and the human rights principle for sustainable development governance that is proposed in this research project. The main source of the writings and activities of the project is the website http://www.the-possibility-of-global-governance.net/

Content

1 Introduction - Making sense of global problems

[…] For decades now, and more than ever before, the global political and scientific agenda is set by complex socio-political issues that burden both our natural environment and our human well-being. Sketching what goes wrong in our world today, the picture does not look very bright: structural poverty, ever expanding industrialisation and urbanisation, environmental degradation, anticipated overpopulation, economic exploitation, adverse manifestations of technological risk, unstable financial markets and uncontrollable financial speculation, adding up to old and new forms of social and political oppression and political, ethnic and religious conflicts, make the world a hard place to live. The stakes are high, and so are the challenges to tackle them. Taking into account the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Agenda 21 and the many that followed these primordial principle commitments, one can say that our society has made progress in developing and formulating general ideas about what needs to be done. These ideas are ethically grounded as they typically (and rightly) refer to fundamental values such as human dignity and equality and the value of nature and also in the way they refer to more modern 'organisational' values such as transparency and fair play in politics and in the economy of goods, services and finance. Guided by these ethics while faced with the observed or expected malaises, one could wonder why deliberations on what would be the right thing to do remain stuck in deadlocks over conflicting rationalities or, in the better case, in vague (re)formulations of non-binding commitments. Is it only self-interest and lack of political will of distinct actors to blame or is there more at stake? […]

'The Possibility of Global Governance' is a research project about the global ethics of sustainable development governance[1]. It does however not initially focus on the ethical implications of the complex problems listed above. Rather the emphasis is on the ethics related to the way we make sense of them in knowledge generation and decision making. From this perspective, the vantage point of the research is that the quality of governance essentially depends on the quality of the working of 'the knowledge-policy interface', and that this 'quality' concerns specific ethics with regard to the generation and metamorphosis of knowledge prior to and in governance, and consequently with regard to the organisation of governance itself.

2 Governance beyond rational and moral perplexity

Fair and effective sustainable development governance essentially concerns a fair and effective organisation of our human socio-economic interactions (the 'global socio-economic dynamic', including the local, the national and the regional). Taking into account the fact that this organisation essentially concerns an exercise in coordinating complex systems of interlinked socio-economic processes in a dynamic of increasing globalisation, a fair and effective dealing with sustainable development challenges will always be troubled by the difficulty of negotiating a consensus that integrates and balances reasonable but often incommensurable and conflicting interests. Not only do we have to deal with the complexity of acquiring knowledge about the functioning of these systems (a complexity enhanced by the many uncertainties, unknowns and

[1] Although the project is called a research project, the reasonings are constructed around a set of premisses that are not extracted from 'objective' analysis as such. The drive of this project is 'philosophical activism for social justice', but the research dimension is in the way thoughts and writings are brought into specific discussion environments. These environments include the academy but also, and essentially, the environments where the envisaged knowledge-policy interface comes alive'. With the focus on the global and on sustainable development, obviously the United Nations lead governance processes on sustainable development and on specific topics such as climate change belong to these 'knowledge-policy interface' environments.

unknowables related to the natural, technical and social phenomena that figure in them), we also need to take into account the fact that our current environmental and social challenges are essentially cases of moral pluralism. That is: even if we could and would all agree on the knowledge base to asses a specific problem, then opinions could still differ about the acceptability of proposed solutions. In these cases, indigenous knowledge and the natural and social sciences can inform us about the character of options, they cannot clarify the choice to make. As a result, the existence of limits to knowing and forecasting of problems and solutions and of a plurality of opinions on problems and solutions makes that anyone who wants to defend a specific interest in that kind of deliberation would need to accept that all arguments are to a certain degree informed by what one 'believes but cannot prove', 'fears but cannot account' and 'hopes but cannot guarantee'. Whether as agent with a 'mandate' of scientist, politician, entrepreneur, consultant, activist or citizen, dealing with own and other's views on problems and solutions in the context of sustainable development governance is dealing with the own and the other's rational and moral *perplexity*. It is the recognition of this 'double perplexity' that forms the basis of the ethical approach to governance as described above.

The 'list' of issues quoted in the introduction may suggest that the ethical approach under investigation here is presented as a panacea for 'all the problems in the world'. That is of course not the objective. Two comments need to be made here in that sense:

A first thing to do is to make a distinction between challenges connected to our 'artefacts of civilisation'[2] that imply a better organisation of our socio-economic activities on the one hand and challenges related to peace and human dignity, here formulated as 'old and new forms of social and political oppression and political, ethnic and religious conflicts' on the other hand. The simple reason is that these first issues need to be assessed in the context of managing 'neutral' sustainable development themes[3]. The notion that they are 'manageable' means that they can be 'streamlined' through a combination of binding regulation and stimulating incentives. Together, they make up the 'global socio-economic dynamic' mentioned above. This socio-economic dynamic is a mean for sustainable development and not an end in itself. In addition, the fair and effective organisation of this socio-economic dynamic has to take into account three boundary conditions that are essential for the well-being of humanity. The first is the recognition that all human beings are equal and have equal rights in enjoying social and cultural freedoms when striving to live a meaningful life. The second is the recognition that the well-being of humanity is inextricably bound up with the well-being of its natural environment (In other words: human well-being implies the well-being of nature and our earth as such and vice-versa). The third is the recognition that a fair and effective organisation of these themes as part of the socio-economic dynamic cannot be completely done *through* that socio-economic dynamic. In other words: they will, each of them in their specific way, always need some degree of political government regulation and control. When I say that the emphasis of this study is on the ethics related to the way we make sense of issues in knowledge generation and decision making, then I mean that it concerns this first set of issues. But the

[2] In part one of this study, these 'artefacts of civilisation' are identified as technological *risk*, environmental *occupation*, economic *profit*, labour *instrumentalisation*, market *dependency*, information *mediation*, heritage *depletion*, trans-generational *burden* (see http://www.the-possibility-of-global-governance.net/ and further on in this text).

[3] In part one of this study, these 'neutral' sustainable development themes are identified as *functional means* (resources, energy, labour, finance, markets, institutions), *functional ends* (water & food, housing & urbanisation, mobility, production & consumption of commodities, cultural support & heritage), *human natural capacities* (natural habitat, health and sanitation), *human intellectual capacities* (education and personal development, research, decision making structures) (see http://www.the-possibility-of-global-governance.net/).

additional argument is that the rationalisation of a particular 'fundamental human value' that is at the root of the 'second set' of issues (forms of social and political oppression and political, ethnic and religious conflicts) is also complicating and even obstructing the current politics of 'making sense of' the sustainable development-related issues. That value is the value of 'human identity', with its specific abstract and artificial rationalisations as 'national', 'cultural', 'social' or 'religious' identity. Simply said: while the first set of issues is essentially complicated by conflicting rationales of truth, the rationalisation of 'human identity' is at the root of *all* political struggles related to the problems listed above, and this is how the two sets of issues meaningfully connect.

A second note to the disclaimer that the ethical approach under investigation here is not presented as a panacea for all problems of the world is that these ethics concern *the values that influence the way* we generate knowledge and make decisions, and not *the specific character* of knowledge produced and decisions taken. Hence, this research does not aspire to present 'ethically correct' solutions to climate change, poverty eradication and so on. Rather, the essential claim is that whether a specific knowledge or decision is 'ethical' or not does not primarily relate to their content, but to the way they are produced.

The previous considerations provide the basis for the claim that the quality of governance essentially depends on the quality of the working of the knowledge-policy interface, and that this quality concerns specific ethics with regard to the generation and metamorphosis of knowledge prior to and in governance, and consequently with regard to the organisation of governance itself. As it is argued in the research, these 'ethics' may instruct both an instrumental view on 'what ought to be' and a more fundamental human rights-related view on how we make sense of ourselves, the world and the issues at stake. Both will be shortly introduced here, and the claim will be that the instrumental view cannot 'work' without the realisation of the more fundamental human rights-related view.

3 In search of support for the qualities of governance

In an instrumental view, the ethics of sustainable development governance motivate a critical-deliberative approach to the use of knowledge and value-based reference in governance, which translates as

- policy supportive knowledge generation that, by spirit and method, is *transdisciplinary* and *inclusive* and
- governance that, by spirit and method, is *inclusive* and *process-oriented*, and that also methodologically enables and enforces *transparency* with regard to actors' intentions and interests.

Why is this instrumental view, promoting transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness (or 'public participation'), process-thinking (instead of 'product-thinking') and transparency as methodological 'qualities' of governance, indeed what is needed to better make sense of 'what ought to be' in sustainable development governance? Because this is the only form of governance that, by the character of its method, can generate

- intra-generational *trust* (because its method cares for intra-generational *solidarity* and *accountability*) and
- intergenerational forward oriented *responsibility* and mutual *understanding* (with mutual in the sense of forward and backward oriented)

In other words, with its focus on methodologically generated trust, responsibility and understanding, it is the only form of governance that, by the character of its method, will be able to move things forward in a practical way, as it would enable a meaningful and effective dealing with the type of regulations, conventions, protocols, frameworks, architectures, instruments, tools and incentives for the socio-economic dynamic that are currently subject of negotiations. The claim is that the self-critical and inviting character of the governance method (transdisciplinary, inclusive, process-oriented, transparent) will make it fair, and its fairness will render it effective. Its effectiveness will be in the fact that actors will trust the policies and measures proposed as they trust the method in which they were assessed and negotiated.

This is the theory, but the practice is different. It is true that transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, process-thinking and transparency are topics of interest in specific critical discourses of academia and civil society circles, and it is true that there is growing support for these qualities in these circles, but one does not need in-depth analysis to conclude that, today, they are not inspiring or instructing the fundaments of policy-supportive knowledge generation and decision making. The claim that, in face of global environmental and social challenges, policy-supportive research should be transdisciplinary and decision making inclusive (or 'participatory') might eventually be acknowledged by politics, but then only 'in principle'. In the best case, the qualities are acknowledged but not taken serious, and only seen as aesthetic corrections (to please citizens and critics) after or in parallel to the 'real' political work. In the general case however, they seem to remain strategically ignored. The current rationale is that, in face of the global environmental and related economic and social challenges, 'we know what (science tells us) to do', and that solving the difficult exercises of 'sharing benefits and burdens' is only 'a matter of political will'. This rationale is further backed up by a defend of the traditional view on representative democracy: the disclaimer that politicians, as democratically elected representatives of citizens, may, until the next elections, act as substitutes for these citizens, and the consequent but rather simplistic critiques to the idea of 'deliberative democracy' that 'it is simply not possible to involve everybody' and that 'it would be unwise to leave government to the uninformed and unsteady masses'. While the political world, 'observed' by civil society and informed by science (and, through politics, by civil society groups sympathetic to the acting politicians), continues to discuss regulations, conventions, protocols, frameworks, architectures, instruments, tools and incentives, apparently the political will to agree on them and to implement them fails to emerge. Simple assessments of on-going policy processes makes clear that, today, opinions differ on whether governance of issues such as climate change, biodiversity or poverty eradication is actually fair and effective. And important to note is that it are not essentially 'the have's and the have not's' who are divided in opinion, but rather actors *within* politics, civil society, science and the private sector.

4 The deadlocks of detached political pragmatism

But if the global political community would suddenly come to realise that the problem with the many faltering, obstructed or deadlocked governance processes does not relate to their content, but to their method, could a pragmatic implementation of that 'instrumental view', or thus of the qualities of governance as described above, help to move things forward, eventually as an experiment or as a last hope? The answer is no, as it would never work. It would never work because it makes no sense to try to 'enforce' this instrumental view on a world that is not ready for it. The claim put forward here is that, although there exist many manifestations of repression against those qualities of governance, in general, their enabling and enforcing potential remains locked into old lethargic modes of knowledge generation and decision making inherited from historical

enlightenment and modernism. Today, the rationale of both politics and their critics is that the road to a fair and effective dealing with global problems such as climate change and poverty eradication or to a successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals remains obstructed by a 'lack of political will' with specific political parties at national level or with specific nations or groups of nations at global level. In the context of climate change, as a significant example, that rationale is blaming the deadlock of the governance processes to a North-South divide and/or to the unwillingness of specific countries such as China or the US 'in sharp contrast with the ambition of the EU'. Although this divide over positions has an obvious effect, this picture is simply simplistic. While democracy is obviously the basic political criterion to move things forward, the real problem is that current enlightened democratic politics of as well developed, emerging and many developing nations is driven by a detached and simplistic political version of pragmatism that ignores the need for a more deliberate discourse on human values and governance qualities. In its most pertinent forms, that detached pragmatism manifests as

- an obsession with systems thinking and 'evidence-based' decision making, too often informed by thin managerial interpretations of holism and by positivist-instrumental and business-minded science practices ('the managerial approach');

- a narrow conception of the idea democracy, sticking to divides over obsolete political identities and strategically supported by the excuse that there are 'unavoidable practical limitations' to public participation;

- nation state 'positionism' justified on the basis of the 'absolute' but, in light of the global problems, principally irrelevant value of state sovereignty;

- the fixation on 'economic growth' as the prime quality criterion for a prosperous society and, in conspiracy with the private sector, pretending that only economic impact should be corrected, not its growth;

- a tendency to relegate 'responsible action' to transnational green(washed) market economy dynamics that, at the same time, leaves nation state positionisms unaffected;

- a strategic cultural tolerance 'in support of multiculturalisms' that primarily serves to protect and defend the integrity of own cultural, political or religious identities, rather than to accept those of others.

In view of this, one may understand that the global ethics of sustainable development governance do concern 'political will', but not the one that is usually referred to. In other words: the world is not ready to implement the proposed qualities of governance because the normative basis to make this approach come true is in itself fragmented and subject of strategic mediation. It is pointless to attempt to implement transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, process-thinking and transparency in regimes of science and politics if these regimes are not 'bottom-up' inspired in themselves by a culture that embraces rational and moral perplexity as *advanced enlightened human stances* instead of as weak, defeatist or cynical positions and that sees the spirit of 'deliberate relativism' as a spirit that can strengthen a society instead of undermining it.

5 In search of cultures of deliberate relativism

The spirit of deliberate relativism suggested above is a spirit of human social engagement. It should be fostered in our cultures of science and policy and inspire our daily socio-economic (inter)actions. As an 'advanced way' of looking at ourselves and the world, it would take into account the possibilities and limits of using knowledge and values in 'socially engaged' reasoning, and this as well in science and policy as with respect to how we justify our daily socio-economic (inter)actions. The argument put forward here is that these advanced ways concern three contexts, being (1) how we reason about 'social systems', (2) how we reason about 'the benefits and burdens of civilisation' and (3) how we rationalise 'collective identities'. They are briefly introduced here, taking into account that the topic is treated in more depth in the main research project writings[4]:

1 - Dealing with 'social systems'

There is some logic in the claim that, in the interest of fair and effective sustainable development measures, it is important to first try to understand and assess 'the system' of the interlinked social practices and their relations with the natural and technological environment. The problem however is that this system is not a neutral given 'out there'. Its own complexity and the existence of uncertainties, ambiguities and unknowns that trouble the assessment of these interlinked social practices and of their relations with the natural and technological environment result in different interpretations of that system. These interpretations concern not only the actual state of that system, but also its historical and future evolution. This means that we cannot come to a joint understanding of such a system, let stand that we would be able to converge on how to change it. This has three important consequences that have not only philosophical but also practical policy-related implications:

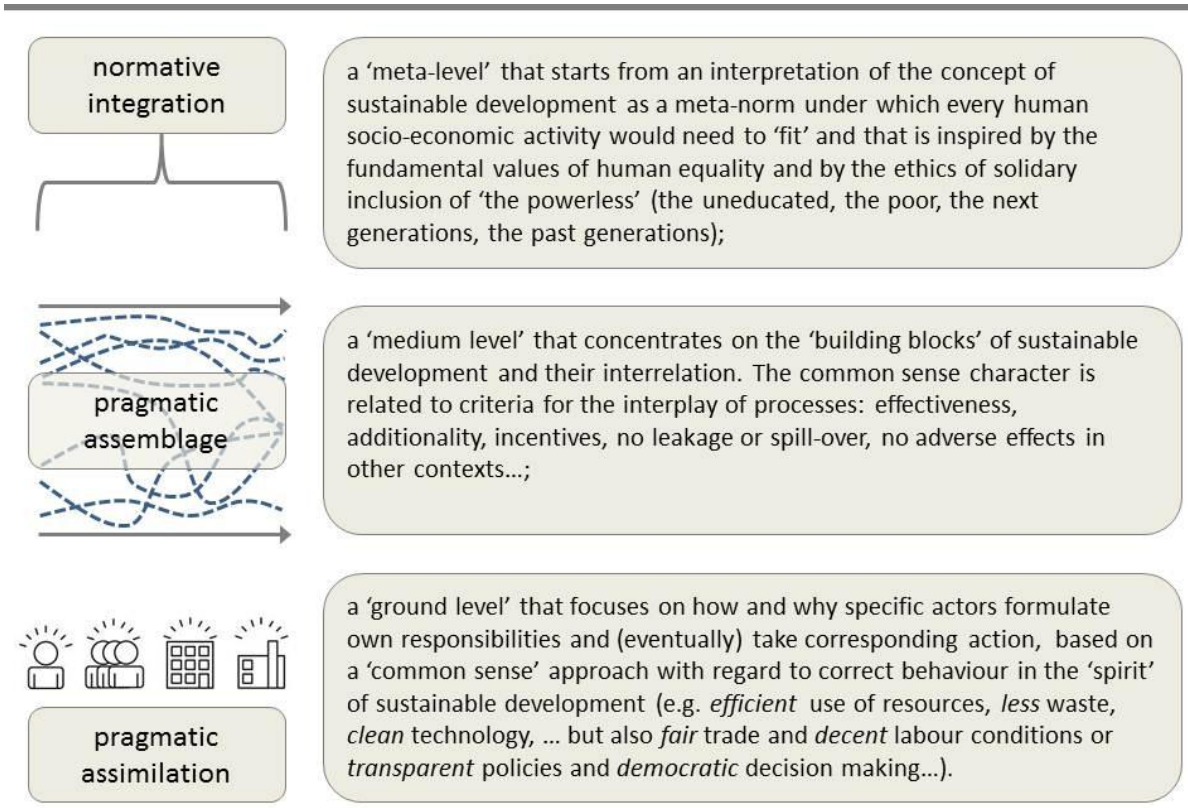
- It is impossible to come to a joint holistic view on the earth-society system in the interest of sustainable development governance. Not only are our actions said to be of contingent nature, also the perception of their effects can lead to different conclusions. If a practice causes a specific 'effect' according to the one, it may cause no effect, a different or even the opposite effect according to another. In other words: what are synergies for the one may be conflicts for the other, which makes it impossible to 'envision' in consensus a holistic earth-society system for the totality of practices and their effects - 'bigger' than the sum of its parts - that would ensure sustainable development;

- The precautionary principle is an ultimately relevant moral policy principle, but its necessity and workability cannot be motivated on the basis of systems analysis;

- It is impossible to converge on a compatible top-down / bottom up approach for fair and effective global governance: the way we try to use 'soft' normative references (such as 'sustainable development') to unanimously *extract* practical policies for complex 'unstructured' problems may lead to as diverging views as the way we try to use 'hard' knowledge-based references to unambiguously *instruct* these policies. The faltering climate change negotiation process may currently be the best example of this.

[4] The texts under the title 'In search of cultures of deliberate relativism' make up Part One of the writings of the research project 'The Possibility of Global Governance'
(see http://theacademiaforum.wordpress.com/research-writings-matrix/part-one).

Dwelling on these reflections, as a starting point to an advanced deliberate approach to making sense of sustainable development governance, the research proposes a framework that would as well inspire a global ethics for societal development and intergenerational responsibility as a 'local' ethics for concrete action by distinct actors, and this by viewing sustainable development as a *convergence of interests* on three progressive 'policy levels':



The motivation for this three-level view is that it suggests a meaningful framework for deliberating theories of sustainable development while it can also inspire concrete policies and trigger debate on responsibilities of concerned actors. Organising global governance from out of this three-level view would initially be *enabling* but finally *enforcing* for global policy. That claim leans on the understanding that pragmatic assemblage as sketched above is not 'instrumental' (in the sense that it does not concern the rational solution of a complex puzzle), but that it is *normative* in its own sense. Fair and effective sustainable development governance is not a matter of assembling and organising all good intentions 'inspired' by the same meta-norm, as this still provides ways for actors to escape specific responsibilities that are crucial for sustainable development. The research identifies three accountability problems in this sense (a discourse related, a system-related and a solidarity-related problem). In short: systemic sustainable development policies that would approach 'pragmatic assemblage' in a normative way would make sure that actors are not only confronted with the adverse effects of their irresponsible behaviour, but also with the adverse effects of their good intentions…

2 - Dealing with the 'benefits and burdens of civilisation'

Nobody will deny that industrial and technological development improves our well-being, but neither that, apparently, these improvements also come with a price. In this perspective, our socio-economic dynamic is marked by specific concepts that, although unwanted in the way they manifest, actually have a 'neutral' character, as today they are accepted as inevitable consequences of socio-political, socio-cultural, technical and economical interaction in the process of 'progressive civilisation'. They include

> technological *risk*, environmental *occupation*, economic *profit*, labour *instrumentalisation*, market *dependency*, information *mediation*, heritage *depletion*, trans-generational *burden*

Today, whether we want it or not, striving for social well-being *implies* these 'artefacts of civilisation'. They are neutral from the perspective that it makes no sense to be 'against technological risk', 'against environmental occupation' or 'against economic profit' etc. However, the fact that they are neutral does not mean that society would be able to come to a consensus on them. Not only is there the existence of specific unknowables, they are also (each of them in their specific way) marked by moral pluralism as specified earlier in this text. While people may have different opinions on the character or degree of 'acceptability' of a risk, occupation, profit, etc, there exists no single objective science- or opinion based rationale to ultimately determine what would be *the* acceptable risk, occupation, profit, instrumentalisation, dependency, mediation, depletion or burden. The conclusion is that the only rationale to be used in this context is the rationale of deliberation itself, and that the only acceptable risk, occupation etc. is the one an informed democratic society considers to be acceptable.

3 - Dealing with 'collective identities'

Considering the fact that the human being, as an intelligent and curious creature, was, is and will always be an explorer, the process of social globalisation is a logic evolution, nowadays supported by the technological possibilities of transport and communication. What were considered to be unique human collective identities connected to specific geographic regions and/or skin colour turned out to be nothing more than collective habits that took shape by imitation (in the interest of social recognition) when people still lived in relatively closed communities. If we look at the human as an explorer, then the idea of identity should not be assessed backward looking but forward looking. The fate of human geographically-bound identity in the process of social globalisation (which is of course different from economic globalisation) is that it inevitably had to loose its relevance as a character or property of a collectivity. This observation, in combination with the insight that national, cultural and religeous identities are nothing more than relative and volatile social constructions in themselves, leads to the conclusion that there exists no such thing as a human collective identity. This means that rationales on human social, national, cultural and religeous identities cannot be used as boundary conditions for fair and effective global governance. The only relevant socio-political concept of human identity is that of the human individual. And because we are all individually different, we are all individually equal.

These three ideas form the vantage points and corner stones for a society that sees the spirit of deliberate relativism as a strengthening spirit instead of as an undermining one and that, consequently, embraces rational and moral perplexity as advanced enlightened human stances instead of as weak, defeatist or cynical positions. The further writings of the research project

elaborate on how cultures of deliberate relativism in science and policy may confront us with (and make us accountable for) how we rationalise our behaviour 'in the system', how we rationalise our opinion on the artefacts of civilisation and how we rationalise our shared interests in terms of 'identities'.

What is, beyond these exercises of deliberate relativism, left for trust? Everything human. In light (or darkness) of the cognitive complexities and moral pluralisms that mark our global problems (and solutions), the conclusion is that the only absolute social value for political deliberation is the value of human equality and that the only rationale for political deliberation is the rationale of deliberation itself. Societal trust, as an anticipated result of fair and effective governance, can only be generated by its method, and it will be this form of societal trust that will consequently support the practical outcomes of deliberation.

6 Reflexivity and the social justice of intellectual solidarity

Recognising rational perplexity means recognising that there are limits to knowing and forecasting of sustainable development – related problems and solutions that cannot be resolved by science neither by intellectual cooperation. The most pertinent actual example is that we cannot *prove* that recent climate change is caused by humans, only presume that it is *very likely*. Recognising moral perplexity, on the other hand, means recognising that there may be conflicts of opinions on sustainable development – related problems and solutions that cannot be resolved by science neither by political negotiation. The most pertinent actual example here is the conflict over the 'shared but differentiated responsibilities' of developed and developing nations. This recognition should not lead to total nihilism, as there are reasons to believe that also in these cases, intellectual cooperation may result in an effective way of tackling them that is perceived as fair by everyone involved. Traditional scepticism would respond by saying that this sense of fairness is impossible as 'we cannot do good for everybody'. In philosophy, we call this classical utilitarianism. In politics, however, this claim would emerge from the culture of detached political pragmatism described above. The argument to refute this scepticism is the simple idea that 'people are not stupid'. In other words: given the specific character of the problems at stake, in order for policy outcomes to be sensed as fair, the policy *method* first needs to be sensed as fair. What sounds irrational to the all but not cynically or strategically detached political pragmatists and their supporters from science, civil society and the private sector, is actually what would really enable fair and effective global governance supported by broad societal trust: the idea that an individual or a group can accept a (for her/him/them) partly unfavourable outcome of a fair policy. But this political version of 'informed consent' requires human beings to benefit not only from means to participate and contribute, but also from intellectual capacities and stimulations to do so.

Visions such as those that take shape in the Millennium Development Goals and the current discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals suggest that 'we know what to do', but societal trust in sustainable development governance can only emerge from a socio-political culture of deliberate relativism that takes rational and moral perplexity and their consequences serious. These consequences do not translate as 'responsibilities' for scientists, politicians, entrepreneurs, activists or citizens in the first place. In a culture of deliberate relativism, the central attitude for each involved individual is not an attitude of responsibility but of reflexivity. More specific, it is *reflexivity as both an intellectual skill and a moral stance* that will make people to be *prepared* to develop and engage in settings for knowledge generation and deliberation that comply with the qualities of governance - transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, process-thinking and transparency – as proposed

before. In addition, reflexive agents will understand that questions about the character or 'degree' of these qualities ('what kind of?' / 'how much?') or scepticism about their practical feasibility and workability may not be used to question the 'ideological' vantage point as such.

In which sense should reflexivity at the same time be seen as an intellectual skill and as a moral stance? With reflexivity as an intellectual skill, one recognises the why and how of rational perplexity and moral perplexity and of its implications with respect to making sense of issues based on knowledge and opinion. With reflexivity as a moral stance, one consequently acknowledges (1) the importance of refraining from relying on authoritative mandatory power to facilitate the use of strategically simplified 'defensive' argumentation, (2) of the need to 'free up intellectual space' for governance inspired by the qualities listed above and (3) of the need to invite others 'to join in that intellectual space'. In dealing with complex issues in a political context, reflexivity as intellectual skill and as moral stance thus acknowledges the importance of *intellectual solidarity*. It provides the insight that no individual agent, interest group or authority possesses alone the knowledge to effectively and fairly deal with sustainable development, neither the insight of what this knowledge should comprise or how it should be generated, negotiated or used.

7 The human rights principle for global sustainable development governance

So the claim is simple (in theory): fair global governance requires intellectual solidarity and the right for every human to that kind of intellectual development that would enable and stimulate him/her to use reflexivity as an intellectual skill and as a moral stance. A care for reflexivity in the *systemic* approach to governance will consequently enable governance to be organised transdisciplinary, inclusive, process-oriented and transparent, which means that it will be effective as it will generate trust based on its method instead of on the promise of results. Important to note is that there is no objective fundamental motivation for intellectual solidarity and reflexivity other than the argument that sceptics can neither come up with an objective motivation to reject them. Arguing in favour of intellectual development for every human being in the interest of enabling him/her to use reflexivity as intellectual skill and moral stance is simply arguing for a new and advanced enlightened 'condition humaine'. On the one hand, it is the most difficult choice for humanity to make today, but on the other hand, it is a more promising choice that sticking to the old 'rational conflict' model.

For sustainable development governance, the previous reasoning enables us now to make the claim that 'before we can all become equally responsible, we first need to have equal chances', although with the understanding that we speak of chances of intellectual development, and not of chances to take part in the market economy. One consequence of a culture of deliberate relativism is that there cannot be different cultures of education. This immediately implies the somewhat uneasy but actually liberating thought that, in this perspective, the right to be educated and to develop a critical sense in order to become a more vocal citizen and to stand stronger in society implies 'by definition' a learning environment and method with a universal character. In other words: there can be no cultural-specific approaches to individual and collective knowledge capacity building. Any critique that this would lead to a flat bleak world or that this view is the result of a new kind of intolerance should also motivate why we would still need to nominate and demarcate cultural-specific approaches and identities today, and is therefore a priori suspicious. Tolerance is by definition tolerance of the uncertain, the ambiguous, the unknown and even of the unknowable in their various alienating emergences. Ethical and aesthetical diversity origins from contingent dynamics driven by 'capable' interacting human beings, not from artificially demarcated multiculturalisms.

In the further writings of the research project, a reasoning is developed on how and why this culture of deliberate relativism, as a culture of intellectual solidarity shaped by human beings in their capacity of reflexive agents, is also a culture that not only cares for intra-generational justice, but also for intergenerational justice. An important insight that emerges from intellectual solidarity is that, in dealing with long-term societal dynamics, 'even all together now, our deliberative power is limited, as we cannot consult and include the next generations'. This means that intellectual solidarity also implies intellectual *resignation*: the insight that a part of our responsibility is to leave next generations 'intellectual freedom' by leaving them a world they can fairly and effectively organise according to their own ethics and deliberate insights.

The previous reasonings support the reasoning that the existence of limits to knowing and forecasting problems and solutions and of a plurality of opinions on problems and solutions makes that there is no single objective path for sustainable development. Sustainable development relies as much on human individual and collective creativity as it relies on human individual and collective responsibility. As a consequence, there will always remain a vague line between what should be 'enforced' in the interest of human rights, human equality and human solidarity on the one hand and what should be 'left open' to contingent dynamics relying on the power of individuals, communities and networks to employ creativity, commitment and solidarity on the other hand.

Whether on the global, the regional, the local or the very local level, the citizen who takes part in the socio-economic dynamic will also accept the burdens of this socio-economic dynamic and, within reasonable limits, an eventual 'unfavourable distribution' of these burdens, if he/she, as a critical-reflexive and thus moral agent, enjoys intellectual solidarity that provides him/her with *the equal right to be responsible* in and for that socio-economic dynamic. Intellectual solidarity would move a democracy beyond the obsolete politics of detached representation legitimised by the wildcard of the majority vote to a system where elected mandatories act as moderators and where citizens become 'cosmopolitans beyond comfort zones', as, with their rights to contribute also their responsibilities would emerge.

In this respect, the idea of intellectual solidarity motivates the view that sustainable development is a collective human responsibility that also implies specific individual human rights with regard to 'knowing', 'expressing opinions' and 'decision making'. In other words, human rights for sustainable development are not only about combating poverty and providing equal access to justice and to basic needs (water, food, energy, health care and shelter), but also about having equal access to that kind of knowledge generation and decision making that recognises limits to knowing and plurality of opinions, and that aims to make sense of and give meaning to the world, ourselves and the issues at stake.

Therefore, from a social justice perspective, these 'ethics with regard to the generation and metamorphosis of knowledge prior to and in governance, and consequently with regard to the organisation of governance itself.' motivate something deeper and more essential than a methodological quality fix, namely an advanced understanding of human rights in relation to global governance. In simple terms, intellectual solidarity motivates the need to enable and enforce for every human being *the equal right to contribute to making sense of what is at stake*. That equal right would be enabled by understanding the normative framework for governance as informed by a threefold advanced conception of distributive justice, seeing the *method* of governance primarily as a 'sharing of effort in intellectual capacity building' + a 'sharing of deliberative space' + a 'sharing of freedoms of collective choice'. Only this approach can provide the spiritual and practical-systemic

support for the methodological qualities of transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, process-thinking and transparency. This vision is proposed here as 'the human rights principle for global sustainable development governance'. What this principle would and could mean in practice is a main topic of the research, but the central argument is that fair and effective global governance will not be possible without societal and political support for policies that would motivate and implement this principle, or thus, in other words, for policies that would enable and foster for every human being *the right to be responsible*…

To conclude, in a schematic way, the human rights principle for global sustainable development governance can be phrased as follows:

… **The human rights principle for sustainable development governance**

→ Added to the 3 fields of human rights that concern a fair socio-economic organisation of our society, being

1. the equal right to aid and access to justice of those in need today
2. the equal right to have access to and to participate in the socio-economic dynamic and to deliberate adverse effects of that socio-economic dynamic
3. the equal right of those of the future to govern their own needs,

… sustainable development governance implies *the equal right for every human to contribute to making sense of what is at stake*. This right can be fulfilled through the implementation of a 3-fold concept of distributive justice:

1. a sharing of effort in intellectual capacity building ('nobody can do it alone')
   [> implying pluralist and reflexive basic and advanced education and inclusive and transdisciplinary research]
2. a sharing of deliberative space ('nobody should do it alone')
   [> implying inclusive, deliberative and transparent multi-level decision making]
3. a sharing of freedoms of collective choice ('even all together now, our deliberative power is limited, as we cannot consult and include the next generations')
   [> implying global governance as a continuing process of engagement and resignation]

→ Connected to the 3 rights-fields that concern fair socio-economic organisation listed above, this right enables what is essential for human well-being and what makes sustainable development governance possible: *the right to be responsible* for every human.