War of Ideology vs a Sober View: Sustainable vs Resilient?

Wolfgang Sassin

Wolfgang Sassin, Dr-Ing, Independent researcher, formerly Senior Scientist of International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis and Lecturer of Technical University Vienna Austria

Вольфганг Зассинъ, докторъ-инженеръ, независимый изслѣдователь, въ прошломъ главный научный сотрудникъ Международнаго института прикладнаго системнаго анализа и лекторъ Техническаго университета Вѣны (Австрія)

Article No and Translatoin / Номеръ статьи и переводъ: 020440211 ENG

For citation (Chicago style) / Для цитирования (стиль «Чикаго»):
Sassin, Wolfgang. 2021. “The War of Ideology and Sober View: Sustainable vs Resilient?” Beacon J Stud Ideol Ment Dimens 4, 020440211.

1 Please send the correspondence to e-mail: w.sassin@aon.at.
HEADLINE. With the past in intensive care or a courageous departure into an evolutionary future?

ABSTRACT

Wolfgang Sassin. War of Ideology vs a Sober View: Sustainable vs Resilient?

After serious ecological problems had arisen, the ideology “to protect Mother Earth by any means” emerged and the very symbol of “Mother Earth” developed into a key media issue. The authors and spreaders of this ideology rely heavily on the concept of non-resilient sustainability. Unquestioning and uncritical adherence to this rigid principle led to the emergence of a series of societal experiments and their unexpected consequences. In the article, I study this ideology and compare it with the soberer scientific and socio-political viewpoint of resilience.

Key words: sustainability, resilience, ecology, politics, society, ideology

FROM ECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS TO DIFFERENTLY COLOURED PARTIES

If one looks at the political conflicts of the past years and decades, then, analogous to the unfolding of a globally oriented civilisation with its consumerist affluent societies, there is an oppressive and threatening increase in mountains of rubbish,
plastic packaging on roadsides and along hiking trails (Redman 2014; Uehara et al. 2019; Ungar 2018). Even in remote recreational areas, “overturned” waters, air enriched with pollutants, especially in the steadily growing urban conurbations, signal a gloomy, even downright bleak picture (Lam et al. 2018; Senier et al. 2014; Thompson 2016).

In addition, there are bad news about pesticides that can be found even in previously largely untouched polar regions and have accumulated in fish and other marine life. Even traces of such substances were found in human breast milk. Against this background, first the protection of the immediate environment, then that of “Mother Earth” developed into a key media issue (Folke and Gunderson 2010).

The political symbol \textbf{BLACK} stands for the use of fossil fuels and thus also for the use of the steam engine, or an industrialisation based on “coal and steel”. This was joined in the past two centuries by the symbolic colour \textbf{RED}. It stands for social behaviour towards the uprooted lower strata of society, the so-called proletariat in the urban cityscapes. In addition to these two symbolic colours, black and red, \textbf{GREEN} has now established itself as a third political symbol. A weighty competitor to the previously dominant black and red.

This new social game of colour is shaped differently by culture, but above all by advances in civilisation, and serves, much like field signs once did, to enable “teams” to find their way in the turmoil, competing against each other, whether in a game or in earnest. Transcontinental economic exchange and global information networking are now suddenly imposing a superior, almost transcendent identity mark on this game of colours. \textbf{WHITE} has not yet established itself as a political colour, but it would be an obvious choice as an integral of all spectral components. It would ensure that clear contours disappear and that there should no longer be any differences whatsoever. White as the colour that symbolises the equality of all, is supposed to end all competition and stands as a symbol for the goal of achieving paradise in this world.

However, precisely such a goal is in no way capable of “integrating” previous “parties”. It would simply dissolve the social bonds that have developed so far. Seen the other way round, and who could put this aside, a Code \textbf{WHITE} is reminiscent of a collective capitulation to an overpowering opponent, namely a merciless nature that puts \textit{homo sapiens} into his place.

None of the classic political schools of thought, be they black, red or green, has so far offered a plausible and viable solution to sudden disruptions caused by this “nature”, which call into question the foundations of a civilisation that is now globally networked and organised according to a largely uniform set of rules (Evensen et al. 2017). The current pandemic is, strictly speaking, only one of many recurring “events of a century”. The notion of sustainability therefore distracts from the existentially necessary need to arm oneself.

\footnote{\textbf{Thomas Mayer}: Founding Director of Flossbach von Storch Research Institute und Professor at the Universität Witten/Herdecke: \textit{The Illusion of a “once-in-a-century Crisis.”} Die WELT, on 7.12.2020. \texttt{https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article221981880/Corona-Pandemie-Die-Illusion-von-der-einmaligen-Jahrhundertkrise.html}}
against systemic disturbances coming from outside, to restore the largely lost adaptability and to always ensure to be able to grow from rubble into new life. Ecologists have coined the term Resilience for this (Handmer and Dovers 1996; Holling 1978; Ludwig et al. 1997; Stern 1997; Walker 1998).

“SUSTAINABILITY BY ANY MEANS” IDEOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN SOCIETIES AS DOUBLE INVERTED PYRAMID

This is opposed by the naïve and self-contradictory green argument: it is not the global spread of the modern lifestyle but only material growth based on fossil fuels that endangers nature, from which homo sapiens, as a biological product of evolution, cannot detach himself. Nature must therefore be strictly protected for the sake of man, who continues to multiply and at the same time claims well-being as an unconditional human right that must be extended in every respect.

How can one realize the consequences of such utopian a vision, the questioning of which is not only considered immoral, but the analysis of which is to be made legally difficult, if not prevented, by sanctions?

In this regard, a kind of architectural sketch that may illuminate the situation in which the societies of the 21st century suddenly find themselves.

How does the Cheops Pyramid, with its original height of 146 m, differ from the current tallest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which is 828 m high?

The angle of repose of the rubble-like filling mass of the Cheops pyramid reaches 40° (Dockrill and Bond 2009). The inclination of the solidly clad Cheops pyramid of 51° is only slightly higher. That is why it is stable against slight earth quakes and was, after all, the tallest building in the world for 4000 years. In contrast, modern skyscrapers that do not stand on such a broad foundation depend on a reinforcing steel skeleton, which, however, rusts in the course of time, which means that at some point it can no longer withstand the tensile stresses caused by destabilising external influences. The two World Trade Towers in Manhattan, for example, fell victim to an attack in 2001 and collapsed because the fires that started in the upper parts led to the deformation or destruction of the stabilising steel structure. It is therefore obvious that the new “landmarks” mentioned, whether in Manhattan, Dubai or elsewhere, will not last 4000 years.

What is similar or what is different in the architecture of human societies?

The stability of a society is always at risk if it does not rest on a solid and broad base, similar to that of a pyramid. Its structure is maintained by the broad-based lower strata, whereby, in the case of mild and moderate disturbances and turbulence, the entire social edifice is still supported. However, if the representatives of the „rule of the people” believe and convey this belief to the lowest strata that are still “awakening” or later remain unproductive due to lack of motivation, that they, the “elites to be elected” according to the
equality postulate, would ensure the stability of a society, then this corresponds to an upside-down pyramid.

Such an upside-down pyramid simply disassembles itself, because it is unstable. The pressure on its base, which is getting narrower and narrower towards the bottom, is taking on enormous proportions. Its inner structure is endangered by the “no-alternative” demand to keep together the weak layers that have now shifted upwards into the focus of public attention. This requires enormous supporting forces, a “reinforcement” so to speak, and additionally a kind of glue, namely the constantly repeated proclamation of humanity and love of one’s neighbour, so that this form of a pyramidal social structure does not collapse.

Of course, a pile of sand cannot be “turned upside down” without such “invisible” interventions serving the statics. To do so, it must first be “solidified” internally. The “rule of the people” therefore necessarily requires an authoritarian political apparatus which sees itself as a “representative democracy” and which must ultimately make its decisions with a view to majorities whose horizon is largely obscured and always points „inwards”.

Figure 1 uses the bold experiment of the French Revolution to illustrate this mental confusion and its correction by Napoleon, who, with the help of his strictly authoritarian revolutionary guards, declared himself emperor on the ruins of the Regime Ancien, reached out with his troops to the whole of Europe, Africa and Asia and thus laid the foundations for the Empire Française. New layers could thus be underpinned via the colonies of the “rule of the people”.
Not enough of the confusion thus triggered throughout Europe about the correct social architecture of the “post-Enlightenment era”. After the corporative state had transformed itself into a party state, a dynamic problem was added to the static problem of the internal consolidation of ever larger “acquired” demos. In order to prevent the “rule of the people” from tipping over, it had to be set in rotation like a gyroscope. By rotation is meant here that “progress” which turns around itself at least once every 4 years in election meetings and which has and continues to have ever stranger blossoms. It was about more “justice”, more of this or that. These lists are long and included tasks such as bilingual city signs to include minorities, the “simplification” of spelling to give “disadvantaged” people better opportunities, to the protection of the hermit beetle (*Osmoderma eremita*), which stood in the way of epoch-making transport projects, not least the effort to use gender-appropriate and politically correct language (Dovers 1996; Sharov 2010).

The larger such a double-inverted pyramid becomes, the greater the pressure on the representatives who have to determine its fate and always have to make their decisions with a view to the desires of the masses oppressing them from “above”, who are entitled to re-elect them.
SOCIAL CENTRIFUGAL FORCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETIES

Even small imperfections in the ever-changing civilisational “ground” on which the (electoral) gyro spins, however, cause it to tip over. The supposed Arab Spring and its consequences are just one example. Society must then be put into “rotation” all the faster in order not to topple over (Almedom et al. 2015; Lele 1998; Pastor et al. 1998).

Figure 2 shows how quickly the centrifugal forces increase, which threaten to tear apart ever larger electoral populations as a whole and not just as in a reinforced pile of sand that stands propped upside down and threatens to crumble. For all layers of these democratic societal structures are subject to centrifugal forces, the faster the conditions change, i.e. the faster these pyramids are put into rotation by the “elites”, i.e. into a growth and progress frenzy, be it through the promise of economic growth would increase welfare or even that population growth would be beneficial because it would make possible something new and always “greater”. Immigration, of whatever kind, is a case in point.

An ever smaller external impulse, or even just an internal shift in the density ratios of the emotionally cemented “bulk masses” is sufficient to turn such a “united” structure into a “failed system”.

Fig. 2 : Dynamics of Different Democracies
Effects of progress, material and informational growth, globalisation and digitisation

Society 1 (Nation State)
Growth rate 2%/a -> +21% in 10a
Doubling of GNP in 35 a

Society 2 = 4 times Society 1
(Economic und Financial Union)
Growth rate = 4%/a -> +50% in 10 a
Doubling of GNP in 18 a

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Fig. 2. Dynamics of different democracies: national one vs economic/financial one whose vector of development is laid by transnational corporations.

Regardless of whether it is an “angular structure”, such as an upside-down pyramid, or a well-developed rotating gyro, in which the density distribution in the individual levels has already been centred, if the constitutional rule of the people is even minimally “disturbed” by external influences, then the construct of “rule of the people” is in danger. If in such cases it is not possible to increase the speed of rotation significantly, then it tilts and breaks down.

However, the price for this supposed “dynamic stabilisation” increases rapidly from time to time. This is because, as explained in Figure 2, the centrifugal forces increase proportionally with the distance from the axis of rotation and also with the square of the angular velocity. The effect on the “outer” members of the “broad social strata” is therefore dramatically higher than for those “inner” members whose thinking and perceptions are located near the psychological centre. To see humanity as a whole, to see it as “a people of equals”, to strive for a global order for homo sapiens and to gradually want to establish a world state, is therefore not just a dystopia.

Be it Corona, five years earlier the mass migration of hitherto “poor” but largely self-reliant individuals into by no means sustainable civilisational mega-centres, organised according to principles of socio-economic factory farming, or a little further back the proliferation of fake ratings on the global financial markets, they all have not only increased the volume of this upside-down form of society. A situation has arisen in which any attempt at such an increasingly “global” approach must lead not to a sustainable, but to a more unstable, indeed downright explosive, containment of homo sapiens in the dystopian system of the boldly postulated One Humanity.

CONCLUSION

The analogy to those elementary forces of nature that stabilise a gyro and at the same time tug at it, gives an idea of where a blind continuation of globalisation and digitalisation will lead us: to the self-destruction of the homo, not to mention the elimination of the sapiens that will take place beforehand.

The question therefore arises: What strategy are those actually pursuing who believe in a new paradise for humanity, or who want to establish a new category of power from the Off with the help of such a vision?
This applies to the idea of wanting to protect the supposed nature of the planet or even the global climate, without seriously asking whether this is possible at all.\(^3\) Such plans and programmes conceal the fact that humans have been fundamentally changing nature for thousands of years, at the latest since the development of agriculture and thus of permanent settlement about 7000 years ago, even before industrialisation. It is all the more distracting that not only the climate has shown dramatic changes in the course of evolution and will inevitably continue to do so, but that the fundamental physical, chemical and ecological changes on this planet have always been triggers for the emergence of new biological species and ultimately also for the emergence of homo sapiens. Without the five major “species extinctions” in the history of planet Earth, we, humans, would not even exist.

Is a world domination to be morally secured with the flat fear of a climate catastrophe, which condemns previous social models to the junk yard of history, models that humans have developed adapted to highly diverse natural spaces and condensed into special resilient cultures, starting with the Inuit in the frosty regions of the Arctic to the San in the dry desert of the Kalahari? Do we want to establish a globally uniform, networked metropolitan culture controlled by a kind of world government that appropriates the planet as a technologically controllable resource, quasi as a global colony for \textit{homo billionis}? It would not be the first time that a taxon, similar to the family of dinosaurs, lulled itself into a deceptive security because of its size and numbers.

The progressive reconstruction of earlier climates by modern natural science and their unpredictable disturbances meanwhile make some ruptures in human history understandable, such as the exodus of the Hebrews from Amenophis III’s Egypt and their crossing of the Red Sea, which the Pharaonic troops, dependent on chariots, were no longer able to prevent because of the changed conditions in the Nile Delta (Sassin 2019a; 2019b; 2021).

Against this background, it is sufficient to look at current events, such as the lawsuit filed by Portuguese “children” before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)\(^4\). This lawsuit and its partial success shows how far removed from historical reality media-driven thinking has already conditioned the average citizen and especially the “judges”.

Our problem is not nitrogen oxides or carbon dioxide in the air, plastic waste in the oceans or other physical or ecological details, but naïve edifices of belief that absolutise values from earlier cultural stages and project them into a dreamed, almost transcendent world that is supposed to be limitless despite better knowledge.

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\(^3\) \textbf{António Guterres} on 9.12.2020: [https://de.euronews.com/2020/12/02/antonio-guterres-unser-planet-ist-kaputt] »To put it simply, our planet is ruined. Mankind is waging a war against nature. This is suicidal. Because nature always strikes back, and it is already doing so with growing force and fury.« Guterres calls for the declaration of a \textit{climate emergency}.

\(^4\) R.-D. Lehner: Globaler Aktionismus: Da ist doch was faul an der Sache? [harte-facts.com]. Archive from December 2020.
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

A limit on birth rates and a re-division of the planet, as well as a return to hierarchies that define adaptability and flexibility as the primary goal of their communities instead of equality and unity (Sassin et al. 2018).

Not the One Humanity, but the diversity of cultures and civilisations must be promoted. Sustainability as a precondition for the continuation of yesterday, coupled with the bold idea of being able to conquer space and colonise the moon or even other planets, form that rising political WHITE that not only blurs but blinds to the iron principle of life: diversity and symbiotic cooperation of highly different species as a precondition for the “domestication” of inanimate matter. Life has changed planet Earth and it is up to it to adapt to its own very different limits, and also to those that this cosmic waste product of a supernova now dictates.

Funding. This work did not receive any specific financing from any governmental, public, commercial, non-profit, community-based organisations or any other source.

Conflicts of interest. None declared.

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EXTENDED SUMMARY

SASSEN, WOLFGANG. WAR OF IDEOLOGY VS A SOBER VIEW: SUSTAINABLE VS RESILIENT?

There are two fundamentally different types of social, ecological and political behaviour that have determined the direction of social evolution so far: Sustainability and Resilience. The concept of sustainability has already become a core part of the emerging ideological narrative reflected in ecology and culture as well as public policy and international relations. At present, many well-meaning, but worried and irritated politicians and policy makers focus just on sustainability. They overlook the much more important concept of resilience. Ideology of sustainability includes the goals of sustaining means to want to maintain a certain structure or status, if even certain changes happen and transform the environment, either by minor internal processes that lead to a tipping point, or by a sudden and deep reaching external event, e.g. a meteorite hitting the earth. To be resilient takes into account that such “disturbances” can happen. Significant resources are put aside to be able to adjust to such a change, instead of investing them into extensive “growth,” be it to raise material turnover or to build up ever steeper power structures. The much soberer concept of resilience implies that to survive a severe blow does not mean to be able or even to try to reestablish previous “unstable” conditions. If the environment has changed, for one reason or another, resilience means to adjust as fast as possible, instead of wasting valuable resources to “reestablish” previous conditions.

Social blocks and political parties emerged during the first decades of the third millennium that may be well characterized by different colours. The GREEN concept is totally oriented towards sustainability understood as ideology that one must follow. In fact a naive idea, as it neglects the fact that globalization, digitization, human compression in every respect, be it physical or informational, and human population growth together use up all means and capabilities to adapt the emerging global civilization to detrimental conditions that have been the very results of the unseen “progress” so far. The RED concept is narrowly oriented to redistribute consumption possibilities in order to reduce social tensions. This concept neglects that savings constitute exactly those reserves necessary to bridge phases of internal or external disturbances, instead of providing a pool to foster consumption. Focussing mainly on efficiency, the BLACK concept neglects the inherent risks of establishing ever larger networks of interdependent “subsystems.” Finally, extremely ideologized WHITE concept is looming at the political horizon. It stands for the globalist aspirations. It would ensure that clear mental, national and cultural contours disappear and that there should no longer be any differences between individual minds, religions or social groups. In the paper, I show why representatives of these “differently coloured” parties are wrong in their understanding of sustainability in the modern world.

The control of global birth rate, introducing and observing different borders in the global world that would not allow the humanity to merge in one lump, re-division of the planet, and the return to hierarchies that define adaptability and flexibility as the primary goal of their communities instead of ideologies of equality and unity, are overdue – the coronacrisis 2019-2021 evidently demonstrated
that the planet cannot be ruled by one set of uniform principles and homo sapiens is not a species of global humanity. Not the One Humanity, but the diversity of cultures and civilizations must be promoted in the future to elaborate principles of resilient development in the twenty-first century.

**Author / Авторъ**

Dr-Ing Wolfgang Sassin’s teaching, research, advisory activities and affiliations included the Technical University of Vienna (Austria), the Research Centre Jülich (Germany), IIASA (Austria), the International Panel on Climate Change IPCC, the UN Program Habitat, the Directorate General on Research and Innovation of the European Commission (Belgium), and OEMs in the German automobile industry on man-machine interfaces.

**Wolfgang Sassin,**
Independent researcher,
Jochberg 5
6335 Thiersee
Austria

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