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Mainstream Economy, Development Politics,
Sufficiency - The other way around as only
possible sustainable solution?

Jorge Guerra González
September 2012

[Mainstream Ökonomie, Entwicklungspolitik,
Suffizienz - Der Weg andersrum als einzig
mögliche nachhaltige Lösung?]

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Mainstream Economy, Development Politics, Sufficiency - The other way around as only possible sustainable solution?

Jorge Guerra González*
September 2012

Abstract:

[In theory we pursue a sustainable development, in reality we do not. An economy based on continuous growth, which evidently is not sustainable, is however the priority model almost everywhere. If we really aim at implementing sustainability we must radically change our economic model. Sufficiency - which means for the individuals, mainly from so called developed countries, not to consume more than is really needed - may offer a useful alternative. We can still find some - last - examples of indigenous peoples living in a sufficient manner, all of them nowadays in so called developing countries. We could learn at least from them that it is possible to live differently in harmony with ourselves and our environment. This would change the way to their - and to our all - protection, as much the manner we understand at present development politics]

Key words: [Sustainability, Sustainable development, Developing politics, Sufficiency, Indigenous peoples, Native peoples, Economic growth]

Zusammenfassung:

[Theoretisch verfolgen wir eine nachhaltige Entwicklung, in Wahrheit tun wir es nicht. Das fast überall priorisierte Wirtschaftsmodell basiert auf ständigem Wachstum, was sicherlich nicht nachhaltig ist. Wenn wir wirklich beabsichtigen, Nachhaltigkeit zu implementieren, müssen wir unser Wirtschaftsmodell radikal ändern. Suffizienz - was für Individuen hauptsächlich aus so genannten entwickelten Länder bedeutet, nicht mehr als notwendig zu konsumieren - könnte eine nützliche Alternative sein. Wir können noch - letzte - Beispiele von indigenen Völkern finden, alle in so genannten Entwicklungsländern, die suffizient leben. Wie könnten von ihnen lernen, dass es möglich wäre, in Harmonie mit uns und mit unserer Umwelt zu leben. Dies würde den Weg zu ihrem - und zu unserem allen - Schutz ändern, so wie die Art, wie wir Entwicklungspolitik aktuell verstehen]

Schlüsselwörter: [Nachhaltigkeit, Nachhaltige Entwicklung, Entwicklungsländer, Suffizienz, Naturvölker, Indigene Völker, Wirtschaftswachstum]

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I. Introduction

Human beings exploit as consumers the Earth's resources in order to satisfy their needs. The problem is that more and more consumers demand more and more resources, and that resources are finite. As a result they dissipate, become exhausted, or simply spoilt. A gradual collapse is unavoidable if the engine consumption-exploitation continues this way. In fact collapse is already announcing its presence: natural resources are progressively rare, hence expensive and not seldom fiercely fought for; our environment (climate, water, land, air) is worsening with every day; sustainability guidelines, that should guarantee the durability of our resources, are mostly observed only if they adapt to the mainstream politics or economy - that pursue much more immediate goals.

The problem is as well that these politics or economy, the ones that clearly count in the international concert, rest precisely on growth and consumption. So it would be a gigantic task to modify its foundation, even if knowledge on causes and negative effects of this basis scheme is already commonplace. In fact knowledge on the consequences of our acting, in case we remain on such scheme, is a necessary condition for reversing the situation, but not a sufficient one. It would be additionally required to consider and mutate influence factors like the inertia of the present economic and political structures, the ability of politics to act in coordination in the long term at several action levels, the resistance of those privileged through this system - and maybe to assume (hopefully only in part) the limitation of humanity to set and pursue priorities and assume responsibilities beyond a certain point (in space, in time). As a matter of proof we can observe the poor results obtained at the World Climate Summits in Copenhagen (2009), Cancun (2010), Durban (2011) or at the so called Earth Summit in Rio (twenty



years after 1992). There we can take for granted that the general knowledge on climate change, resource scarcity, etc. and of their causes and consequences unfortunately only played a minimum role compared to the influence of the many contrary factors¹.

Even, the way to understand and promote development politics, that should follow almost by definition other priorities (such as sustainability in the sense of inter- and intragenerational justice), has become in reality a way to export such mainstream model to the world, the one that paradoxically has caused the present pre-collapse situation, thus multiplying its negative effects and limiting its solution scope.

In any case it is urgent to find and follow a path able to bind economy/politics and real sustainability. Either voluntarily or we will have to do it compulsorily.

This paper proposes a radical (just meaning, thorough, from its roots) view change through goal substitution of our general economic and political acting, focusing then on ways to implement it.

The advocated goal concerns every human being: to achieve his or her fulfilling. The funny thing is that achieving this goal would assure global sustainability. Then the way to this achievement leads almost necessarily to sufficiency, i.e. just consumption moderation. This admittedly, not especially original approach, for, as probably anyone can figure out, would make it possible to live sustainably in harmony with the environment without missing any essential aspect in human life. Another funny thing. It would work easily, at least in theory: anyone can start any time, without any precondition.

Nevertheless this way would certainly be very complicated to implement, as it diametrically contradicts the way and foundation of our economy and politics.

¹ S. e.g. Dehmer 2012; Endres 2011; Drieschner 2010.



In order to implement sufficiency the focus of this paper turns to indigenous peoples in so called developing countries searching for appropriate models. This approach would bring other positive effects. It would lead to another conception and consideration of development politics as an inspiration to learn from, and as a way to expand sustainable solutions in a multi-directional way, all of them being regarded as equally valuable, those people and their way of living finally gaining respect - and protection. This should as a counter effect assure our protection over generations.

Therefore, the next chapter describes mainstream politics and economy in order to understand them and analyze their transformational potential. Chapter 3 offers the foundation of the possible way out, sufficiency, and a new orientation of and from development politics regarding its implementation. Chapter 4 shows some examples of living ways that are still practiced by indigenous peoples, that today only to be found in "developing countries".

II. Growth/Development - Limited Resources - Sustainability

Growth is a particular concept nowadays, as it alone justifies economical-political measures without the need of any further foundation²: If those measures are meant to promote or promise growth, they are good in themselves. The same could be said about *development*, as at the end of the day it is often identified with economic growth³.

World economy relies basically on growth. Such statement would not deserve any additional comments if growth did not encourage resource consumption - or vice versa - and if resources were

² S. v. Weizsäcker et al. 2009, 356 ff.

³ Sachs 2000, 9.



not finite⁴. However they are certainly not infinite, so we have to face an uncomfortable inconvenience. The model the dominant world economy relies on - employment, public and private investments, pensions, health security, insurance, social assistance, etc. - is wrong, and requires urgent updating, or better, deeply transforming, as it nears an abrupt ending⁵.

Perhaps an economical model based on growth seemed right as its limits were still not perceived or not that close, for it could be identified with wealth and welfare. As resources seemed inexhaustible, as there were not so many consumers and as their needs were much more modest than now. At present though, subsequently to the reaching of its confines through its worldwide expansion - or rather as the precondition of such model - the perception of its effects is different and clearer. We are continuously confronted with resource limits and with the boundaries of growth at the same time. More and more often we face bottle necks, for resources get exhausted or damaged⁶. Some of them sound perhaps old fashioned: diminishing oil reserves, abusive fishing, ozone layer depletion, acid rain. Others are more present in public consciousness: climate change, food crisis, radioactive remains. Finally others are more or less unknown: lithium exploitation in Bolivia, coltan wars in Congo, Mapuche land expropriation in Chile. New bottle necks will doubtlessly continue to be originated⁷. As a consequence of the mainstream economic model based on resource consumption/growth we are compromising all aspects that are concerned in a truly sustainable development: Economical, social, environmental, and also inter- and intragenerational justice. So if we mean it se-

⁴ E.g. Jackson 2011, 23 ff.

⁵ S. Müller/Weiger 2010.

⁶ BUND/EED 2009, 41 ff; Sachs 2000, 11 ff.

⁷ E.g. through NF_3 (Nitrogen trifluorid), a gas with 17200 more powerful greenhouse effects than CO_2 (Forster/Ramaswamy 2006, 212) that has not been included in the Kyoto-Protocol list. It is released by solar cell production. So when we are solving a problem, substituting fossil through renewable energy sources, we meet this next limit.



riously with sustainability it is necessary to find alternative models or solutions.

III. Sustainable Strategies - Sufficiency - Reconsidering Developing Politics

A Strategies towards sustainability: Efficiency, Consistency/Substitution

In order to ensure sustainability and resource protection we could count on strategies concerning *efficiency* (doing things *better*). They aim at saving resources by optimizing the relationship between input and output in goods production: less input for the same output, otherwise more output for the same input⁸. These strategies would reduce resource consumption - provided that its demand remained stable.

We could also rely on *consistency* strategies (doing thing *differently*) that foot on the ideal of a (more) sustainable resource use - neutral if possible with regard to global sustainability -, e.g. by a positive re-integration of the required resources in the environment or in the production process⁹. Or on those that have the objective to replace non-sustainable for sustainable resource utilization, which are called *substitution* strategies if considered by themselves¹⁰.

The most relevant advantage of these strategy groups is that they do not break with the growth scheme above. They simply try to integrate in them the questions of sustainability and resource scarcity. Paradoxically this is their greatest disadvantage too. Without questioning the growth based economic model it is not possible that they really brings us any further to sustainability. Even if we rely on human know-how and technique

⁸ S. e.g. BUND/EED 2009, 335 ff.

⁹ The idea of *waste* would make no sense, non-renewable, non-resource neutral good production would be incompatible with this approach (s. e.g. McDonough/Baumgart 2002, 68 ff and their "cradle-to-cradle" principle).

¹⁰ Comp. BUND/EED 2009, 306 ff.



succeeding at compensating the negative effects of resource consumption, either with efficiency or with consistency/substitution approaches, we realize that resource exploitation increases much faster nowadays; i.e. that the improvements achieved cannot keep step with the worldwide consumption growth. It means that resource scarcity or damage will be still an issue if we just rest on these strategies. But the real scenario is even worse if we take into account "rebound effects"¹¹. They appear when the resource protection or saving achieved due to efficiency (and even, indirectly, also due to consistency/substitution¹²) strategies vanish just after a while owing to demand rise, which eliminates that resource saving - and sometimes, overcompensates it, thus worsening the original situation¹³. Finally, concerning consistency/substitution it is obvious that there is no such thing as neutral resource consumption¹⁴.

So the mainstream economic and political system are after all undermining their own foundation and therefore unavoidably utopian, as anyone would admit that eternal growing, or infinite resources, are logically impossible. Collapse will approximate progressively, more or less slowly, *velis nolis*, if we insist still in rooting in it. And the strategies exposed, still deeply rooting in it, cannot change, at most delay this destiny¹⁵.

¹¹ v.Weizsäcker et al. 2009, 289 ff; Radermacher 2008, 33 ff; Hofstetter/Madjar/Ozawa 2006, 105-15.

¹² This point becomes more obvious when demand - in this case, for "renewables" - significantly rises, which bring many negative side effects in other areas - s. the conflict energy/food (s. SI 2010). Apart from the fact, that solar energy needs solar panels and wind energy wind mills, that also require resources.

¹³ The ground for this notion is probably that these strategies produce no change at a deeper, motivation level of consumers but just outside them, in the relationship price-performance (s. below).

¹⁴ As for example showed in fn 7. S. Stengel 2011, 131 ff.

¹⁵ Comp. Paech 2012, 71 ff.



B Strategies towards Sustainability: Sufficiency

1. *Two alternative attitudes*

The strategies above are not adequate to succeed in the objective of a durable present and future for human beings. The future they promise is unknown but different and in the sense of sustainability steadily worse to the present we enjoy. In this regard we can take two alternative attitudes:

a) We can be realistic, or perhaps just pessimistic, and recognize that human beings as a collective subject have very seldom acted as one and preserved anything just for the sake of future generations - notably in the leading economic growth countries. Only at an individual level - apart from some especially generous persons - we can find some unselfish examples concerning immediate political interests, or acts although only benefiting family and friends, not altruistically any next to kin - noting that heritage refers mostly to goods kept for close family (mostly known) heirs.

The reason can be that not yet (or as distant) perceived human beings, and even more those who are to come, are not categories we can really consider and then take care of¹⁶.

The good news is that human individuals are custom or habit creatures. We learn to get used to what we have. So we can trust that future generations of people will manage with the resources they receive; they cannot miss what they never had. We did the same, we could not either. Our generation has learnt to survive in this manner.

The bad news is logical. We are only ethically responsible for the future. From the legal point of view there would be no case on assuming responsibility about damages in the very long term. No one would be to blame, and it would be very complicated to face concrete complaints or accusations from the future or in

¹⁶ S. e.g. Liedtke, Max 2011, 37 ff.



the name of human beings to come, provided that we do still not take steps to improve (e.g. we are still wasteful). It would be legally very questionable, as there would be no easy way to represent them or their interests today. Besides, resource collapse or denigration might be fast, but these results would be multi-causal and will happen mostly slow enough so that no present politician, country or generation can be made responsible of. And in any case, no future politician, country or generation will be able argue that it is impossible to live in the conditions they inherited. They will manage and will not look backwards.

b) Otherwise we can attach to our present ethical values, even beyond any legal requirements, and look for strategies that really guarantee a sustainable development¹⁷.

I think the only strategies that first break with the present economical-political predominant system and second offer realistic alternatives without destroying our resource assets are those based on *sufficiency* (i.e. *less*, moderation in the needs and in the ways to satisfy them)¹⁸. Those strategies are more realistic than the actual scheme based on continuous growth, as its foundation and goals are definitely utopian, whereas just the realization of the former would be extremely difficult but not impossible - as aless as their foundation or goal¹⁹.

Sufficiency has an incomparable advantage over other strategies. It can be directly implemented by anyone and any time²⁰. It would probably start as a bottom-up purport. If a signifi-

¹⁷ Comp. Braun 2010.

¹⁸ Not too much of anything: Linz 2002.

¹⁹ It is true that a growing population of moderate consumers could compensate those strategies as well, as a huge number of them could make it unavoidable to reach the boundary of resource scarcity and exhaustion or drain anyway after a while - certainly, depending on the definition of *moderate*. Most important however, is to change the foundation of the actual economical politics, as this shifting would offer a real chance for sustainability for this and future generations.

²⁰ Comp. Kaufmann-Hayoz et al. 2001, 37-8.



cant number of consumers dare to try this strategy, economy and politics would have no other choice as to consider them.

The advantage of this individual approach concerning sufficiency can also be a disadvantage. Successful individual efforts in one State or world region would have a minor effect if these efforts do not reach simultaneously a broad international support²¹. If economic growth continues to be the model that rules politics and economy, those countries that followed sufficiency strategies would weaken themselves in the political concert, as their economy would become progressively feeble. The consequence would be that they would have less and less international influence if the others did not go this way as well; we would then run out of sustainable models.

2. Towards Sufficiency Implementation

Previous statement: Sufficiency is a tricky question. If you want to implement it directly, you will transform it into voluntary or involuntary renouncement - and sufficiency has to come from an inner freedom: you do just not need more²². Otherwise and as a kind of "rebound effect" you will obtain consumption moderation only as long as the external (e.g. financial crisis) or internal (e.g. bad conscience) pressure affect the individuals decisions of renouncing to material goods. Afterwards you will have the same consumption level as before - or perhaps even more, at least for a short while, to compensate the renouncing time²³.

²¹ It is different with regard resource conservation in case international consensus failed, as States that decided individually to preserve their resources would not necessarily harm themselves by keeping their resources in case other States do not follow them. Those resources will still be there, just in case. They might even become compensations - against guarantees - for their preservation (UNDP 2010).

²² Comp. Stengel 2011, 340 ff.

²³ This is the essential difference between *abstinence* (lat. *abstinere*, *abs* away, *tinere* hold, to abstain, to refrain) and *sufficiency* (lat. *sufficientia*, *sufficere*: *sub* down; *facere* make, to suffice, to be adequate) approaches. Even if their goal should be similar, namely less resource consumption, their ways are different. In abstinence approaches



In any case the first question concerning the adequateness of sufficiency would be easy: *Whether* people can live acceptably with moderate needs or moderately covering their needs. The answer would probably be affirmative²⁴. We can assume that living a fulfilled, happy life is the direct or indirect goal of any human acting²⁵. And we can accept that happiness does not directly depend on material goods - or that it could even be incompatible with them²⁶. So the pursuit of our own fulfillment should have real sustainability as a result.

We can go into more detail. We can observe from the logic behind growth that our generation has had more than enough goods to cover needs (and probably more needs too) as ever. However it would be difficult to conclude that our generation lives happier than older generations just for this reason²⁷. So we could indeed state that happiness and consumption go different ways²⁸. It would mean on the contrary that a growth-base system has in principle little influence in the attaining of happiness - or might be counterproductive. *De facto* we can observe in countries with different Gross Domestic Index (GDI) that their

there is a heteronomous - maybe autonomous - element of obligation (to consume less) that is absent in sufficiency ones. This difference is important, as moderation will last only as long as the obligation. In other words, voluntariness guarantees the stability and success of sufficiency.

²⁴ S. Paech 2012, 113 ff.

²⁵ Which can be regarded as nothing less than a fundamental right: Virginia Declaration of Rights 1776: I "*That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, ...; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety*". Declaration of Independence 4th July 1776: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*". Comp. the Preamble American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, 1948.

²⁶ S. Beckmann 2010; NEF 2009, 45; Heuser 2007, 3.

²⁷ S. Jackson/Marks 1999, 421 ff. Probably anyone can individually arrive to the same conclusion. In so called developed countries people must have had less in the past (certainly in peace times without any kind of emergencies or disasters) than they have today, given the continuously growing economy. And this does not mean that they lived (twice, thrice, x times) less fulfilling lives. Some would even say, the contrary would be rather true.

²⁸ S. Jackson/Marks 1999, 436 ff.



"happiness" index - provided that they really can measure what they are supposed to, which is not obvious at all - does not correlate with their GDI, at least not in a consistently significant manner²⁹. Even if there is some relationship between wealth and happiness, at any rate under a \$10,000 limit, the exceptions are overwhelming (Costa Rica has one of the highest life satisfaction rate worldwide)³⁰. Finally, external observations on GDI-weak countries - which I can share - often also conclude that their people seem to be as happy as people in the so called developed world (or even happier) having much less material means³¹.

The decisive questions are nevertheless, *why* should, or *what* makes people to consume moderately, just in case, to live in frugality - i.e. to reject the present model that promotes not to want to have enough but more and more from everything - and *how* to implement it. Answers can be very complex: Many areas of knowledge must be considered and combined in order to obtain plausible results. It is well worth though to achieve those answers, as the success in replacing the growth-base present economical scheme, could depend on them. Politics would be challenged to look forwards and from an international perspective, less oriented to immediate needs; Economy, now reluctant to change the model it is at present based on, would have to question its basement and conceive post-growth scenarios; Law would be responsible for presenting - supportive, repressive, sanctioning - instruments in order to achieve those political/economical goals; Psychology/Sociology, which have the competence to understand and explain motivations behind human act-

²⁹ S. Jackson 2011, 53 ff; v.Weizsäcker et al. 2009, 362 ff.

³⁰ NEF 2009, 21 ff.; comp. http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/findingreports/RankReport2009-2d.htm - 31.08.2012; Heuser 2007, 2. According to the Happy Planet Index (HPI) the first three countries by combining the targets live expectancy, life satisfaction and ecological footprint are at present Costa Rica, The Dominican Republic and Jamaica (NEF 2009, 27-8).

³¹ S. below. Comp. Everett 2009.



ing, should explain and ground the shift from life quantity to life quality; Religion/Ethics should offer credible or plausible alternatives to materiality as much as cementing values and principles that are valid beyond generations; etc.

However answers can be very simple if we follow the arguments above. As it was mentioned, everyone wants to live a truly fulfilling life. They will look for their own answers and instruments to achieve it. Doing this, they will live sustainably. This simplicity could mean a paramount advantage: There would be no need to know, to understand, to convince or to attach to abstract ethical values - that would be very difficult to determine or perhaps to perceive or justify. Individuals need just to be "egoist" and look for effective ways of obtaining happiness, and hence they will be in solid harmony with global sustainability, even beyond generations³². In any case, and as advantage of all ways concerning sufficiency, no new technique, no specially clever method have to be found or discovered for its achievement.

IV. Sufficiency and development politics:

Paradigms to learn from in developing countries

A Sufficiency and the consequences for developing politics

In the context shown development politics should be seen under a very different light. In two senses:

- The reflections above would challenge its foundation, mainly if mainstream economic development is underneath, as it is usually the case. This development concept compromises and undermines the environmental and social conditions of our and of the next generations. Therefore a new goal, compatible with true

³² It may sound like Adam Smith's invisible hand and resource allocation in society. The outcome of the proposal shown in this paper should hopefully work better inter- and intragenerationally.



sustainability, must be the goal of development politics. This approach would certainly bring a fundamental change in the way such politics were to be carried out in future.

- It may not be clear which development concept is preferable or which ways should lead to it. It is sure however that unidirectional, uniformising approaches would not be adequate any more. The idea that (sustainable?) development should come from those who know, "developed", somehow superior, to those who "must" or "should want" to know, "developing" countries, somehow inferior, would be highly questionable. Not least because there would be no reason to export a wrong model. Indeed if development equals sustainable development, there could be many good ways to achieve it. So the knowledge on real sustainability could already exist in those so called developing countries. The input to a new development approach would be necessarily multidirectional, as many of those "developing" countries have something to contribute and say on experienced sustainable models.

The result would be a radically transformed view change. The difference developed or developing countries would become redundant, as all countries would belong to both categories. Hence the search for real sustainability would imply equality and respect. All views and ways pursuing that goal should then be considered at the same level. They all could potentially provide valuable paradigms to learn from. Developing politics would be a good chance for the communication and implementation of such obligatorily sufficient, sustainable strategies, as they are the only ones that benefit simultaneously individuals and their environment. Both points bring us to the next section.

B Native or indigenous peoples: an approach to learn from?

Strategies based on sufficiency are realistic and far from reality at the same time. On the one hand sufficient ways of liv-



ing would be a sustainable solution, on the other hand their implementation would be rather utopian, as the dominant economy and politics would be extremely difficult to displace.

Their realistic side could however become a higher weight, as it corresponds to the living experience of some peoples in so called developing countries. They show that it is possible to exist in harmony, synergy or symbiosis with the own environment, taking just what is needed, thus guaranteeing its sustainability. It could be beneficial for human beings to see that and how these models work, to know that there are other ways of living to learn from, so as to decide which one could be adopted or just how to adapt our (in theory) more developed solutions to truly sustainable ones.

Three examples, among many hundreds, will be considered in this section. There is no special reason for this choice. Apart from the fact that their conditions and approaches are different from each other, they have something in common: The cultures they represent have developed a higher respect for their environment and for their integration in it, are aware of the validity and sustainability of their world views and willing to keep them. Something else: Their particularity is menaced, as they subsist amidst a much more influencing mainstream-economy world that threatens both their living space and their way of living.

Previous to their presentation it is important to remark the following:

- This chapter aims to expose very shortly the reality of different ethnicities and their cultures in a different manner to anthropology or ethnology, just in order to qualify them as valid counterparts.
- It does not pursue to protect those people as a curiosity, as this attitude would contradict any respectful approach to them and cement a new dependence on their "protectors", which would



not allow to leave inequality; and would finally mean disorientation and isolation for them, as the world around would be still irresistibly and unsustainably changing, them being negated any influence on the process.

- It is necessary to present those examples in the most genuine version as possible, perhaps partially anachronistic, in order for the contrast to mainstream approaches to be more evident. At the same time it tries to keep distance from naivety or from romantic interpretations or approaches.

- Cultures can be very rarely hermetic, as they communicate and influence one another. Perhaps the best chance for indigenous people and their cultures would be to participate in the building of politics and economy without giving up their own roots, which would logically cause a complex tension field on both sides. The cost of this exchange could be to lose for them - and for all of us -, as the weakest side, most of their originality.

- With our ignorance or their disappearing (or assimilation), these and other similar cultures would miss the chance to leave their print in the way people live in future. If they fade away the practical models those cultures represent as chances (e.g. to turn upright the collapse utopia) will vanish with them.

- The paradox is that indigenous peoples are among those that suffer most of the consequences caused by deeply unsustainable mainstream politics without having contributed - in general: at all - to their arising.

- The following examples are not meant as a desire to undo development or western civilization. They should be just the expression that other ways of living, which are far from materialism and economic growth, are possible, and that they deserve respect in themselves, not at last as a source to mutually learn from.



- Finally: You can doubt if the following people voluntarily chose their way of living - probably not, so in a way we could not agree if they live according to our approach to sufficiency -, or if they would be ready to change it for ours, if they were asked. Those questions would require an own analysis. These examples just aim at showing that sustainability and a balanced life are possible. Not more, but not less than that.

1. The Machiguenga

The Machiguenga (or matsiguenka) is an ethnic group of around 9,000 individuals who live in the upper rain forest of South-eastern Peru, mostly in the Urubamba and the Madre de Dios river drainage, including the Manú³³. Traditionally they preferred isolation from western influence, so they started to settle in more and more inhospitable places. They spread in smaller groups, although complete isolation is nowadays no longer possible. Some facts are to be highlighted that are fundamentally a part of a culture that is orally transmitted from one generation to the next one³⁴: Their respect for the nature in which they live, their integration into their environment (also spiritually through the ayahuasca shaman ceremonies); their deep appreciation of biological diversity; and their immense knowledge of botanic and plant effects - which is by the way far beyond utilitarian thoughts³⁵. The Machiguenga are animist

³³ S. http://www.peruecologico.com.pe/etnias_machiguenga.htm - 31.08.2012. The reached relative international prominence through Vargas Llosas "The Storyteller" (2001).

³⁴ Shepard/Chiccón 2001, 166 ff.

³⁵ Shepard 1997: "*Native peoples [sic] have a great deal to teach us, not only on the spiritual level but also about practical issues about the environment in which they live. Native peoples [sic] have great knowledge about medicines, wild and domesticated food plants, dyes, insect repellents, resins, perfumes and other practical uses of plants. Not only do native peoples have tremendous knowledge about individual plant species, they also know the plant communities, habitats and local forest types better than scientists. In a three-month survey of Machiguenga knowledge of the forest, I was able to document some 45 different kinds of forest recognized by the Machiguenga in the immediate area of their village. Scientists working in the Manu are currently able to distinguish just ten or twelve types of forest. (...) I hope that native people, typically*



and explain through myths and philosophical speculation the origins of the life around them³⁶.

2. The Mapuche

The Mapuche (*mapu*, earth; *che*, people) ethnicity is now to find just in Central and in Southern Chile and in South-West Argentina. They resisted the Inca and the Spanish empires, started to yield and decline with and after the independence wars in the 19th century. Policies of assimilation both in Argentina and Chile afterwards have had a very negative effect on their language and cultural identity or integrity. The Mapuche represent an important part (4-10%) of the Chilean population - although less than 0,5% of the Argentinian³⁷. They have developed a deep and profound knowledge of their natural and spatial environment and believe in the cohesion and mutual influence of everything. Gvnechen (*Ngenechén* or *Ngünechén*) is their highest deity. All visible or invisible matter has *energy* (*Newen*) and thus movement and life. Nothing is static or isolated. Human beings do not have hegemonic power over the cosmos or over the forces that are present in the world, as they are just a part of it and of its balance³⁸.

3. The Bijagós

The Bijagós (Bissagos/Bidyogo) are a native ethnicity of about 20.000 people that live in the Bolama/Arquipélago dos Bijagós³⁹. In their matriarchal and matrilineal culture women choose their husbands and play a guiding role as priests in their communi-

looked upon as backwards and uncivilized, can be seen instead as sophisticated naturalists in their own right (...)".

³⁶ Shepard 1997.

³⁷ The existing statistics are however contradictory and vary significantly from each other depending on their source (Bussani 2003; <http://www.ine.cl/cd2002/sintesisencensal.pdf> - 31.08.2012).

³⁸ Millamán 2008, 67-70. This is the sense of the central Mapuche yearly rite of nature balance renewal on the 23th June (Bussani 2003).

³⁹ It is located in front of the semitropical Guinea-Bissau coast (West-Africa), counting 88 islands, only 23 of which are inhabited. Corbin/Tindall 2007.



ties⁴⁰. The Bijagós have achieved to preserve their independence despite long periods of slavery and colonial oppression. Their religion is animist and land-oriented. It prohibits the access to certain sacred places for ceremonies and rites of initiation. This prohibition has been decisive to the conservation of flora, fauna and natural resources in the islands (since 1996 the Archipelago is UNESCO Biosphere Reserve). Now fisheries, offshore oil drilling, shipbreaking or drug smuggling are menaces, not at last through pollution and the creation of social problems, for the long existing environmental balance, which is vital for the almost autarchic Bijagós population⁴¹. Its and their protection is not assured nonetheless due to the fact that Guinea-Bissau is one of the five poorest countries in the world.

V. Conclusion and Outlook

From the point of view of logic it is sometimes difficult to understand why there is a divergence between how things are and how they should be if all agree in the goals and in the ways to achieve them, and these are feasible. We would all concede that human beings pursue, consciously or at least unconsciously, to have a happy, a fulfilled life according to the circumstances they are given. They will do their best in order to succeed in that goal. No way that really brings to this goal (i.e. without missing to satisfy any essential need) would burden those individuals or their own environment. Its attainment would also guarantee sustainability over generations. So then why the enormous discrepancy mentioned?

It would be complex to speculate and delve into all possible explanations. They all would only give partial answers on how reality is as it is now, or how it became like this. This can-

⁴⁰ Corbin/Tindall 2007; Bernatzik 1933.

⁴¹ Henriques/Campredon.



not be the aim of this paper, instead to draw attention on some inconsistencies, to ask for their grounds and then to make some solution proposals.

This paper presumes that mainstream economy and thus the politics based on it are wrong. First their foundation - continuous growth or consumption - as it exhausts or damages the existing resources, thus impeding sustainability, hence having a negative impact on the ways this and future generations should satisfy their needs. And second their way, as it deviates human beings from their own essence by promoting values like materialism and individualism. As a result there is no logical reason to support this economy or politics. They should be replaced, as complicated as its removal may be, because this would benefit all of us durably and absolutely, i.e. beyond any timely or local point of view.

If the premises above are convincing, the good news is that replacement is actually at our hand. Anyone of us can start to live without any previous knowledge or condition a sustainable way of life that will be more fulfilling for him or her. Or *vice versa*, anyone can look for his or her own balance of fulfilling (happiness, it is preferred), and then they will be living in a sustainable way. I.e. acting for and assuming responsibility just for ourselves will benefit not only any one of us, but also our next to kin, as our needs and the manner to satisfy them will then be sufficient, moderate and, therefore, sustainable.

The consequence of this view change is capital and immediate for development politics: The idea behind *development* is to be questioned - why should other people *develop* or be *developed* if it does not make sense to insist in the mainstream growth-economy and politics. Another development concept would be required, the input of which will have to come from different sources. The answer cannot be unidirectional any more but mul-



tidirectional, according to different models, toward a global real sustainable development - also coming from some native peoples and their cultures in former developing countries. With this approach development politics would be sustainably hindered to spread unsustainable models and awry values, but truly fair and durable ones. Those will be respectful with any human being and hence simultaneously with all our heirs to come and with the medium we are all living in.

In this paper some real models were shortly described with two purposes. The first one is to show that it is possible to live differently and sustainably - as the example of some aborigine cultures highlights, most all of them in that called developing countries. The second is to encourage people to react quickly, for our own sake, and also in order that those models do not belong to the past before they may become and remain an open lesson in this regard.

On the obverse we can consider realistically (and perhaps sarcastically) that no one will be to blame if economy/politics remain like this; that humans are custom or habit creatures that get used to what they receive; or that their timely and spatial perspective is limited, so it is extremely complicated for them to assume responsibility beyond that boundary - indeed, resources will diminish and peoples living in peace with their environment will adapt or disappear, and the knowledge on this will not be enough to stop this development. However there is hope. There is one horizon or perspective people will respect. Their own life. Each one of us will not really feel better or fulfilled if the dominant values are materialism and individualism. So it is not possible though to see the logical point of approaches leaning on them: What are they good for, or for whom. So: Just try to happy, in balance with yourself and your (also social) environment and you will buy a sustainable development for the same price.



This paper is not to be understood as a rejection of any progress or development or as technique-resistant *per se*. Its purpose is to offer alternatives to an evolution that goes step by step to its own end. Integration of different views and mutual respect could be ways to achieve it. If the goal is to stop such negative evolution, and this means to question progress or development, or the ideologies behind, this inquiry should be made though.



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