

Debating

Limits to Sustainable Development?

A case study of Thailand from a cultural perspective
on sustainable development in Southeast Asia

by Karl H. Segschneider



HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION

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Debating

**LIMITS TO SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

**A case study of Thailand from a cultural
perspective on sustainable development
in Southeast Asia**

With guest essays by

Wilasinee Poonuch-Apai
Jörg Löschmann

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Karl Segschneider
Chiang Mai
August, 2002

Preface

For the last two years the Heinrich Böll Foundation has played a decisive role in the preparatory process for the Johannesburg Summit, not only in South East Asia, but throughout the world.

For example, the Foundation has organized capacity building for NGOs, individuals and people's movements and also set up an internship program for a new generation of Southern activists in international organizations and institutions working on sustainable development in the North. We have combined these activities with participation at the prepcoms in New York and Bali. The Foundation has also prepared a series of World Summit papers on issues that are part of the sustainability debate and related to the development process.

In Thailand and Cambodia the Foundation's Regional Office facilitated the debate around a national people-centered agenda for sustainable development. This agenda was developed through a participatory, bottom-up consultative process in which grassroots communities played an integral part. Together we have prepared a lobby document for an alternative national sustainable development policy. This document, published in Thai, is also available in English as *People's Agenda for Sustainable Development in Thailand*. It critiques the Agenda 21 implementation process in Thailand.

The Foundation's greatest achievement at the global level is without doubt *the Johannesburg Memorandum—Fairness in a Fragile World*, which is now available in different languages (download available at www.worldsummit2002.org). The Jo'burg Memo, as we call it, will also be published and launched in Bahasa Indonesia, Thai and, hopefully, in Chinese and Vietnamese.

The Jo'burg Memo is the Heinrich Böll Foundation's contribution to the debate on both the desired outcomes of the Summit and the critical path for the sustainable development agenda in the next decade.

The Memo raises the central but often-forgotten question "Development yes, but what kind of development and for whom?" This parallels the core question among the Foundation's partners in South East Asia during 2001: "Growth yes, but what kind of growth, at what cost and to be shared with whom?" The Jo'burg Memo suggests an agenda of ecological sustainability and equity in the decade to come. The text elaborates the mutual and intricate relationship between ecology and equity, while not pretending to deal with poverty eradication in all its manifold dimensions. The Memorandum combines a critical account of the post-Rio decade with a rich set of proposals on how to change the paradigms of unsustainable development in order to promote civic, social and environmental rights.

The Memo also expresses the need for a redistribution of rights and resources. The strategic call to reclaim the community and its rights in a globalized world expresses the basic demand of activists from South East Asia who have been actively preparing for the World Summit in their home countries. Challenging UN jargon, the demand of the many people's forums taking place in South East Asia during the run up to the Summit can be summed up as: "Rightholder not stakeholder!"

One World Summit Paper (No. 2 May 2001, “*10 Years after Rio: Debating Development Perspectives*” also available in Khmer and Thai) prepared by the Foundation’s Thailand and South East Asia Regional Office examines the genesis of the current sustainable development paradigm and its flaws. *10 Years after Rio* reviews the shortcomings of global governance processes, institutions and mechanisms as well as contradictions in the Local Agenda 21 implementation processes. It emphasizes the economic and managerial aspects of sustainable development.

Although only marginal consideration has so far been given to cultural perspectives relevant to sustainability in developing countries, such perspectives are needed. The economy—national, regional and worldwide—will continue to be the mainstay and motor of development. Hardly anyone questions the introduction of sustainable development on the basis of a common, globalized market. Yet such a market has a profound impact on existing power structures and the roles of the individual within societies. The globalized market will surely shape the visions and demands of future generations. But will these generations have the chance to combine their new life-style and associated consumption patterns with sustainable behavior or will the introduction of sustainability in consumption depend on cultural factors that will hardly be discussed under the current dominant paradigm?

Could the world have been spared the events of 11 September 2001 if past development had resulted in changes that would have allowed policy target groups to maintain their own cultural concepts as a valued part of their development? Would such a cultural self-affirmation make it easier to leave behind cultural patterns incompatible with a self-ruled and self-esteemed modernization process based on universal human values?

Development policies still follow the economy-centered ideology that the Truman administration promoted just after World War II. In this, the first modern development paradigm, development is seen as an opportunity to increase income for capital holders (and through ‘trickle down’ the rest of society) through extending markets and creating more demand. Like every ideology, its concepts are culturally bound and often contradict or even compete directly with local cultures and traditional concepts. But if, after all, the paradigm is to be exported further as ‘sustainable development’, its concepts will have to be adapted to local conditions.

This publication, another World Summit Paper, No. 14, reflects problems in South East Asia regarding these questions. Based on a specific case study, it considers the cultural dimension of Thailand’s development process and its impact. Asking “What kind of development, how and for whom?” the paper represents a complementary, ‘applied’ reader to the Jo’burg Memo.

We are directing this Paper and the concerns it raises at our priority target group in Thailand and the South East Asia region. Nevertheless, we hope the Paper makes interesting reading for an international audience as well. Many issues covered here are universal in their social patterns and the Paper’s conclusions and reflections may well resonate with representatives from modernizing traditional societies in other parts of the world. With this publication, I also wish to reach out to the many ‘experts’ and ‘specialists’ from the mainly Northern-based development agencies, at least those working in mainland South East Asia where we find similar cultural and social patterns to those in Thailand. I hope this paper will contribute to the emerging debate on the relevance of

cultural factors in development and project planning. Additionally, I hope it will serve as a critical reflection of development goals based on our intention to contribute to true sustainable development in its many aspects.

A critical assessment of the dominant assumptions, tools and methodologies in development cooperation could forward the decisive implementation of refreshed, alternative sustainable development. Only then would the demand for increased development finance (ODA and private) make sense and truly support sustainable development as the term is used in this Paper. This would also contribute to a review of definitions of poverty in different cultural and social contexts and to rethinking much debated poverty eradication strategies, the new wonder pill of the first development decade of the 21st century. The current mainstream development model, the institutions involved and the strategies used have, in the name of modernization and sustainable development, often contributed to new poverty and deprived people of their rights and natural resources for sustainable livelihoods. We need to review more critically the impact of these efforts.

Dr. Heike Löschmann
Chiang Mai, 12 August 2002
Director
Thailand and South East Asia Regional Office

Introduction

Limits to sustainable development?

This publication will take a look at Thailand ‘in the age of development’ and establish links to other countries in South East Asia (SEA) in this context. It will discuss limits to sustainable development common throughout the region that seem likely to persist as long as international policies and politics continue to ignore the cultural traits of target nations and regional target groups, in effect rendering many of the development aims and tools ineffective. In this view, it might actually become necessary to reject a single global vision of development as the only basis for efforts to forward global sustainability. For if a single global vision requires agreement on many qualitative concepts such as ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’, ‘Responsibility’ and ‘Duty’, ‘Justice’ and ‘Independence’, ‘Equity’ and ‘Fairness’, to name just a few, it must contradict sustainable development itself as conceived in Rio, which envisions the protection of human cultural diversity as one of its main cornerstones.

With this dichotomy in mind, the first chapter will briefly summarize how development arrived at the current status quo and show some of its drawbacks and problems. In doing so, it will take a look at SEA focusing in particular on Thailand, examining the country’s basic social structure when development policies became relevant and how the region has fared under development into the present. This chapter is written mainly for readers not very familiar with the development context and debate. It can therefore be safely skipped by more advanced critics of the development process without missing the crucial arguments of the following chapters.

Chapter two will look at the foundation of the western development model and how it reflects on policies regarding sustainable development currently offered by different stakeholders. Chapter three considers different approaches to development, sustainability and sufficiency and how they impact on communities and generate policy needs and political demands. Chapter four discusses the Thai government’s perspective towards development as expressed in the ninth national development plan and offers a critique on the basis of some specific Thai cultural traits, which are shared in part by other mainland SEA societies. Chapter five focuses on alternative approaches towards development that can be found in Thailand and how they relate to the international development context. Chapter six outlines some of the factors that limit sustainable development and examines how some international policy proposals try to introduce corrective measures. The cultural aspects discussed in the previous chapters are here linked with the term sustainable development while stressing the significance they have for achieving sustainability.

Attached to this reader on Limits to Sustainable Development are two guest essays that provide applied analysis of two different issues in Thailand’s recent development. The first, by Ms Wilasinee Poonuch-Apai, is entitled “Social space in transition: Thai women under the sustainable development paradigm”. This essay is intended to illustrate certain influences of Buddhism and of Thai culture on Thai women’s social space. It discusses the role of Thai women from the past to the present and uses cultural perspectives to justify the existence of social inequity regarding gender differences. The second guestessay is titled “Art and Sustainability”, by Dr. Jörg Löschmann, a member of the German Goethe Institute and curator of the regional exhibitions, “The End of Growth?” (2002) and the upcoming “Identities versus Globalisation?” (in 2004). The essay considers the status that

sustainability has achieved in the modern visual arts in Thailand, its progress in the various spheres during the last decade, and the problems and critical aspects that must be addressed in the future. The essay is, in this respect, a case study that shows the degree of sustainability achieved in a society as reflected in its art.

Chapter 1

Reaching the Present

The concepts of development and sustainable development in the developed world

Historically, the term sustainable development is an extension of the development paradigm based on growth and the theory of accumulative economics. It is linked to the US Presidency of Harry. S. Truman in the late 1940s. During the first three decades of its implementation, the original paradigm revealed flaws that rendered the basic concept invalid. While stressing a resource intensive throughput economy to achieve development, it ignored the fact that all resources are limited. In consequence, the paradigm led to a type of development that was impossible to sustain over time. It became necessary to extend the original paradigm to acknowledge the scarcity of resources.

Sustainable development indicators and policies

Truman's development paradigm¹ used economic indicators, for example Gross Domestic or Gross National Product (GDP and GNP, respectively²), to define and assess the level of development. The higher these economic indicators, the higher the level of achieved development. While being able to describe an amount of resource throughput, such statistical values only consider the macro-level of a developed or developing economy and the wealth it has accumulated as a whole. Costs created by resource use within 'The Commons' and the distribution of wealth within an economy are not described adequately. They can therefore neither relate to the environmental impact, nor to individual and social development, of human societies. Truman's paradigm was thus unable to function as a realistic basis for policy development to achieve a desired outcome on an ecological or social level.

Consequently, removing resources from the natural world to become part of economic resource throughput systems has over time exceeded nature's unique capacity for self-healing and replenishment, resulting in an alarming rate of environmental destruction and a worldwide environmental crisis. This destruction puts both economic and social development at risk as it threatens the very foundation of human existence. Economic growth without limits, as forwarded by Truman's development paradigm, thus leads to a contradiction between objective and achieved result. The need for a paradigm that can accurately identify limits in economic, societal and environmental development as the basis for future policy and planning makes the introduction of sustainability into development crucial. A paradigm sensitive to issues of sustainability has to put more stress on positive social and environmental development, as it is here that discrepancies in achieved development become obvious. Issues of sustainability include for example policies and tools to alleviate poverty, introduce equity, properly and fairly manage 'The Commons' and provide fairness and justice for individuals within their societies.

¹ Like other terms, for example The 'Truman Doctrine', the term 'Truman's development paradigm' originates in convenience of use. Being a political concept, it would hardly suffice to declare Truman the sole creator of the paradigm. However, as it was first introduced during his time in office the concept became attached to his administration.

² Since 2001 the World Bank is increasingly referring to GNP as **GNI**, i.e., Gross National **I**ncome.

Shortcomings of sustainable development based on the Brundtland Report and its implementation

Acknowledging the prevailing paradigm's shortcomings and resulting problems in development described above, 'The World Commission on Environment and Development'³ introduced the current sustainable development paradigm in its 1987 report entitled 'Our Common Future'. While this 'new' paradigm was able to forward a definition of sustainable development that accurately places sustainability in an environmental context⁴, sustainability in economic and social development nevertheless continues to rely on an ever-growing catalogue of interpretations and definitions.

As development efforts therefore lack a true action platform for the introduction of sustainability to economic structures and human societies, they have at times resulted in a piece-meal and mechanistic approach towards sustainable development. This approach prefers to view cause and effect in a linear analytical context instead of taking a holistic view. The result is a sustainable development implementation policy that has lost its holistic perspective, i.e. it has evolved into an approach stressing its link to the theory of the paradigm while assessing progress in quantitative fashion and not in accordance with a factual situation such as the actual quality of life achieved within a given locality.

Besides active engagement in environmental protection, poverty alleviation measures and social reform, it is therefore equally imperative to intensify the search for alternative economic and social sustainability paradigms. While economic theories are slowly progressing along lines that emphasize least resource consumption as the single most important aspect of sustainable development, for example Herman E. Daly's 'steady-state economy'⁵, a paradigm for social sustainable development is still missing. As current human societies perceive development as still dependent on a steady surplus economy and accumulative growth⁶, the creation and political implementation of a truly sustainable economic paradigm seems to be a precondition to further decisive progress in social development.

Sustainable development implementation after Rio

For the time being, efforts to introduce social sustainability are mostly of a corrective nature, trying to reverse the worst effects of an unequal distribution of and access to wealth under current economic structures and the social hierarchies that have evolved along with them. Uniting sustainable development of the economy, society and ecology under 'one single paradigm of political action' is therefore imperative. With global governance not yet rising to the task demanded by sustainable development, the focus of current efforts in development is split into the various aspects put forward by Agenda 21.⁷

The splitting up of Agenda 21's sustainable development implementation plan into 44 main topics with even more sub-topics is on the one hand a necessity in order to view development and its problems in their entirety. On the other hand, it constitutes the central

³ A commission of the United Nations

⁴ Development that does not take more potentially renewable resources from the natural world than can be replenished naturally. At the same time, human consumption should not overload the capacity of the environment to cleanse and renew itself by natural process.

⁵ See Herman E. Daly: 'Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development', Boston. Beacon Press. 1996

⁶ The steady surplus economy based on accumulative growth is also referred to as the accumulative economy and its theoretical concepts as accumulative economics.

⁷ Agenda 21 is the international development action plan resulting from the Earth-Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It is based on suggestions made by the Brundtland Report five years earlier.

weakness of the Agenda 21 implementation process, as it allows for a multitude of partially contradicting interpretations and ‘empowers’ political decision-makers to bicker over each agenda independently, switching between *Realpolitik* and *Power Politics* at random and in accordance with needs unrelated to sustainable development. Experience with its implementation over the last decade has demonstrated that it is possible for two interest groups to address the same development issue in name, but refer to two different positions in concept.

For example, the term sustainable economy originally refers to the ability of an economy to achieve ecological sustainability in consumption patterns. It is promoted by establishing special economic structures aimed at achieving that goal, implying that the current economic structure is not sustainable. However, for example in Thailand, the term is mostly translated as sustainable economics and understood as the sustaining of an accumulative economy that also sustains the ecology. This is a contradiction in terms⁸ because it does not consider the finiteness of resources. Any paradigm that ignores the very real ‘limits to growth’ will simply end up promoting ‘sustained economic growth’, and thus take the sustainability issue completely out of development policies and efforts.

Inadequate global governance structures

Well aware of this fact, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGAS) established the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)⁹ as the central implementation agency for Agenda 21. However, the political mandate given to this organization falls short of the authority necessary to lead and guide sustainable development implementation within the United Nations (UN) framework of commissions and organizations. Being a sub-unit of the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC), the CSD has practically no influence on other commissions, especially those that address the most pressing environmental problems like climate, desertification, bio-diversity, forest management etc. Therefore, instead of guiding policies in sustainable development the CSD concerns itself with the impact of decisions taken independently by other UN Commissions. Consequently, the much-needed allocation of budgets for sustainable development suffers to such a degree that, especially its social aspects, it fails to progress beyond theory. The UN process of implementing sustainable development has for example missed the opportunity to merge the first world conference on financing for development¹⁰ with the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. This would have been an ideal occasion to link financing of sustainable development with sustainable development implementation.

Thus without a ‘guiding light’, sustainability remains a much debated but little implemented issue within development. For the larger part of the world, it is in practice still based on the approach and thinking of Truman’s original development paradigm: high per capita income equals good and low per capita income equals bad in terms of community development. With such a quantitative definition in place, the impact of development in terms of actually achieved positive change in social development and resource distribution falls victim to the logic of the accumulative form of economics. Consequently, social development and resource distribution are not measured against independently established reference terms, but always linked to economic performance

⁸ See also: Rio+10 (‘10 Years After Rio: Debating Development Perspectives’) by the HBF Regional Office SEA, chapter 3

⁹ In 1992, as a sub-division of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

¹⁰ International Conference on Financing for Development took place in Monterrey (Mexico) in March 2002.

and its indicators. As a result, true advancement in development in regard to justice, fairness and equity, amongst others, is still missing in sustainable development policy implementation.

It is therefore not surprising that UNGAS has assessed¹¹ the Rio process¹² after 10 years in very critical terms:

‘...[UNGAS is] deeply concerned that, despite the many successful and continuing efforts of the international community since the Stockholm Conference and the fact that some progress has been achieved, the environment and the natural resource base that support life on earth continue to deteriorate at an alarming rate...’

The high throughput economy remains the main focus in most of humanity’s development so that social and economic problems first described in the early 50s remain unsolved, especially in developing countries. Due to the lack of effective implementation, the sustainable development paradigm still has to prove to those waiting for the improvement of their livelihood that it is more than a frame for a system full of the ‘tricks and dodges’ of an unscrupulous, wealthy minority to keep its ‘ill-gotten gains’.¹³

Reaching the development status quo in South East Asia

To better understand the gap between promise and delivery, it is useful to examine one target region of sustainable development policies, namely South East Asia. Taking the example of Thailand, one can briefly outline a typical status quo of societal development as at the beginning of the new millennium and, through the common roots of SEA’s culture and social structure, consider development and sustainable development in the whole region. SEA shares a number of common denominators that exist between its countries despite their often radically different modern histories, i.e. since the period of imperialism and the establishment of western political influence in the region. The example of Thailand provides a variety of topics that have become central aspects in the on-going sustainable development debate, all of which are united by a common critique of the sustainable development paradigm itself. This critique is rooted in a different point of view towards as well as a different understanding of sustainability and sufficiency in the past when compared to the present.

A major source of the internal conflicts currently surfacing in Thailand in the development context is the adoption of western models of economic growth and consumerist tendencies by the rich and middle classes. In such conflicts, the needs of the rich are weighed against the needs of the poor. As in many other countries, the development critique offered in Thailand¹⁴ does not focus on material aspects alone, but increasingly on moral and cultural issues, for example dignity, social opportunity, fairness and justice¹⁵.

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly. *Ensuring Effective Preparation for the 10-year Review of Progress Achieved in the Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Program for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21*. Report of the Secretary-General. English, 2000.

¹² Also often referred to as ‘Agenda 21 implementation process’

¹³ ...as described by Sir Thomas More in ‘Utopia’, his 16th century fantasy decrying the new rise of capitalism, which made extensive advances during his time.

¹⁴ All strata of society offer this kind of critique from rich to poor, influential and less influential, religious and NGO circles and many others. Although the degree of critique varies, all share a basic ‘unhappiness’ with the current growth paradigm.

¹⁵ The on-going sustainable development debate in SEA is similar to the one currently held in the Cono Sur countries of South America, where we can find interesting parallels in that economic aspects do not have the priority in the sustainable development concept proposed there. These similarities as well as some major differences might be interesting to explore.

Shared roots and traditions

South East Asia (SEA) is a land-area dominated by water. Due to this geographical feature it is often understood as a 'group of islands and smaller countries' attached to the Asian continent. It is dwarfed by the land-giants India and China and by the economic powerhouses of Japan, Hong Kong and South Korea. However, this area can truly be considered a continent in its own right. Although its northern part is an extension of mainland Asia, the (until very recently) impenetrable mountain ranges towards China and India constituted a barrier comparable to the oceans surrounding Australia. The people of SEA also have their own indigenous languages, which constitute independent families, mainly Malay, Tai¹⁶ and Khmer. This relative 'continental isolation' fostered many cultural similarities amongst the different peoples of the region and we find diverse but closely related expressive styles in the art and culture of all its countries¹⁷.

We also find similar strategies in politics and planning¹⁸. Wars in the area were for example mostly fought to destroy the land territory and resource base of the enemy and to capture as much of its population as possible to be abducted as slaves. Thus, casualties were few but the cultural exchange very intense. Socially, we find similar separations into a multitude of classes that were to some extent defined by birth, but mostly by access to resources. If that access was lost, so was the social class along with it, almost always independent of birth. Thus SEA never developed a rigid class or caste system like India's. Although the arrival of Islam in the continent's southern parts brought a new perspective and different political organization to large parts of the SEA population, many original SEA cultural ways of thinking and socialization remained intact.

For example, traditionally SEA society was governed by a system of personal bondage that was not based on property, but on personal debt¹⁹. It was thus never the amount of property someone owned²⁰, but the number of dependents in debt-obligation that decided the status of a leader and his power and influence. Such a system, in combination with the continent's abundance of natural resources that allowed for relative local independence due to easily achieved self-sufficiency, was never really able to establish a widespread political dominance of one specific urban center. Instead, areas of nominal influence and

¹⁶ The Tai language family has in the past been considered part of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Modern linguists, however, tend to separate it as an individual and separate language family comprising Tai, Burmese, Thai and Laotian.

¹⁷ With the possible exception of Vietnam, which has a traditional role of cultural bridge between China and SEA and shows a large Chinese influence in its cultural development

¹⁸ Historical data forwarded in this and the following chapter is largely derived from Anthony Reid, 'Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce', volumes one and two, 1988, Yale University.

¹⁹ Concerning the traditional make-up of SEA societies long after the arrival of Islam in some countries, Anthony Reid states that: '...it would be wrong to characterize the social and economic system of [SEA] as either feudalism or slavery. At the heart of both those systems in Europe was a legal bond recognized by state and church alike. Within the cities of feudal Europe and ancient Rome there were legally acknowledged conditions of freedom, which would play an important role in the accumulation of capital that eventually gave rise to capitalism. By comparison, the [SEA] system was both more personal and more monetary. Loyalty was more important than law, and everybody had a master. Money was necessary to buy men's loyalty through debt, not to buy their labor on a temporary wage basis. It was dangerous if not impossible to accumulate capital unless one also accumulated bondsmen to protect and use that capital... (SEA in the Age of Commerce: Vol. 1: 136)'

²⁰ For example, regarding social and political organization: '...Legapazi confronted in the central Philippines a more strikingly kingless society than most [...]. Yet throughout SEA there was a combination of sharply stratified hierarchy with seeming looseness of political structure, which would baffle European travelers, empire builders and ethnographers for centuries. Kings of great power did arise within this framework, but they imposed their will on wide areas only by the force of remarkable personalities and the wealth of flourishing ports. The underlying pattern appears to have been one of descent groups constantly competing for power in the form of dependents. In this part of the world where land was abundant, buildings impermanent, and property insecure, it was in followers that power and wealth were primarily expressed. [...] Although the ideology of a sacred line of succession from the ancestors was very strong, the flexibility of marriage, the frequency of adoption, and the reality of competition among potential successors made lineage in a genealogical sense not the most crucial part of the system. What was crucial was the vertical bond of obligation between two individuals. (Anthony Reid, SEA in the Age of Commerce: Vol. 1: 120)'

cultural leadership existed. But at the beginning of modern SEA history – i.e. for Thailand, during the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V - imperialist pressure from European, American and later Japanese powers made it necessary to achieve a politically united Thai kingdom that could negotiate with the imperialist powers as a unit.

The foundation of Thai modernity

One of the greatest achievements of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) was to bring the competing provincial princes and leaders under the central authority of Bangkok²¹. These local overlords had controlled their populations in a similarly absolute fashion as the king ruled over them. But King Chulalongkorn created the ‘Modern Thai State’ or ‘Siam’ with a central government and the beginnings of ‘common law’ modeled after the English legal system. In addition, increasing immigration of Chinese laborers (and other ethnic groups) to Thai city centers, especially Bangkok, introduced ways of living based exclusively on trade²².

The separation of city and rural community

Thus Thailand’s political and economic society developed and ramified into its current state on the basis of a few distinct characteristics:

- Rural people lived mostly by the rules and laws of their provincial leaders in general self-sufficiency and relative economic security, but in a distinct class society based overwhelmingly on agriculture. This system was carried over into villages and families, where the respective head took the position of leader in all public decisions. This hierarchy is still very much alive in contemporary rural social structures.
- Income generation based on activities other than agriculture was mostly needed in city areas with their foreign immigrant communities who, unless they had children born in Thailand and educated in Thai schools, were for example not entitled to own land. Thus their major source of income had to derive from activities in trade, services and the administration. Even up-country, it should be noted that the administration was almost exclusively controlled by urban Thais who were in many cases descendants of former immigrants.
- As the foreign communities in the cities had their own rules and traditions that set them apart from Thai society, the most readily identifiable common denominators between the merchant circles and original Thai society were defined by matters of finance and trade.
- The descendants of immigrants born in Thailand – and thus the main trade representatives - blended with Thai culture and power structures through

²¹ One of the most important problems King Rama V faced during his reign, ultimately so beneficial for Thailand, was to steer away from its bond-system and turn his country into a nation in the Western sense. He approached this task on an emotional and administrative level, by firstly introducing an ulterior and alternative bond between his subjects and the newly created ‘nation’ of Siam, as opposed to the loose and culturally based ‘sphere of the Tai’. In a second step he patiently introduced a truly ‘national administration’, which promoted ‘national objectives’ in local and regional decision-making. This process took much longer than his benign reign and it is said that the last province to finally come under national rule (Nan Province) did so only in the mid 1930s.

²² In the year 2001, some Thais of mixed descent can still be heard declaring that ‘the original Thai population does not like to work’, probably meaning to make a living through a life based in the cities and on trade. Even during the Ayudhaya period of Thailand, immigrant communities of Indians, Persians, Chinese, Japanese and Europeans mostly conducted trade, while the large majority of Thais lived as agricultural peasants.

intermarriage with the urban Thai population (especially with those few Thai families that did engage in income-generating activities other than agriculture): modern Thailand was born.

- While more and more new concepts of government have been introduced to Thailand since the beginning of the 20th century, its economy has continued to be largely controlled by a minority of trading families located in Thai urban society. This urban elite had and continues to have very few cultural roots in Thai agricultural society yet through the urban center it has steadily increased its economic interest and power in rural areas.

However, social change did not affect the countryside very much, where older social patterns continued to dominate a relatively isolated village existence. Extensive and dense woods and jungles still covered more than 80% of the country up to 1950²³. Moreover, development in Thailand until the mid-1970s limited infrastructure development and political adaptations at the beginning of industrialization to the urban centers, permanently leaving rural areas 'behind'. Living outside the city increasingly meant life in a bygone era with a distinct set of values, concepts and beliefs removed from, and at times even at odds with, attitudes of city dwellers. The rural population lived in accordance with hierarchical dependencies originating in the past and widely kept alive in the rural present.

Sustainable development after the economic crisis in the region

Since the 'Asian Flu', otherwise known as the economic crisis in 1997, more and more nations in SEA have become aware of the shortcomings of development policies as implemented in their own countries. This is not due to a conflict with sustainable development-connected goals such as poverty reduction, equity, empowerment and democracy. It is mostly due to the fact that politically influential citizens have adapted their thinking and decision-making concepts to materialism and consumerism and that, with an increase in relative affluence, economy-centered values have replaced the original Thai values which focused less on material gain. Thus the internal conflicts in SEA are rooted in a dilemma: more development in accordance with an economy-centered sustainable development paradigm means even less emphasis on local culture and more basic conflicts between rich and poor. But an outright return to old values is very difficult as too many key factors of SEA's social structures have already been eroded. The traditional separation into urban and rural areas in terms of political power, economic standing and access to administrative decision-making aggravate the situation in that the introduction of democratic tools as a possible solution to the development impasse is hindered by a distinct and culturally established anti-democratic and authoritarian pattern in decision-making.

The current problems are therefore very much an economic crisis in combination with a cultural one concerning SEA's self-perception and extending into most of its social classes. The political center of this crisis is the prevailing cultural concept upheld by the elite of how and to what extent all classes can be given access to real political power. But SEA does not want to be considered by its economic performance and political development alone. These cannot yet compete with the western model. It would therefore also very much like to see those social attitudes, concepts and values that are uniquely

²³ Today, in 1998, the Thai forest cover has shrunk to less than 23% of its total land area. Source: Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker: 'Thailand's Boom and Bust', 1998. O.S. Printing House, Bangkok.

theirs and represent their culture incorporated into any development process. Thus, the social, political and conceptual adaptations demanded by development and sustainable development on the one hand, and hard economic pressure brought upon the region through the process of economic globalization on the other, are perceived as a direct threat to its cultural identity.

South East Asia's development conflict

South East Asia and its dominating social classes are living through a classic 'Faustian' conflict²⁴. The rapid economic growth of the past has increased the opportunities, affluence, and access to consumption of the upper and middle classes, in effect multiplying their social influence, power and dominance. The new social role defined in the process channels the benefits of development into the hands of a few. However, economic growth itself was only possible due to a rapid change in the role of the lower classes and how they participated in development. The disadvantaged are now demanding their share of development gains. With economic globalization in full progress, the need to restructure society becomes more pressing but the pace of new demands towards social liberalization will also increase in order to benefit and empower the poor. This sector of society may otherwise threaten to refuse to play any part in a new round of development programs.

The resulting policies of the ruling classes want to promise both – to the elite, rapid economic development without changes to the political structure or status quo of power, and to the poor a fairer distribution of development benefits including a larger political role. A typical example of this dilemma is the ninth Economic and Social Development Plan of Thailand²⁵ that can be seen as an ambiguous mix of moralizing and bemoaning the loss of culture in order to justify policies to extend the life-span of old and secure comfortable social structures for those better off. Yet at the same time it promotes a bundle of policies focused on neo-liberal economic demands that could only be effectively realized if those very same social structures came to an end.

²⁴ To face the consequences and impact of the sudden fulfillment of one's desires and dreams made possible by a pact with forces larger than oneself.

²⁵ See also chapter 4

Chapter 2

The historical roots of development conflict

The foundation of the western development idea

After the idea of ‘development’ as such first sprang up under the Truman administration, it began slowly to evolve into the ‘development paradigm’, very much based on the Western nations’ historical experience of changes within their societies that stretched as far back as the fifteenth century with the rise of mercantilism. By the end of the Second World War, this process had western cultures assume a number of basic conceptual frameworks to describe ‘change for the better’ including growth, accumulation of wealth, competition and the market, and social and economic stability. These concepts were in fact the mercantile guidelines and indicators that had led western culture to dominate the world during the course of the previous two hundred years. They strongly influenced perception, thinking and thus visions for the future, especially in the United States where they almost achieved the status of moral values. In this light, they were considered to be the basis of ‘the American success’, in the end helping America to win the Second World War.

Other non-mercantile values, assuredly equally important and based on an even longer tradition reaching back to antiquity -- for example justice, democracy, governance and the rule of law-- were mostly rediscovered and refined to support the fulfillment of human potential. This meant, even as early as the 15th century, human economic potential. Later, in the 18th century, Adam Smith elaborated the paradigm of the free market for a society of free men, which automatically would ensure that the mercantile concepts of change for the better could be established to their full potential and bring the advantages of the ‘invisible hand’. Thus, during the course of western history after the Middle Ages, mercantile and humanist concepts slowly converged to finally exist on a par with each other²⁶.

Mercantile concepts drive development and sustainable development implementation

As already noted, mercantile perceptions were the basis for the development paradigm under Truman who intended to use them to create a system of nations that were too affluent to go to war with each other. But over the first four decades of the paradigm’s implementation (late 1940s to late 1980s), a variety of non-mercantile concepts were added to enhance the desired result and make up for some of its ‘shortcomings’. The Brundtland Report signifies this, seeking to introduce sustainability to development efforts, acknowledging the finiteness of resources and the overexploitation of the environment. The 1990s then brought the latest aspect of development into focus: a shifting of the process of globalization towards a neo-liberal economic²⁷ outlook. However, all the additions to Truman’s development paradigm, which were needed to continue with

²⁶ The economic theories of Marx and Engels were the first that put this relationship and its inherent priorities into a perspective other than the one originating in mercantilism. Their theories put a focus on society and the moral concepts that guided it, reversing the traditional priorities. Thus they introduced the term ‘socialism’, meaning to put society first, and added the term ‘capitalism’ to describe a society that puts capital accumulation and growth related concepts derived from mercantilism first.

²⁷ ‘Neo-liberal economic outlook’ here understood to be the belief in the superiority of the ‘free market’ over the ‘regulated market’, stipulating a development priority for the establishing deregulated economic structures over democratic ones as the most important step to further sustainability.

development implementation, did not really solve the problems they were intended to address. This was due to a fundamental flaw in the paradigm's very concept.

Throughout the different steps of adaptation of development strategies, from the original paradigm to sustainable development, the conceptual frameworks provided for change always originated in a mercantile outlook and therefore copied the historical experience of the West. Thus in the sixties, a distinction was made between agriculture-based economies and industry-based economies. In the seventies, trade regimes were improved and direct financial aid provided for the developing world to 'catch up' with industrialized nations. In the eighties, the focus fell on human resource development where many 'non-mercantile' demands began to make their impact felt on the development paradigm. Finally, in the 1990s, there was a shift towards liberalization of trade and neo-liberal economic globalization.

The attitude the West acquired through its own development process was thus transplanted into the modern development paradigm to the point where even human resource development and the social demands linked with it were mostly forwarded to enhance economic growth. This often sidelined development and opportunities for the individual. Equity, community development and decentralization, to name but a few, were considered necessary in developing countries to support an increase in economic output and throughput. The objective of a higher GNP or GDP for developing countries thus overrode previously existing cultural structures and needs, a process that was justified in terms of the promise of development benefits for all. What was almost completely overlooked was the fact that once traditional structures and cultures are changed on a large scale, traditional mechanisms to distribute development benefits must also be lost. The developing world ended up with a new rich and middle class that ignored its historically developed social duties. While the number of old and very young beggars increased, so did the number of customers dining in western fast-food chains, the latter taking the opportunity to leave their 'third world' behind for an hour or so.

Strategy proposals of the European Commission for Johannesburg 2002 in the name of sustainable development

The results of past development efforts have been dramatic as the numbers given in the European Commission Communication²⁸ (see below) demonstrate: not least, a fifteen-fold increase in world trade. However, the shifts and adaptations of the paradigm have never escaped the mercantile perception of how to define change for the better. Policy-makers simply added facet after facet without changing the fundamental mercantile outlook. This is equally true of the sustainable development implementation process of the past ten years, even though the sustainable development paradigm offers - at least in its ideal perception - a vision that does not accept constant increase in throughput as a way to define development. Thus, several issues must be tackled in Johannesburg: shall the world allow other than mercantile visions for humanity's future development and thus strengthen the sustainability agenda, or shall the sustainability agenda again take second place behind mercantile concepts as the central driving force for 'change for the better'? Is the sustainable development process in danger of 'being hijacked' by a development concept based on sustained economic growth'?

²⁸ 'Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development', The Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, released 13th February, 2002

In the EU paper on the external dimensions of sustainable development, some of the criticism presented by UNGAS last year is taken up and elaborated on:

‘...Since the Rio Conference in 1992, many new initiatives have emerged to address specific elements of sustainable development, but overall progress has been slow. A *new impetus* is thus required in order to tackle, in a *more comprehensive and effective way*, the many *remaining challenges*, as well as new challenges arising from globalization...[italics added]’²⁹

According to the EU, the remaining challenges are (in summary):

- ◆ The income gap between the richest fifth and the poorest fifth of world population
- ◆ Unbalanced consumption structures between developed and developing world
- ◆ Exploitation of natural resources at or beyond their limits
- ◆ Growing inequality within societies
- ◆ The increase in poverty and deprivation due to social and cultural conflict
- ◆ A gap in global governance between developed and developing countries

The ‘new’ impetus as described in the Communication may be summarized as follows:

- ◆ Integrating markets
- ◆ Stabilizing foreign direct investment (FDI) by multi-national enterprises (MNEs)
- ◆ Promoting sustainability initiatives by developed countries
- ◆ Consistent work of international institutions towards sustainable development

Business as usual: policy promoting ‘sustained economic growth’ as sustainable development

The above summary represents the basic approach towards sustainable development that the European Parliament is planning to forward during the Rio+10 World Summit in Johannesburg 2002. Besides globalization, it does not add any specific new challenge or contextual issue that goes beyond what the world already knew in 1992. Thus one must ask, what kind of development and what kind of sustainability have been implemented after the ratification of the final Rio Protocol, Agenda 21, if ten years later we still face the same problems? The quantitative data on which the above ‘catalogue of challenges in sustainable development’ is based paint an even darker picture. The EU paper explains:

‘...half of the world’s population lives on less than \$2 per day. Inequality between and within countries is increasing. In 1960, the income of the richest fifth of the world’s population was 30 times larger than that of the poorest fifth: today it is 90 times larger. The richest fifth account for nearly 86% of total private consumption’³⁰

Nonetheless, in proposing a ‘more comprehensive and effective way’ to tackle the remaining challenges of sustainable development the EU Commission offers policy proposals for the World Summit under the following headings:

- ◆ Harnessing globalization: trade for sustainable development
- ◆ Fighting poverty and promoting social development
- ◆ Sustainable management of natural and environmental resources
- ◆ Improving the coherence of (European Union) policies

²⁹ Opening words of the resolution (A/RES/55/199) on the Rio+10 preparation process in November 2000

³⁰ ...as opposed to 70% at the time of the Brundtland Report in 1987.

- ◆ Better governance at all levels
- ◆ Financing sustainable development

But in order to *harness globalization*, i.e. ‘...ensure that globalization contributes to sustainable development’, the EU envisions talks on

‘...a wide range of issues such as the environment, competition, investment and trade liberalization [which] will ensure that market liberalization takes place within a broader regulatory framework’.

Given the obvious neglect of social globalization issues and the mere mention of the environment preceding a range of economic issues, one is inclined to ask whether by any chance the EU paper means the business environment? The paper goes on to comment on details for *fighting poverty and promoting social development*:

‘...These inequalities [in the distribution of the global rise in output] also extend to access to health, employment, education, knowledge and environmental goods and services, such as clean air and fresh water...Education and good health are key determinants of economic development.’

The Commission not only fails to consider education and good health key determinants for sustainable development, it also misses a fact about the equal distribution of the global rise in output: because the pollution it has caused is distributed evenly throughout the world, humanity has a crisis of the ‘Global Commons’ in its shared air and water resource. If the pollution from the consumption of 86% of the world’s resources by the richest fifth would stay with the consumers, the rich would find it extremely difficult to breathe and the poor might be able to sell them oxygen -- thus conveniently empowered to alleviate their own poverty.

Unrealistic maneuvering

On the question of *sustainable management of natural and environmental resources* the EU’s suggestion needs careful consideration:

‘...By managing natural resources in a more sustainable manner, and decoupling resource consumption and pollution from economic growth, the European Union will also contribute to global sustainable development.’

How would this be achieved? Resource consumption and pollution are a direct physical consequence of economic growth...unless of course one would want to establish alternative economic paradigms such as Daly’s ‘Steady-state Economy’³¹, or the Carbohydrate Economy³², or the Progressive Utilization Theory (PROUT) which all redefine resources, re-focus on consumption and sustainable consumption patterns, and introduce sustainable patterns of human behavior. However, alternative economic concepts are not mentioned even once in the whole text. Even if the decoupling of resource consumption and pollution from economic growth, which is not discussed in the paper, should mean some alternative economic vision, the comments on *Improving the*

³¹ Daly, H.E. *Beyond Growth*. Boston. Beacon Press, 1996.

³² For details on the Carbohydrate Economy or the Progressive Utilization Theory (PROUT) see also chapter 6 and/or the data source: ‘Maticichon’, issue 1120, February 2002, pages 37 and 38.

coherence of (European Union) policies underline the current political reality of such an approach:

‘...Domestic European Union policies may have negative ‘spill-over’ effects on other countries, notably in the developing world. In several important areas, existing European Union policies may also conflict with sustainable development objectives... Policy coherence has several dimensions. This makes it a politically challenging concept.’

With European policy coherence yet to be seen, how would one really implement a change in economic vision? It would probably be much easier to change the objectives of sustainable development to avoid a future conflict with EU policies. Moreover, the last two headings on the subject completely ignore the past ten years of sustainable development implementation experience. Under *Better governance at all levels* the paper states that:

‘...Good governance is first and foremost a domestic issue. Democracy and the rule of law call for active participation of stakeholders and are necessary prerequisites for sustainable development.’

One of the biggest problems of past sustainable development implementation has been the fact that a stakeholder is in most cases not a rightholder. Unhappily, active participation hardly achieves anything if it is not coupled with transferring the same rights to all stakeholders equally. Similarly, good governance is not a domestic issue but one of working democratic structures-- locally, regionally, nationally, internationally and globally. On *Financing sustainable development* the EU paper offers a variety of interesting and pressing measures, for example increasing development funds, alleviation of national debt burdens and the linking of ‘Global Public Goods’ with new forms of taxes. However, financing for development remains one of the saddest chapters in sustainable development history in which most developed countries failed to reach the 1992 Rio goal to provide 0.7% of their GNP to finance development by the year 2000. Constant foot-dragging by some of the wealthiest countries prevents decisive progress on issues like alleviation of national debt burdens and the linking of ‘Global Public Goods’ with new forms of taxes.

Benefits for whom?

Only the second paragraph of the paper, the one immediately following the call for a ‘new impetus’, and preceding the paragraphs quantifying the unfairness of the distribution of wealth, states that:

‘...Many countries across the world have benefited from increased economic growth, notably through progressive market opening and through liberalization of foreign direct investment (FDI) regimes. Since 1960 world trade has increased fifteen-fold and global per capita incomes doubled. Experience shows that globalization can continue to generate economic growth and productivity...’

The questions that arise are, of course, which countries across the world and who in those countries have truly benefited? What type of globalization will most benefit human development as a whole? These are the very questions that represent the split between the

proponents and opponents of economic globalization. They divide the perception of sustainable development into the views carried by critics in civil society³³ (and already expressed in the alternative treaties of Rio³⁴), and those carried by most of the world's governments³⁵.

Alternative western strategic approaches

The above EU strategy paper prompted a press release of the Green Parties in the European Parliament³⁶. The parties' Development Committee coordinator, Green MEP Didier Rod from France, stated that:

‘...We are seeing a coordinated attempt to hi-jack the World Summit on Sustainable Development... [The] Development Commissioners intended to put environmentally sustainable practices at the forefront of international policy-making at the World Summit [but now] the focus is in danger of shifting to making free trade the motor of development...’

In other words, sustainable development is in danger of being redefined as ‘sustained economic growth’.

However, the European Commission and the European Greens do not differ in principle, but only in focus. While the market is the most important aspect of development for the Commission which thus expresses a preference for mercantile concepts of change for the better, the European Green Parties, and with them international civil society critics, hold that the shift in the sustainable development debate is moving in a completely wrong direction. Thus the conflict currently dominating the sustainable development discussion is not necessarily one between growth opponents and growth proponents, as many conservative governments would have us believe, but one of differing priorities with regard to human and economic concepts within the growth-based sustainable development paradigm.

Sustainable development - the full circle of a traditional western conflict

A similar type of conflict occurred during the second half of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. This was the introduction of socialist concepts into society based on the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Especially during the latter half of the 19th century, an ‘industrial nationalization’ based on the advance of railways and the telephone/telegraph was taking place. These merged markets nationally as fast and as radically as the Internet and advanced electronic communication are now fostering globalization. The current conflict in sustainable development therefore shows similarities not only with regard to merging markets and the drastic and rapid change brought to local populations, but also in the radicalization and polarization of ideas and attitudes throughout the spectra of human societies: social, economic and environmental³⁷.

³³ This refers to the view that the current sustainable development paradigm mostly benefits the already affluent parts of society, independent of status of development and thus is a basic flaw of the paradigm or its implementation.

³⁴ Agenda 21, ‘Rio Cluster’ Information Habitat the NGO **Alternative Treaties** full text of the Alternatives Treaties: <http://www.igc.org/habitat/treaties/>

³⁵ ...which would be sustainable development policies on the assumption that distribution of wealth is an internal, national agenda of developing countries only, and not also related to a basic flaw of the paradigm nor its implementation.

³⁶ On 13th February 2002

³⁷ This social conflict of the 19th century does include concerns over the environment. Through these concerns, not yet termed ‘environmentalism’, European societies experienced an aesthetic period later termed ‘Romanticism’ that featured the first

During and especially after the ‘golden seventies’ of the 19th century, rapid economic expansion in Europe (and the US and Japan) widely replaced local economies with national ones. Based on the newly acquired economic might of the winners in this process, a re-negotiation and re-arrangement of local and political power structures took place. It was a time when industrialists became barons, as a gesture of appeasement by the ruling nobility, and intense economic lobbying entered politics on an unprecedented scale. Waves of mass-migration, especially to the US, took place throughout Europe and reflected new economic conditions of the period: rural communities were impoverished and wealthy towns became powerful cities.

Throughout this period, political polarization into two opposing views of human development produced the rift between communist and conservative political forces. Socialism tried to mediate between the two political extremes, but in the end almost always became a victim of the political winner: the fascists in Western Europe and the Bolsheviks and later Stalinists in Eastern Europe. It took Europe two World Wars to finally establish a status quo of new international power and local systems of power sharing that could (somehow) accurately reflect the economic and social changes that had taken place in the preceding decades. The new structure incorporated at least some of the political ideas of the working class.

What is growth?

At the center of the current polarization in the discussion of development is how to define, implement and monitor ‘growth’, and the threat this question represents to the existing power structures. Attempts to find an answer differing from a mercantilist point of view are quickly branded by those in power as extreme or radical and a threat to the market. However, objections or reservations towards for example the World Bank hardly condemn the market, but rather the role this institution plays in development without even having a mandate. Similarly, current power structures do not favor implementing a number of different objectives linked with sustainable development such as equity and economic justice as these are seen to pose a direct threat to the power status quo that is very often based on economic might. The EU paper itself agrees that some of its policies do contravene sustainable development objectives. That is because some of the changes stipulated by the sustainable development paradigm would not support the current status quo of political and economic power, but on the contrary envision a permanent shift of that power towards those that are presently stakeholders but not yet rightholders. That these stakeholders still lack access to rights is no coincidence: a successful re-distribution of decision-making power and access to resources is not really supported by those holding power. A political consensus on this issue has therefore never emerged.

The outcome of all this is that the sustainable development implementation process has finally reached a level of conflict where ideas questioning the dominance of the free market are seen as opposing development and not as attempts to regulate its shortcomings. Long-standing terms that have dominated the sustainable development discussion over the last decades, such as North-South conflict, ‘developed’ world, ecology crisis, equity, and even sustainable development, have become meaningless or must be seen within a new relationship context. It therefore now becomes obvious that those who promote ‘sustained

introductions of public parks in city areas, new principles in landscaping gardens modeled after nature and at the same time saw proverbs like: ‘Where there is muck, there is a buck’ (meaning: dirty, industrialized areas devoid of nature bring opportunities to make a living).

economic growth' as the main guideline for sustainable development in the future have been willing to ignore the injustice and inequity directly resulting from the past focus on economic development. And they will also in the future continue to ignore the very concepts – economic, social, political and environmental – that were introduced by the sustainable development paradigm to open a better way to more peaceful human development based on dignity and rights.

The need to regulate economic globalization

To define growth simply as an extension of the economy violates not only the spirit of Rio and the resulting Agenda 21 action plan, but also the human rights of most of humanity. History has shown that the free market and its 'invisible hand' are not capable of respecting weaker partners in a development deal; and with the new dawn of economic globalization and its rapidly merging markets, policy decisions of the near future must consider the beginning of the circle from where development per se started. They must therefore concern themselves with the mercantile concepts of growth, accumulation of wealth, competition, the market, and social and economic stability, asking how and to what extent these should be relevant for the core-content of sustainable development and indicators of growth. In this context, there can be no ecological protection without equity and no sustainable growth without fairness and justice. To think otherwise means to fall back into and defend the simple but very dangerous social set-up of the last century, dividing on the one hand those who have and hold all the rights from those on the other who lack and are denied their rights.

To deny those who advocate 'sustained economic growth' as the main concept and driving force of sustainable development the opportunity to implement atavistic politics that could return humanity to polarized visions of what is good and bad³⁸, it is imperative for critics within civil society and governments alike to claim and control the dynamics of economic globalization. The progress of globalization ought to be adapted in line with sustainable development objectives for a sustainable human future, explicitly demanding a priority of democratic structures over economic ones. The reform of current power structures should only evolve in this context, enhancing the positive impact democracy must be allowed to have on future development strategies.

This will most decidedly have to include economic approaches, where democratic principles, rules and regulations such as the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP) will determine whether humankind can counterbalance unjust trends in future economic structures. Injustices like the commodification of the 'Commons' where economic development is in danger of placing the administration of formerly public goods such as water in the hands of private organizations must therefore be curtailed. Even a development optimist will agree that unregulated implementation of such commodification is unlikely to distribute the rights in accordance with the stakes, but according to economic and political influence.

³⁸ One wonders if, in the post-communist era, the new 'typical' bad guy will not be termed 'communist', but may be a 'terrorist'. At least from the current US government's point of view, the definition seems to be the same: one who threatens the American Way of Life.

An alternative North-South perspective from civil society

Differing sustainable development visions from the West and East alike, for example from international critics within civil society like the ‘International Forum on Globalization (IFG)’, offer a point of view that is often considered to be anti-economic or anti-market. In its report summarizing alternatives to economic globalization³⁹, the IFG opens its introduction under the headline ‘global resistance’ with the following words:

‘...Society is at a crucial crossroads. A peaceful, equitable and sustainable future depends on the outcome of escalating conflicts between two competing visions: one corporate, one democratic.’

However, the choice offered by the IFG is not meant to exclude the market from future development, but to give the free market more relativity in a sustainable development perspective and democracy more relevance. It should therefore help moderate past economic trends that for example have slowly but decisively promoted the importance and influence of international corporations. In the process - and as a result of economic and financial power, not democracy - TNCs have changed from stakeholders of development into rightholders with a strong influence on economic and political decision-making.

Wealth and mandates

The impact on development and sustainable development of institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) effectively establishes a mandate for action in development issues where no real mandate has been specifically conferred. A future focus of development and sustainable development that forwards demands derived from so-called ‘economic necessities’ in the interests of international and corporate finance will introduce a global governance pattern that is based on indicators relevant only to this interest group.

The following numbers easily illustrate and support the assumption of the IFG that development is running the risk of becoming corporate in character: In the year 2000 the total revenue of (the TNC) EXXON MOBIL was US\$ 210,392 million. If put on a listing of GNI (see footnote 3) of all nations, EXXON MOBIL would rank 21st, after Sweden and before Austria. The total revenue of the top 50 TNCs is US\$ 4,519,290.5 million. This is slightly more than the GNI of Japan, which is currently the second biggest economy in the world. This is also more than the combined GNI of all countries ranking lower than 17 (190 out of 207 listed countries) which have together a total GNI of ‘only’ US\$ 4,346,897 million⁴⁰. Such economic might cannot be healthy for the development process, especially if its influence remains unregulated, i.e., is not counterbalanced by the introduction of more democratic structures in the economy, or at least a catalogue of economic rights established for individuals and communities.

‘Corporate Development’

The IFG describes the absence of democratic regulation of the market in future development as ‘corporate’ in order to distinguish it from democratic, i.e., where such regulating measures are introduced. In not a single line of the IFG report summary does it

³⁹ ‘A Better World is Possible’, Alternative Committee of the International Forum on Globalization, summary of an up-coming report, spring 2002

⁴⁰ Sources: World Bank and Fortune’s Global 500

deny the validity of the market, the idea of growth and wealth. What does become apparent is a different focus and priority regarding the importance of agendas relevant for the process of globalization. The report describes 'key ingredients' and 'general effects' of what it terms 'corporate-led globalization' under the following headings:

- ◆ Corporate deregulation and the unrestricted movement of capital;
- ◆ Privatization and commodification of public services, and remaining aspects of the global and community commons, such as bulk water and genetic resources;
- ◆ Integration and conversion of national economies to environmentally and socially harmful export-oriented production;
- ◆ Promotion of hyper-growth and unrestricted exploitation of the planet's resources to fuel growth;
- ◆ Dramatically increased corporate concentration;
- ◆ Undermining of national social, health and environment programs;
- ◆ Erosion of traditional powers and policies of democratic nation-states and local communities by global corporate bureaucracies;
- ◆ Global cultural homogenization, and the intensive promotion of unbridled consumerism.

It continues subsequently to describe 'democratic development' in accordance with 'Ten Principles for Democratic and Sustainable Societies' under the headings of:

- ◆ New democracy
- ◆ Subsidiarity
- ◆ Ecological sustainability
- ◆ Common heritage
- ◆ Human rights
- ◆ Jobs/Livelihood/Employment
- ◆ Food security and food safety
- ◆ Equity
- ◆ Diversity
- ◆ Precautionary principle

'Democratic development'

The description of 'democratic development' reflects the main criticism brought forward by critics in international civil society. It thus does not deny its roots in mercantile thinking when it refers to 'Jobs/Livelihood/Employment'. This is not just a concession to *Realpolitik* but arises directly from the insight that development needs markets. The IFG thus acknowledges the development regulating mechanisms as the West has sought to establish them: the freedom of the individual must be allowed to build and maintain its own link to the economy. However, the description of 'democratic development' also forwards criticism towards current sustainable development implementation and especially the economic globalization process. This criticism is distinctly humanistic and focuses on culture, representing an approach that rather dominates the point of view from developing countries. That is, the link of the free individual to the western style market must not threaten cultural diversity, equity, human rights or common heritage. The IFG report also gives in its overall criticism a more detailed review of diversity in all aspects of development. It opts for strong support of indigenous cultures not based on western mercantile thinking. Specifically:

‘...Cultural, biological, social, and economic diversity are central to a viable, dignified, and healthy life’.

The general approach of the report and the different conceptual sources it employs are a truly democratic mix, showing that the institute accepts dissent and consent as equally valid on an agreed ground. It offers a forum for voices from ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ societies alike and can place clear stress on non-mercantile concepts without becoming anti-economic. It agrees on the advantage of a market in principle, e.g. the provision of jobs and livelihood, and views the diversity and democratic foundation of market structures as pre-conditions for healthy development per se.

New Democracy, subsidiarity and ecological sustainability

The IFG also acknowledges the relationship between democracy and the market and demands the political right of the individual to have an impact on development. It would therefore not abolish or dismantle free trade, but develop it to its full sustainable potential. The ‘new’ democracy would therefore distance itself more from economic interests so that governments could serve the people instead of serving corporations. Under ‘subsidiarity’, it demands new rules and structures that consciously favor the local and ensure that whatever decisions and activities can be undertaken locally should be. Thus:

‘...only when additional activity is required that cannot be satisfied locally, should power and activity move to the next higher level: region, nation and finally the world.’

Only thus is it possible to counterbalance de-localization and de-empowerment of communities and local economies resulting from economic globalization; only thus can guarding the ecology be entrusted back to local responsibility.

Common heritage and human rights

Regarding common heritage, the IFG would extend its role beyond cultural definitions encompassing the knowledge and heritage of culture to include collective human efforts such as knowledge and services relating to health, education, public safety and social security as a ‘modern’ common heritage. The natural heritage of water, land, air, forests, and fisheries must be considered physical resources that are part of our common heritage. The availability of these resources to all who need them should be considered part of justice. The definition of human rights ought to go beyond that focused on by the richer nations such as civil and political rights, and include a guarantee of economic, social and cultural rights of all people. These five main concepts -- new democracy, subsidiarity, sustainability, common heritage and human rights -- must become the basis for approaching other agendas of sustainable development. These would include jobs/livelihood/employment, food security, food safety, equity, diversity and the precautionary principle.

The market and democracy

On 29 March 2002, ‘The Nation’, a Thai English-language newspaper, printed a letter to the editor that critiqued an editorial column in its 25 March edition. The reader, a foreigner to the country, reacted to the following remark in the editorial ‘...what free trade promises

is one thing and what it really delivers is, in most cases, another...' and offered the following opinion:

'...Attacks on genuine free trade, where it exists, are just whining about non-issues...Those who damn the alleged evils of free trade really ought to be honest about their views, and say frankly: I am for unfree trade, I want restrictions that forbid people to buy and sell as they see fit; everyone should be prevented from shopping where they can get the best deals. That means I insist on government policies that force consumers to pay unreasonably high prices for a smaller range of goods and services...This is good, because it allows favored - that is politically well-connected - individuals and businesses to run their inefficient, high-cost operations without fear of competition. Competition is bad, because it encourages improvement and progress. I want politicians to make laws, and the shadow figures behind them, to direct the flow of wealth as they see fit, either to buy votes or simply to enrich themselves. Liberty is a dangerous concept, subversive and evil.'

The interesting argument quoted above is an example of how the current discussion on trade and economic globalization mixes up agendas that do not belong together. This is a current trend of development implementation and - unfortunately - of policies from many western democracies. Genuine free trade, the argument goes, is seen on par with liberty, i.e., the introduction of free trade signifies the end of corruption and the arrival of democracy. However, as the example of Europe increasingly demonstrates, weaker social structures and services at the cost of democratic participation can very well be one result of the free market. Affluence can also create a deficit in democratic structures, as the WTO exemplifies, or reduce a society's respect for the human being in the pursuit of wealth, as expressed in soaring crime rates in many developed countries.

Critics within civil society maintain that the introduction of free trade does not guarantee the introduction of free political or social structures. On the contrary, the benefits of more efficient and faster growth, which supposedly is the result of a free market, will stay concentrated in the hands of the largest capital holders if free political and social structures as the foundation of economic development are not introduced first. It is imperative to demand free trade only in connection with a politically and socially free individual. The free market will not destroy corruption, favoritism and unfair competition, unless a working democracy of free individuals based on economic, social and political rights is in place to support the market.

Demands and critique

The core demands of civil society regarding action needed to truly further sustainable development thus focus firstly on democracy and only secondly on the free market. However, the core critique of civil society of past and current development efforts does focus on the market because past economic policies have largely ignored the very relationship and impact the market has with and on a free civil and political society. The market does not need democracy to function properly. But it does need democracy if it wants to introduce justice and fairness to the results of economic development and if it wants to be sustainable.

The EU paper discussed in the first part of this chapter indicates what to expect from Johannesburg: international powerbrokers, supported by economic rightholders, will try to

establish the concept that the worldwide introduction of the free market is what humanity needs to bring forward all the agendas addressed in Rio. The concept's logic is like this: 'if only the world could make trade really free, then justice, fairness, democracy, equity, poverty alleviation, good governance and all the other important aspects of sustainable development will come to pass because the invisible hand of the free market will automatically do the greatest common good. It must do so, because this is how a free economy works. So if humanity can make the world economy grow fast enough and our economies free enough, we will have a shortcut to sustainability that is fast, efficient and turn humanity into one.'

However, liberty can indeed be a 'dangerous concept' if democracy does not guarantee that all are equally free. Competition without political liberty and a firm democratic basis for the market is indeed 'dangerous', as it does discourage improvement and progress. This is why development and sustainable development will need to be established as thoroughly political paradigms in the up-coming conference in Johannesburg. It must be brought to the attention of policy-makers that it is the true purpose and intent of sustainable development to change power structures wherever it is necessary to introduce sustainability. It cannot be the duty of society to support the economy unconditionally so that growth can finance development and sustainable development. On the contrary, it must be the duty of society to provide democratic structures ensuring that the economy stands second in line after sustainable development principles, be they economic, social or environmental, to allow for a pattern in development humanity can afford.

Chapter 3

Approaches towards development

First basic target group - the individual

International affairs and relationships are to a very high degree organized quantitatively, even when based on qualitative concepts like cultural exchange, religious exchange etc. The reason is very simple: in order to assess progress in any development, or to express it more generally as any form of change, quantitative tools are used based on 'modern' scientific methods. The assumption is that human development can be adequately described by quantitative indicators. By insisting for example on an international definition for poverty, verification tools and indicators based on quantity become a logical necessity. However, such assessments necessarily end up describing quantitative units and not qualitative status.

Cause and effect and their relationship are traditional tools of Newtonian thinking. If 'action A' occurs (or does not occur) here, then 'reaction B' shall follow. The inadequacy of this kind of thinking to solve problems in sustainability has been increasingly acknowledged in development work which has consequently sought to introduce a holistic perspective. In spite of this, however, many problems in development are not being solved by the approaches introduced. The foremost example is the increase of poverty in spite of massive national and international programs to counter it. It is becoming increasingly obvious that on the political level and in neo-liberal economic circles, mind-sets are stuck with Newtonian concepts that fail to incorporate a most qualitative variable in their approaches and policies, namely human nature. If the sustainable development implementation process tries to quantify poverty in line with economic concepts only, it will hardly be able to suggest an effective solution because it will always try to derive an answer that is verifiable through economic, quantitative indicators. This will be true even with an added holistic approach.

How to approach sustainable development politically?

It is possible to measure a person's resource needs to sustain his life and assure healthy physical development and then to define a quantitative minimum. However, once this minimum is provided, poverty becomes a qualitative term which it is impossible to adequately describe and define through general quantitative indicators. Instead, such description must depend on personal perception and social context. Whether material wealth is perceived as an important part of poverty depends very much on the culture in which a human existence is lived and the context of socialization in, for example, a rural or urban community. The further two cultures are apart in their conceptual make-up, the less probable it is that common definitions of poverty can be agreed upon between those two cultures.

The Center for Science and Environment (CSE) in India has recently⁴¹ issued a 'statement of concern' regarding sustainable development and its progress under the Rio process. In

⁴¹ In September 2001

its final chapter it demands that the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002

‘...clearly define what is meant by sustainable development, and reach a global consensus on how it can be operationalized, so that institutions and laws can work towards this goal...[and]...identify a few key areas such as ecological poverty and water poverty which, once addressed, will help lead to sustainable development.’

The above statement is based on the assumption that so far no one has really followed in a political sense the sustainable development definition forwarded by Rio, in spite of the detailed paradigm structure given in Agenda 21. It also senses a lack of a common set of definitions and instructions on how exactly to implement sustainable development.

The demand of the CSE’s ‘statement of concern’ is a typical example of approaches in sustainable development policy making. To call for international definitions in policy formulation based on the individual agendas of sustainable development is the norm throughout all political spectra. However, the nature of this approach might be the real reason why all international efforts so far to arrive at a shared political understanding of sustainable development implementation have failed. The demand for an international definition should, on the one hand, be extended to the political level of global governance and not stop at the demands of Agenda 21. However, a definition that can guide the political action of all is hardly achievable at present in the light of power politics engaged in by most developed nations⁴² internationally and by the rich everywhere. On the other hand, to make any definition at all locally relevant, implementable and effective, a political level of local sustainable development governance must also be approached, ideally based on qualitative criteria and oriented towards local communities.

Achieving political relevance for a qualitative local sustainable development definition would probably serve the sustainability agenda much better at the implementation level⁴³ than its global correlate. As such, it would need a distinct regional or local character because sustainability is not only about how a society grows economically, but also about bowing to the limiting factors of the planet. It is within one’s personal actions and visions, a qualitative unit, where one needs to accept the fact that resources are finite. Based on a regional and/or local qualitative understanding of what sustainability actually represents, it might be much easier to find a political consensus that could extend its dynamics to the level of global governance. It is only with such an extended understanding of sustainable development as a qualitative unit that includes and politically empowers diverse cultural concepts, that humanity can break the vicious cycle termed the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’⁴⁴, where the rationality of the human mind leads inevitably to self-destruction through overexploitation of resources.

⁴² A perfect example is the withdrawal of the United States of America from the Kyoto protocol

⁴³ After the destruction of the WTC Towers in New York on September 11th 2001, the United Nations could unanimously condemn the attacks as they were easily quantifiable in terms of damage and loss of human life. However, all attempts to define terrorism by the UN have so far been and may remain unsuccessful. A qualitative definition of what a terrorist actually is would be needed before the problem can be quantified in terms of the actual number of terrorists and direct action be taken to solve the problem not only in Afghanistan, but also worldwide. Terrorism is a local phenomenon with a worldwide impact. Any action to stop it must therefore be first of all qualitative in character if we do not want to run the risk of an even stronger backlash through operating without a clear, qualitatively and quantitatively defined frame of action.

⁴⁴ Garret Hardin described this concept in 1968, suggesting that development problems might not have a solution that is technical in character, but moral, i.e., qualitative. Hardin, G. The Tragedy of the Commons: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968.

Finding new indicators

The qualitative aspect of human perception within a society can be summarized in qualitative models or concepts to develop indicators. If one looks at 'poverty' from this angle, 'cultural concepts' can constitute a framework for all individual models of what life in a community should be. As such, only the concepts shared within any human society or community can be the provider of valid indicators to judge the progress of development. Poverty in Thailand for example is not only based on a definition centered on financial means, although that is an important part of it, but also considers access to social rights within a community.

For instance, someone with relative wealth but little access to justice and fairness might very well have access to opportunities for developing economically. On the other hand, society could still consider this person's overall social standing as poor, due to limited access to justice and fairness. Valid and effective policies in poverty alleviation in the context of sustainable development must therefore avoid measuring only economic growth and should focus equally on local qualitative data with regard to concepts of poverty. They must therefore include considerations of social role and its integration into social responsibility under the definition of poverty, even if such definitions vary from culture to culture. Otherwise, opportunities to alleviate poverty not directly connected to the financial means of a person might be missed.

Sustainable development in need of social and cultural diversity

If sustainable development can put the human being back at the center of development thereby replacing the current domination of economic indicators, sustainable development might actually become a viable option for the future. And because a human being is as much a qualitative entity as a quantitative one, it might actually be important to avoid a global definition of sustainable development based on something like Agenda 21. This is especially true if its implementation overemphasizes the promotion of ecologically destructive production and consumption. Instead, a focus on promoting a multitude of local sustainable development definitions based on local values and visions, i.e., a multitude of local sustainable development paradigms, would serve global sustainability better. This is because there are two separate components that successfully implement sustainability: on the one hand, the sustainability perspective identifying where a society wants to go, its sustainable vision - a qualitative paradigm; and on the other sustainable development as a framework for action, an action plan - a quantifiable and 'qualifiable' unit - to achieve progress towards sustainability.

By defining sustainable development locally, the need to introduce international development indicators based on quantity would decrease and maybe eventually disappear. Meanwhile, the opportunity to keep qualitative indicators as part of the sustainable development equation would become much bigger. It could be quite interesting to discover what insights locally-suggested sustainable development paradigms might reveal for the implementation of sustainability worldwide: specifically; whether it would show possible limits to the on-going 'globalization of concepts' and the sustainable development implementation it is supposed to enhance. To do that however, it is clear that the sustainable development implementation process will need to reclaim the concept of community and its decision-making power over resource use and development priorities. In other words, global governance to promote sustainable development must become a

radically decentralized system that offers equity on all levels of society, be they local, regional, national and/or international.

Sustainable development and democracy

The western approach towards development sometimes ignores that the development paradigm, and especially the sustainable development paradigm, does carry a message familiar to almost all societies. This is that the market and the local environment provide a basis for the development of society. But now there is also a third and unfamiliar concept on how to govern these resources: namely through democracy and decentralization. Already in 1992, F. Fukuyama⁴⁵ hinted at the possibility that the larger part of human societies might have to surrender their own ways - developed through a long historical process - of governing their societies:

‘...What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the cold war, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government...’

If democracy and decentralized administration are really going to be the global instruments of political governance and sustainable development alike, then a larger set of related values based on what one might call ‘humanist attitudes’ will have to be installed worldwide. There is no democracy without concepts like equality, freedom and human rights. All of these are qualitative concepts. However, under the current pattern of development they are closely linked to the introduction of the free market. Although democracy is advancing wherever western political influence reaches, the free market is advancing much more rapidly wherever western economic influence reaches.

Economic globalization melds all humanity into one economic unit and is the carrier for the worldwide introduction of capitalism and market values, including competition, growth and the accumulation of wealth. Thus the development paradigm carries two main messages, one political and one economic. The latter is normally the first to arrive. Reflecting the different pace between the introduction of democracy and the free market, one might want to consider another point of view:

‘...as an economic system, capitalism is essentially undemocratic, despite (or because of) being centered on the free market. Capitalism is built on the fundamental split between those who control economic decision-making and those who do not. The decision-makers control the means of production; the majority does not. Capitalist economies may be free, but they are hardly democratic: the freedom to accumulate capital militates against the democratic distribution of power in society. To be consistent, those who advocate democratic pluralism in the economy must also advocate democratic constraints on the operation of markets...’⁴⁶

Economy and democracy: competitors in the development process

One of the reasons for the slower pace of democratic development when compared to the adoption of free market values might be that for most developing countries democracy is a

⁴⁵ ‘The end of history and the last man’: F. Fukuyama, 1992

⁴⁶ From: ‘Poles Apart. Winners and losers in the history of human development’, A&A Taylor, 1992: page104

new concept. From the developing countries' point of view, this concept often requires that a set of new and foreign parameters or moral values be respected in society if it is to function at all. Unlike democracy, trade is known to all human societies and existing social structures have often established a ruling economic elite before the arrival of democratic governance and decentralization. In most developing countries, any policy that tries to distribute access to the economy more equally through democracy is in direct competition with the established powers that did not rely on democratic structures to accumulate their wealth. As the worldwide introduction of the capitalist free market through economic globalization makes rapid progress in promoting its ideology of accumulating wealth as a primary objective in life, the democratic component of sustainable development implementation and the social changes it suggests are increasingly considered a threat to the stakes of the ruling elites.

Rapidly changing economic roles in the wake of the introduction of the free market and economic globalization also result in changing social roles and responsibilities within a society. When the change in these social roles is not mirrored by an adequate change in economic opportunities and perspectives, an increasing number of conflicts appears within a society. However, equality of access to economic opportunities depends on the quality of the democratic and decentralized structures in a country. Social change accompanied by economic injustice quickly finds a political expression if the impact of the change itself is large enough. This is the case with current development efforts in the name of implementing sustainable development, especially in combination with economic globalization.

Thus from an agenda to introduce sustainability into humanity's future, the perspective of the poor towards sustainable development changes into an agenda that is mainly perceived as a political paradigm that offers the tools to reshape the political self-perception of the individual within his/her society. In other words, for those disadvantaged as a result of social and economic change, sustainable development must first of all result in a transfer of political and social decision as a set of prerogatives to the general populace to ensure economic fairness and establish economic rights. It is not the concept of sustainability that makes the sustainable development paradigm so attractive for many at the lower end of development, but the political concept of rights in decision-making for the individual.

For critics within civil society, any development that rightly calls itself sustainable is equated with efforts to achieve two things. The first is social justice and fairness as a basis for development of the individual so that political rights become an indicator for quality of life. The second is economic justice and fairness as a basis for securing the well-being of an individual so that economic rights also become an indicator for quality of life. Whenever basic political and economic rights can be established for the individual and are accompanied by a process of verification through locally suggested qualitative indicators, environmental protection will be demanded sooner or later as a necessary extension of development. As any individual is interested in sustaining the very basis of his/her economic and political rights, namely the local or immediate environment, true sustainable development becomes at least a possibility⁴⁷. Thus, political, economic and ecological rights become one and the same.

⁴⁷ Most developed countries with firmly established political and economic rights, have popular and/or political movements to protect the environment and an increasing number of individuals are willing to adapt personal behavior to promote sustainability.

However, the empowerment of the individual must be followed by the empowerment of communities to hold and defend their own through active participation by the individual in any decision-making concerning their direct environments. Without establishing political and economic rights for the community as well, the cultural and conceptual gap between for example urban and rural areas could hardly be bridged. In spite of empowered rural individuals, urban areas, which have much more intensive resource demands, would still consider rural communities an easily accessible and exploitable resource base. In this scenario, the only roles left for the newly empowered rural individuals would be as employees in any urban-planned undertaking to redistribute local resources away from rural homes in accordance with needs of urban political and economic power structures that deny rural communities their rights to sustainable development.

Second basic target group - the community

(Some parts of this and the following chapters refer to the social structure of Thai society and how it is adapting to modern conditions. The intention is not to give a complete and comprehensive picture of traditional Thai society, but to focus on major differences in the perceptions of its populace now and in the past, and draw a comparison to Western countries. *The concepts presented here are therefore to be considered a generalization only in order to establish a context to the development and sustainable development discourse and to allow a better description of the current social problems and conflicts apparent in Thai development.* This is especially important to better understand the Thai urban development context when compared to the still majority needs and demands of rural Thailand. Throughout this chapter, it is assumed that the past traditional structures as such are no longer complete in themselves but that their attitudes still play a very significant role in shaping modern-day Thai behavior.)

The importance of shared values

In the past, training workshops for government officers in Thailand to follow up Agenda 21 helped participants to understand the process of drawing up an action plan. However, problems did (and do) arise in the implementation itself, or, if this was successful, in the monitoring process. Although a variety of reasons may be given for the failure of so many workshops to achieve their objectives, one cause that is commonly observed is the absence of a decentralized process. Centralized implementation almost always alienates local decision-makers from the activity's objectives. It also prevents already existing democratic community structures, for example a local consensus democracy, from adjusting and improving development goals and implementation steps so as to benefit the local community most. What is worse, centrally implemented sustainable development policies might in the long run alienate local communities from the sustainable development idea itself. Unhappily, centrally induced sustainable development projects hardly ever share values with the actual target group.

Already in 1998, a series of case studies had demonstrated the importance of decentralized processes in implementing development policies and the success they can enjoy if supporting actors, for example from government, are willing not only to plan 'bottom-up'

but also to allow a target community⁴⁸ to come up with its own concepts based on its own values.

‘...The group adapted the system [of their Community-based Organization (CBO)]...to their local conditions. Therefore the system remained manageable and understandable for the group members. The fact that there are traditions and values commonly shared by all members, contributes to a strong feeling of unity among the villagers. They feel responsible for the [CBO], and trust each other. In fact, the loss of these values is considered by the villagers to be the only reason for which any community activity, such as the savings group, could fail’.

Thai social structure

Traditional Thai social structure, which is increasingly re-appreciated by modern Thai society, when compared to a ‘western-style’ or ‘modern’ social structure influenced by development and economic globalization, has two important dimensions⁴⁹. The first is rooted in the local environment and the second in social behavior within a group or community. Both dimensions are aimed at sufficiency. We might term this approach towards social organization ‘cultural sufficiency’, as it includes a strong social component that is normally not part of the (western) sufficiency definition. Cultural sufficiency would translate into a life based on the traditional Thai attitudes of *Kunnatham*, *Khunnaprayod* and *Djariyatham*⁵⁰, which express themselves as the relationship between three major aspects, i.e., the framework and structures of the social system, the political system, and the economic system.

The environmental (or ecological) dimension has its roots in a cultural perspective that links livelihood with Theravada Buddhism and calls directly for environmental sustainability. It is the general belief that one’s behavior must respect and ensure the needs not only of the current but also of future generations. This includes respect and efforts for the protection and maintenance of life and the biophysical systems that permit the maintenance of a community’s environment. Thus the sustainable use of nature and ecosystems, and the establishment of forms of conduct, standards, laws and necessary community instruments to ensure environmental sustainability become part of everyday behavior. For example, the daily allotment of firewood in some Tai⁵¹ tribes throughout SEA is still exactly regulated. All collected wood is deposited at the village entrance to be

⁴⁸ ‘Potentials for Self-Directed Rural Development – Community Based Organizations and Their Networks in Thailand’, Humboldt-University Berlin, Seminar für ländliche Entwicklung (SLE) and Centre for Advanced Training in Agricultural and Rural Development (CATAD), Bangkok/Berlin, December 1998. Quote from chapter 4.7: pp. 47 and 48

⁴⁹ The beginning of this re-appreciation can be placed during the early and mid-nineties, when growth-based development implementation eroded the livelihoods of local self-sufficient communities, for example due to national forestry or dam building policies. The conflicts generated were the beginning of an intense contemplative process that by the year 2001 has resulted in efforts to create the country’s own paradigm of sustainable development. This is especially true at the grass-roots level where people face harsh competition from the city centers and their wealthy elites for shared resources.

⁵⁰ Cultural sufficiency =

Kunnatham: Socially and morally well-balanced deed

Khunnaprayod: A result or benefit achieved by a socially and morally well-balanced decision

Djariyatham: Moral or ethics based on the five major Buddhist precepts of

1. Do not kill humans or animals

2. Do not steal

3. Appropriate sexual conduct

4. Do not lie

5. Do not indulge in intoxicating substances

Kunnatham, Khunnaprayod and Djariyatham form a conceptual behavioral framework within which the environment, the individual and the community are anchored as the basis for a ‘good life’. Someone living a ‘good life’ would adhere to the concept of ‘ruu djak pho’, which means ‘to know when one has enough’.

⁵¹ Tai tribes can be found throughout all of mainland SEA and should not be confused with Thailand itself. However, the Thais and the Tais constitute part of the same cultural family.

separated into an individual pile for each family in the community and the number of people it has to support.

The basis of the second dimension is the dignity of the individual. This requires a set framework of responsibilities and liberties⁵², each of which finds its unique behavioral expression within the social, political and economic relation between members of Thai society. The individual subjects his or her personal freedom of behavior and choice to the needs of the family or other supportive units at the community level. In turn, the ‘family’ and/or family-head is obliged to share the opportunities gained as a result of the behavioral discipline of its members. This results in a strong community bound with the concepts of trust and leadership. Most final decisions are left to leaders or household heads. Criticism is rarely voiced and often understood as a challenge to the leader’s position.

Dignity for the community

The concept of community based on dignity and opportunity is an important mover of culture. Dignity and opportunity are linked with each other and to environmental philosophies through a social definition of ‘choice’. Dignity is upheld for the individual when society respects his/her choice of lifestyle and considers it a private matter, irrespective of whether the individual has many choices in life or only one⁵³. And, vice versa, the individual upholds his/her dignity by being a member of a community. Thus the term dignity, which is linked almost solely to the individual in western societies, can in Thailand always be a function of both the individual and the community to which he/she belongs.

Guaranteeing at least one choice and thus at least one opportunity to integrate into the community is of utmost importance as it is synonymous with the community’s efforts to uphold the dignity of its members and thus of the community itself. Traditional social, political and economic systems are consequently organized around the individual’s responsibility towards the community. This responsibility never ceases, regardless of the social, political or economic status an individual may achieve in life⁵⁴. We could call such a type of society a ‘pride-society’ where the responsibility of a member towards his/her own pride is larger than the responsibility towards all prides combined, e.g. the nation.

Tradition and modernity

As neither social nor political aspects of any culture could develop without resources and surplus, the economy and related activities are a powerful motivating factor in Thai communal behavior. The social and political systems in Thai society bracket the economic system and ‘guard’ it. By binding social, political and economic aspects of a society to an equal moral framework defined by the community, wealth can only be justified in a context of social responsibility⁵⁵. To live a morally correct life, a life bound to the rules of the community and obliged to them, is therefore the key aspect that keeps the overall consumption patterns of society relatively sufficient and in the past was the main factor in

⁵² This is expressed, for example, in the Thai concepts of ‘*Greng Djai*’ and ‘*Sabai Djai*’.

⁵³ Western philosophy would, for example, rather focus on providing as many choices for as many individuals as possible than on providing at least one (1) choice for every member of its community.

⁵⁴ Thus, SEA culture is difficult to represent in a pyramid with relatively free fluctuations between the top and the bottom, as can be done with western cultures. A more appropriate symbol to represent SEA societies would be that of many circles within a single big circle, representing the cultural context in which the smaller circles act.

⁵⁵ In Thailand, for example, a person who amasses wealth without sharing his/her social responsibilities is called ‘*khii niaow*’ (meaning extremely sticky, as he will not part with his or her money), and considered a socially slightly defective human being.

wealth distribution. Economic indicators like GNP or GDP have no meaning whatsoever in this context as they neither describe economic performance with regard to actual access to wealth or resources for the individual, nor the social responsibility morally linked to wealth in Thailand.

In Thailand and throughout SEA generally, a great emphasis is put on leadership and the decisions put forward by it. However, because this leadership and the internal structures available for policy implementation are not only established by strong moral links within individual communities but also by the relative affluence of a person or group, western economy-centered thinking that emphasizes individual competitiveness to a very high degree poses a considerable threat to the functioning of the whole. In particular, *the link between affluence and social responsibility is severed and former methods of distributing wealth are corrupted*. The result is one of the largest gaps between rich and poor in the world that is still increasing. To counterbalance the increased economic disadvantages they face, local communities have to turn to their own means to be able to continue providing a minimum of social security to their members, especially in the light of inadequate social welfare.

Competition: community structures versus modern structures

However, the local economies and most of their potential as perceived under the concept of ‘cultural sufficiency’ are exploited by those that in the past supported the less affluent strata under social responsibility of the old Thai cultural system. In modern Thailand, and especially in urban areas, Thai culture has often shed the aspect of social responsibility and retains only the aspect of decision-making prerogative for elders or leaders. The new ‘western’ form of competitiveness, focusing on the individual and a limited responsibility for the community (which in ‘modern’ Thailand is theoretically cared for by the state), keeps those in power from surrendering once-acquired advantages back to their communities. Instead, more and more resources generated by the old economic and ecological structures provide wealth and positive development results for less and less people.

As communal land is now largely administered by power structures using the traditional system to forward their own interests but without respect towards the social responsibilities that accompany affluence, local communities are being deprived of their former resource base. They have often no choice but to advance into economic and ecological areas that were in the past unexplored and considered ‘off limits’ by the community. The ecological balance, intact in Thailand over most of the last centuries, has thus come under intense pressure as new players compete for the resource base. These include export markets and transnational corporations (TNC).

Simultaneously, local communities are held back in their efforts to establish a new self-sufficient way of life by increased competition for formerly unexploited resources and new rights to manage them granted to state agencies. As the old Thai social structure disappears and its system of resource distribution is replaced with concepts of the free market and neo-liberal approaches towards its internal economy, the guaranteed basic level of justice provided by the community in the past can no longer provide a minimum of opportunities for every member. The community is exposed to increasing injustice, unfairness and inequity. The resulting call for political reform from the grassroots or community level is now being opposed by the established centers of power and influence.

These centers not only want to keep their prerogatives, but are also increasingly intent on pursuing their newly adopted 'western' lifestyle, focusing on individualism and consumption: the new affluent North in the South.

Chapter 4

Thailand and Development⁵⁶

The following lists summarize the most pressing topics in connection with either sustainable development or development as suggested in the up-coming ninth development plan of Thailand⁵⁷:

1. On strategic visions
 - ◆ The quality of society
 - ◆ Society as the source of wisdom and knowledge
 - ◆ The unity of a charitable and moral society
2. On strategies to develop the economy and society
 - ◆ Positive administrative strategies
 - ◆ Strengthen and support the roots of society
 - ◆ Adapt economic structures
 - ◆ Strategies to manage natural resources and the environment
 - ◆ Strategies for people's participation in (public) business administration
 - ◆ Strategies to improve the competitiveness of the country through increasing productivity and capacity
 - ◆ Strategies to strengthen Thai science and technology
3. On priorities in development efforts
 - ◆ Strengthen and speed up the economic recovery of the country
 - ◆ Strengthen basic Thai business sectors
 - ◆ Lessen problems within society, like drug-abuse and health related problems, adapt the national labor market and instill love for the country
 - ◆ Poverty reduction measures

Comparing the above headings with examples given in chapter 2, one can find a number of differences and similarities. While from the European Parliament's point of view, Europe should stress economic means to solve pressing problems in development, critics in western and international civil society want to focus on controlling the market by adhering to an increased political acceptance of democratic structures in the politics and policies of development. Only then can executive and decision-making power be distributed back to the basis of human societies: the development of the individual and communities takes priority over economic development issues.

While western political and economic power holders (as presented in the EU paper in chapter 2) promise to do anything to make the world economy – and this would include the Thai economy – grow faster, and sustainably at that, critics in international civil society describe the neo-liberal economic approach towards development as socially, ecologically and economically wasteful. For them, this is an approach that the vision of sustainability cannot really afford. Past experience with development implementation based on strong economic policies over weaker social and environmental policies has brought a relatively large increase in the middle classes, but also an overall increase in poverty. This has been accompanied by social and cultural discrimination and marginalization.

⁵⁶ All translations of Thai sources are provided by the author

⁵⁷ Source: Thai National Economic and Social Development Board, <http://www.nesdb.go.th>

The question arises therefore, why the Thai ninth development plan so obviously ignores some of the problems that were associated with development policies of the sixth, seventh and eighth development plans. One would expect a clear strategy on decentralization, empowerment and good governance. However, on the contrary, the perspective of the Thai government is neither centered on economic tools as a driving force for development, nor on democratic principles per se. Instead, it introduces a clear moral content when it comes to its visions for development, a mixed social, political, environmental and economic approach when referring to strategies, and a clear focus on the economy when it comes to development priorities. The obvious contradiction or incoherence, and with it the dilemma of Thai development after Rio, is easily recognizable: Thailand's power holders want fast economic growth but without introducing social changes and raising political demands.

A brief look into the Thai cultural and social structure can reveal why measures stressing economic development while ignoring civil society and social development are not likely to work. A few aspects of traditional Thai culture, outlined as the concept of 'cultural sufficiency' in chapter 3, still have a very great impact on Thailand's development and its options for future policies. These aspects are the social, political and economic structures of decision-making which are still present and valid for the vast majority of the country's population⁵⁸.

Social aspects of 'cultural sufficiency':

• *Rabob Phi Noong*

The social aspects of 'cultural sufficiency' focus on responsibility for other community or family members. This is expressed in a rigid system of respect, originally based on age: the elders are responsible for their youngsters and are at liberty regarding decision-making. The younger acknowledges the elder's responsibility and the opportunity it creates for him/her by respecting the decision without (voiced) reservations⁵⁹. Family structures are open and flexible, and not necessarily dependent on any relation based on lineage. An unrelated individual can become a proper family member at any time in what we might call 'social adoption'. Thus, family units connected by birth can quickly extend into larger prides consisting of any number of individuals firmly united by the commonly shared responsibility for each other within the pride. The resulting system is called '*Rabob Phi Noong*' - and includes a strong political aspect, described later. In an example from another SEA country, this type of system was largely responsible for the comparatively small number of orphans housed in public facilities after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia in 1979. Either immediate or extended family through social adoption took in most children that had lost their parents and gave the country a working social buffer to help in organizing new communal development after the demise of the Khmer Rouge. However, with increasing consumerism modern Cambodia sees a rise in child abandonment and a rapid disappearance of social responsibility towards children in general.

⁵⁸ At times, the brevity of the description makes it necessary to refer to a cultural ideal in order to explain a general principle. It is understood that the described structures are deteriorating or in the process of decline. However, the old mind-set of society still plays a major part in decision-making and policy planning at all levels of society, in both private and public spheres.

⁵⁹ The opportunity, here, would consist of the provision of a 'care-free' time in certain respects of life, which the younger individual can use to explore and learn in accordance with his/her own needs. These needs are only curtailed by respect for the elder and by the duties he/she has towards others younger than him or herself.

- ***Khreua Yaad***

While a member of the pride is always an older or younger (*Phi* and *Noong*, respectively) ‘brother’ or ‘sister’, independent of whether they know each other closely or not, social contacts outside the individual’s group are described as acquaintances (*khon ruu djak*), friends (*phuan*) or close friends (*phuan sanit*). These social contacts can over time reach a level where the terms *Phi* and *Noong* are used to address each other, or even more intimate pronouns like ‘*gu*’ and ‘*mueng*’ that are not used with direct family. The calling upon of resources or their provision is managed by the ‘*Khreua Yaad*’, which is the network of all people united in a pride that provides social security for its members in times of need and opportunities in times of affluence. The *Khreua Yaad*⁶⁰ can extend over several prides in order to forward mutual interests.

- ***Rabob Upphatam***

The social discipline needed by all individuals to adhere to the basic framework of the pride-society is cemented by what is called the ‘*Rabob Upphatam*’. This is a system of unquestioning respect for the social elder within a group of people and guarantees his or her prerogative in decision-making for the whole group. A social elder would be a person who has earned the trust of his or her community so the position is not necessarily connected to age. The ‘*Rabob Upphatam*’ can also be described as a system of conflict management, not only within a pride but also between two or more prides, when social elders meet to discuss and solve problems for the communities they represent⁶¹. To function appropriately, it is necessary that all members of a society believe in the correctness and goodness of the decision of a social elder. This system applies especially in SEA countries that adhere to Theravada Buddhism, but to some extent also in Islamic countries of the region. A strong link with religious teachings and institutions is therefore a basic pre-condition for becoming a social elder or leader.

De-empowering the community

Over the last two decades and especially during the economic boom-years (1987 – 1997), Thailand was an example of a country that developed too fast under imbalanced development objectives and priorities. The conceptual impact of the Western development paradigm could be seen in Thailand during this period with its historic strong separation between urban and rural societies. Consequently, the leadership generation of the last twenty years has gradually changed its perspective on the definition of ‘correctness’ and ‘goodness’ of a decision.

The Thai culture of the past had a direct link and understanding towards rural communities as distinct entities and the resource base of the country, and thus also as the resource base for urban development. Decisions were mostly long-term as they concerned utilizing existing communities to produce and provide resources that could not be found in urban areas. This role of the rural community as a relatively secure entity and its local control over the environment always gave Thailand a buffer it could fall back on in times of crisis. Urban centers were linked to rural populations by *Rabob Phi Noong*, *Khreua Yaad* and *Rabob Upphatam*.

⁶⁰ Although the *Khreua Yaad* might at times look similar to a patron-client relationship, it is much more based on respect than on dependency and thus not really comparable to the patron-client concept.

⁶¹ The standard translation of the term ‘*Rabob Upphatam*’ as ‘peer-ship system’ or ‘patron-client relationship’ is misleading and not correct, as its concept is not based on an economy centered culture, but a community oriented network of responsibilities and opportunities.

Macroeconomic interests undermine communities

With Thailand reaching the status of a newly industrialized country (NIC) at the beginning of the 1990s, decisions became increasingly short-term. The goal was to promote export markets while offering natural resources as collateral. Decision-making was de-linked from rural communities and the associated social efforts to ensure their continued existence. Instead, decision-making for development placed more and more emphasis on the so-called macro-level of the economy.

The concept of the Thai rural community that in the past had been the single most important resource unit of the country was now split into its resource components: lands, crops, ore, forests, labor, water etc. In line with development policies of the nineties, these resources were brought under public administration and control to ensure their 'sustainable' use. In accordance with the economic paradigm of a steady surplus, urban leadership policies restructured the national resource base to ensure an uninterrupted flow from rural areas to fuel throughput to further economic growth. Policies assumed that 'sustainable consumption' patterns needed to be introduced to rural communities to prevent 'wasteful' resource use, i.e., resource use not directly contributing to macro-economic growth. Suddenly forests needed to be protected, water needed to be regulated, and concessionaries to be found for a controlled and more efficient use of natural resources to replace old socio-ecological relationships in the hands of 'uneducated' and 'ignorant' local communities.

This process completely ignored the historic role and function of the rural community in the national context, but fully exploited the common belief in the correctness of leadership decisions. Urban directives were executed at a local rural level in the general belief of the responsibility traditionally shown by social elders and leaders. But the new development policies were indirectly – and at times even directly – aimed at de-empowering local communities. Representatives for business activities in the physical space of the community environment were replacing community representatives that still saw the social link between local resources and the characteristics needed for a local community.

The end of the line

Once the balance between social, political and economic decision-making in favor of the community had shifted towards one favoring the extended national and urban business interests in rural areas, *Rabob Phi Noong*, *Khreua Yaad* and *Rabob Upphatam* were reduced to tools of local power politics. They thus served to achieve the most profit for individuals who were now detached from past forms of social responsibility in accordance with old social structures. As long as the country was in an unprecedented phase of growth, the doubts of rural communities regarding development objectives were eased with 'development gifts': new roads, better access to water, more hospitals etc. However, all these 'gifts' were material in character, and did not include political or economic rights to replace faltering social structures with adapted modern legal status. They thus prepared the way for even more urban influence in rural communities. And once the 'Asian Flu' brought economic growth to an abrupt halt, the character of the social change that had occurred dawned on many people: rural Thailand had almost ceased to function as a workable social buffer in times of need. In particular, the new opportunities created by improved rural infrastructure were in the hands of urban business interests that did not need intact communities to exploit their resources.

In 2002, an increasing number of legal and illegal foreign workers from neighboring countries are progressively replacing the local community workforce. The number of empty houses in rural areas, owned by the urban elite and of no use to local communities, is about one in ten⁶². While the community of the past was responsible for its individual members, the community of the present is a de-empowered conglomerate of often marginalized people with hardly any legal rights. There are many instances where the communities do not have enough resources to live up to their responsibilities under the old social structure. Rural agricultural land bought up by urban populations for speculation on the real-estate market is lying fallow. It has been taken out of the rural agricultural production cycle to such an extent that it is considered a major policy issue in the country.

The policies to encourage rural development suggested by the 9th development plan can hardly be effective any more due to the changed characteristics of *Rabob Phi Noong*, *Khreua Yaad* and *Rabob Upphatam* which have changed from a traditional instrument to govern community well-being to one of furthering self-interest in the name of sustainable development. The approach to economically developing rural Thailand can only succeed through strengthening and re-linking the remnants of the old social system to rural development and local community needs. This however would mean de-empowering urban interests, an unlikely occurrence, especially in light of another aspect of Thai society: its political structure.

Political aspects of ‘cultural sufficiency’:

As every person in Thailand is both *Phi* and *Noong* to at least one other member of their social group or ‘pride’⁶³, the social regulating mechanisms of *Khreua Yaad* and *Rabob Upphatam* also play a role in politics. Due to their impact on the political system, the country’s traditional administration was and is a consistent mixture of power (*Amnahd*) and influence (*Ithiphon*) as reflected in any politician’s dual responsibilities towards his administration and, at the same time, his ‘extended social family pride or group’⁶⁴. However, with the demise or de-linking of the old social system from the local community, what is left in modern day Thailand is a close cooperation between power and influence to further personal interests. For example, the number of schemes between the country’s administrators (power or *Amnahd*) and the private sector (influence or *Ithiphon*) are countless. The local Thai press uncovers and exposes new scams to cheat the public of literally billions of Baht of tax-money at the rate of about two per month (in 2002).

• *Mai Pen Rai*

The old political framework of society does not promote democracy which needs a certain minimum of objectivity in decision-making as well as the courage to make an independent decision as a free individual. Thai prides and the respective systems of *Phi Noong*, *Khreua Yaad*, and *Rabob Upphatam* provide for social and emotional links between their members. Objectivity is therefore difficult to achieve in political decisions and hardly a quality expected in a leader. Instead, a leader is respected by the ‘fairness of his/her decision’ within the social frame of the pride (but not necessarily outside the pride).

⁶² Based on observations in Chiang Mai province

⁶³ His Majesty the King of Thailand is the only exception to this rule as his position transcends any social boundaries and has no limitations.

⁶⁴ In spite of claims otherwise, the western political system follows a very similar principle and allows lobbying to take place in order to influence political decisions.

Similarly, a strong system of respect in Thai social organization tends to discourage individual decision-making which is mostly left to the social elder or superior. Thus the democratic system in Thailand functions basically and historically top-down and not bottom-up. However, in the old Thai social pattern the need for a strong link to Theravada Buddhist teachings in the leaders introduced the concept of morality in political action. The need to uphold a leader's moral integrity can override the need for a decision if it is likely to generate conflict. Political action can therefore consist of more than 'Yes' or 'No' to also include a decision that is neither of both. This is called *mai pen rai*, literally meaning 'it is nothing, it does not exist'⁶⁵.

Democracy with a different dynamics

The upshot of all this is that trust in a leader's moral aptitude promotes a system that the West has termed 'consensus democracy' where a leader takes the final decision based on the factual need of his/her community. It is the leader's responsibility to listen to all members of a pride that have reached the status of *Phu Yai*, meaning 'one who behaves maturely and is in principle able to become a leader himself'. This expressly excludes minors, e.g., the *Wai Run* (teenagers) and the *Dek* (children) with regard to age and to a lesser degree also the *Phu Noi*⁶⁶. Consequently, the political and social development process of Thai communities lacks an important feature of western democracies where younger people provide an important source of new concepts and thinking for society and are taught or encouraged to criticize their social environment. Compared to western democracies, which are proud of their 'social dynamics', change in Thailand through a democratic process is rather slow, conservative and cautious in order to avoid abrupt change to power structures.

Coalitions

In such a social and political context, coalitions and alliances become an important feature, affecting the extent to which a leader can guarantee a following in any political decision-making process. The social discipline of the *Rabob Upphatam* includes political discipline and is rewarded by the leader directly through material or social benefits for his followers. However, this discipline does allow differing political opinions and decisions within a family or community where members are free to support different parties without generating internal conflict.

A social representative of political interest within a community, the *Hua Khanaen* (freely translated: election broker), locally organizes political followers of a leader. The leader's party pays the *Hua Khanaen* an amount of money (and maybe other favors) for each supporter he can rally. Individuals who have once committed themselves to a political group by accepting, for example, material or cash gifts will in the overwhelming majority stick to their 'personal alliance' while polling during elections. The most important factor for any party is therefore its material status or affluence in combination with its overall influence to determine policy decisions. Once in power, parties have both an interest in

⁶⁵ The common translation of this term, 'it doesn't matter' suits the perception of foreigners confronted with the Thai language but it covers only a fraction of the actual meaning.

⁶⁶ 'Dek': any individual up to 15 years of age; 'Wai Run': any individual between 15 and 25 years of age; 'Phu Yai': potentially any individual older than around 25 to 35 years and always any individual older than 40 years of age. The actual time when an individual reaches a new status very much depends on his/her actions within the pride as perceived by his community. The term *Phu Noi* is mostly used to describe the absence of power or influence of any individual within a pride and independent of age. The term *Phu Yai* refers to age and is also used to denote a person's influence and power regardless of age.

receiving a return on their investment during election time and in repaying their supporters. This specific aspect is identical to the political structure in Cambodia, Laos and Burma and exists in similar form throughout SEA.

The traditional Thai political system, while it was still functioning in all its aspects, had a few distinct advantages. It could overcome limited infrastructure, limited tools and media to exchange information and could ensure the continued existence of the community in its role as the main social unit. But once the concepts of the Western development paradigm had introduced a different perspective during the nineties, the direction of national development led away from the community, instead stressing individual and national resources. Thus the old political system ceased to be an instrument whose core interest was ensuring the survival of the local community as a political power base while the new political focus was directed towards ensuring the success of a new national business interest: the country's performance and competitiveness on the world market.

However, what stayed in place were the old political power structures and vested interests. With the changed perspective came the economic perception that an individual or an individual company could further the economic interest and reputation of Thailand faster and more efficiently than rural communities. Policies strengthening rural economic performance⁶⁷ were consequently missing from politics. The economic opportunity for the nation and urban elites - often linked to political parties - became the policy focus during the seventh and eighth national development plans and encouraged a nationwide trend away from the community and local political leaders. Once the country had reached a remarkable affluence in the mid-1990s by empowering the national economy over the local one, the political leadership did little to use that wealth to close the gap between urban and rural development. Instead, a new policy objective became important in political circles: the Thai economy and politics were going to become global players! The political system once more changed direction away from rural communities to go hand in hand with the largest business interests -- always located in urban areas.

A re-focusing on rural development within the old political structure would now be difficult to achieve. In an administration mostly thinking and working top-down, the 9th development plan wants the political power structures and associated administrators (*Ammahd*) to listen and accept guidance from those rural communities that have been almost completely de-empowered and de-linked from political development in the previous decades. And, as in a vicious cycle, another aspect of old Thai society reinforces the odds against rural development actually taking place: the role that the economy traditionally plays in Thailand.

Traditional economic aspects of 'cultural sufficiency':

The focus of a Thai definition of economy in a past cultural context is not the economy as a self-contained system independent of the value of social relationships, as described for example by Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'. On the contrary, the communal economy in Thailand is entirely in need of a 'visible hand', meaning a group or person who controls wealth strictly within the confines of the social and political systems. For example, the very existence of affluence in one's hand demands that it be shown and displayed as

⁶⁷ The international business community would hardly realize if the country built 10 more cement factories in poor provinces. But it surely acknowledged the country's economic prowess when Thailand became the world's biggest producer of cement through acquiring foreign production lines during the late nineties.

wealth is an indicator of the extent to which a person or group is able to take responsibility for a pride. The objective of affluence is to make individuals stand out in the group and through furthering their interests benefiting all members of society through the social systems of *Rabob Phi Noong* and *Khreua Yaad*.

- ***Phasii Sangkhom***

Besides age, affluence constitutes a second factor that is associated with a *Phu Yai* or a leader. A wealthy or rich person is always a *Phu Yai*, and has to take a large share of responsibility in a pride's affairs. However, the principal responsibility of the leader does not change if his position is mainly acquired by wealth. The moral context in both social and political organization demands that such wealth be used to create opportunities for its pride and to provide for its members in times of need. A leader is expected to contribute to any public affair of a community, be it a wedding, a funeral or a public dinner. This contribution consists of material donations, cash or by paying for an event entirely and is termed '*Phasii Sangkhom*' (society tax). It is the main means a leader has, besides his integrity and steadfast morals - which give him respect - to gain influence (*Ithiphon*) within his pride⁶⁸ and it gives actions and decisions within his/her society significance.

Poverty is a very relative term in Thailand, and the language and all local dialects have a variety of words to describe the absence of resources within degrees. In Western culture a poor person is one with very little or no means of subsistence. In Thailand the term is also always linked to a person's social status (*thana*) within the systems of *Rabob Phi Noong*, *Khreua Yaad* and *Rabob Upphatam* and his interaction on various social and political levels. Thus, a rich person is one who can pay his social dues in form of *Phasii Sangkhom* on a large scale while a 'poor' person can only do so on a limited scale. This, however, does not automatically mean that a 'poor' person in Thailand has automatically very little or no means of subsistence or is materially poor in the western sense of the word. This aspect of cultural sufficiency is equally present in Cambodia, Burma and Laos.

- ***Thana***

In the past, poverty was linked rather to the overall perceived development of a person; socially for example in the form of education, politically in the form of influence and economically in form of material wealth. On the one hand, someone with financial means at hand but with little or no education and influence could refer to himself as a 'poor' person. On the other, a famous teacher whose concepts and teachings had great moral influence on society but who had little or no material wealth would have hardly been considered 'poor'. The relative position of a person within all three cultural factors -- social, political and economic -- gave a person what was generally referred to as *Thana*. And it was the absence of *Thana* which made a person poor, not the absence of material wealth⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ The fact that Mr. Thaksin, the elected Thai Prime Minister in 2001, has been able to conquer Parliament with an almost two-thirds majority with a party merely five years old can be ascribed to this cultural trait. He is considered one of the wealthiest private individual in the country and his demands for the nation's leadership are considered almost a 'logical' turn of events. That he has 'deserted' his former political party, where he held the position of Vice Prime Minister, would make him in most western eyes 'suspicious' as a political figure. However, Thailand's society views the forming and leaving of alliances as a standard means in the formation of power and as proof of his versatility in managing power.

⁶⁹ To express the same concept from another point of view, the higher a person's *Thana*, the more followers he/she had and the less poor he/she was considered to be. 'Wealth' was rather perceived in the number of followers someone had. A primary-school teacher up-country would earn very little income. However, he/she was in a position of *Thana*. Thus, the parents of his pupils normally extended little favors or presents to the teacher. As he/she shared his 'wealth' with the students, in this case knowledge, the parents shared their wealth, in this case food or other presents, with him/her. A person, who gave the impression to society that he/she was able to unify all three aspects of *Thana* and balance them properly was described with the Chinese word '*Ngo Haeng*'. *Ngo Haeng* was considered a very auspicious sign and an ability that could not be achieved by everyone. A comparable freely translated western concept might

A change in perception

With the arrival of the modern phase of development, especially after 1987, the social perception of *Thana* has changed. As late as the mid-eighties it was possible for any person⁷⁰ to be served food in one of the numerous street-side and even ordinary restaurants and – if one had forgotten one's money – to be sent off into the night with best wishes and all assurances that it did not really matter. One was not expected to come back and pay later. Between their begging sprees, scores of children depended on free dinners from fellow poor, e.g. not 'affluent' street vendors. To leave no doubt in the reader's mind: this was not paradise, not even idyllic or romantic; it was no more than a gesture that could be observed frequently putting into practice the public belief in the 'good deed', the 'merit making', the right and duty of which was an obligation to everyone who could afford it⁷¹.

By the mid-nineties most beggars and street-children had disappeared from public view, forcibly removed by the city administration. With them went the spirit of this most simple (and dignified) act of helping each other. The perception of the (urban) public of what 'goodness' is had changed. By the time of the bust of the Thai economy in 1997, the *Thana* of a person had become the material status of a person, preferably demonstrated by lavish spending for personal consumption and to a much lesser scale on merit-making involving strangers. The old social and political Thai structure and its strong link to the concept of personal leadership turned those early consumers (some would say capitalists) into role models. Rural leaders increasingly used material gifts, which would formerly have gone back to the communities where traditional structures were still intact, to copy their urban elders. Soon, a person's *Thana*, e.g. his/her influence, power and economic well-being, was solely expressed by a show of affluence. This was supported by the older economic attitudes towards economic wealth, but was now widened by the addition of being 'western' or developed⁷².

Economic status equals social status

While in the past, wealth was linked to a variety of social responsibilities towards the community, it is now often employed to consciously create distance from the poor strata of society which are considered undeveloped. Wealth has become a demonstration centered on the individual. It is a means of saying that one is developed, meaning one is in possession of *Thana*: a status that could hardly be owned in the past but was bestowed on a person through a communal act of respect. As large sections of the Thai population in urban and rural areas alike now look at wealth as a sign of development and being civilized, an increasing rift in society is created with regard to opportunities in all aspects of the former system of cultural sufficiency - social, political and economic. The increasing introduction of free market rules for managing these aspects has created double standards throughout the country. Capitalist ideology even rules matters like public education or public health, and has firmly established vested economic interests.

Considering the historic cultural roots of Thai decision-making, it is doubtful that the approaches suggested by the ninth development plan will be able to succeed in solving

be 'a model of dignity', although the concept of *Ngo Haeng* also described physical features, was independent of age and could be found in children as well.

⁷⁰ These particular examples are based on the author's own experience over a few years in Bangkok at around that time.

⁷¹ Even today one of the most common greetings in Thai is the equivalent to the English: 'Have you eaten, yet?'

⁷² At one point during that time it was a proud statement of one Cabinet Minister that he 'wore no single item of clothing or ornament on his body that came from Thailand'.

current development problems. The urban rich and upper-middle classes have lost their rural roots and found new ones in consumerism. And after ten years of having - more or less systematically - impoverished rural communities and destroyed communal roles in the interest of national economic development, Thai national development policy has created a rural population that lacks the necessary economic, social and political resources to provide the country with 'moral' or 'cultural' guidance in development. Few rural social and political structures still function to the extent necessary to implement the ninth development plan from within the system. Instead, rural communities increasingly organize as critics in civil society to achieve what the development process of the past has denied them. By failing to cultivate and preserve the trust that socially and culturally existed between ruling and ruled classes of the old society, Thailand's national policy has steered the intended future focus of development - the community - into opposition.

Chapter 5

Criticism from Thai civil society

Development in crisis

One perspective towards development from critics in Thai civil society is taken from a series of eleven articles published in the weekly Thai magazine *Matichon*⁷³ (Opinion of the People) between January and March 2002. In its detailed criticism towards development and sustainable development it described the result of past development in Thailand as follows (summarized):

1. A poverty crisis
2. A crisis in income distribution or distribution of development benefits
3. A crisis in debts and financing
4. An environmental crisis
5. An energy crisis
6. A science and technology crisis
7. A crisis of violent behavior in politics, society and the economy
8. A crisis of moral and spiritual attitude

With regard to the most important aspects of Thai development now needed, *Matichon* identified the following requirements (summarized):

1. The characteristics of sustainability for the market
2. Ecological thinking and concepts
3. A gradual change away from materialism
4. The strengthening of science and technology for sustainability
5. Sustainable agriculture
6. Sustainable cities
7. Gender and generation issues

When compared with the ninth Thai national development plan, a major difference is that civil society criticism defines the result of past development as a crisis. It also acknowledges the lack of sustainability, linking this to the attitudes of materialism based on unfettered growth. It sees such attitudes as a major reason for the alarming situation throughout the Kingdom. The sustainability of agriculture, which is the foundation of rural life, is considered as important as urban sustainability. Although a poverty crisis is identified for the country, poverty alleviation measures are not mentioned as a separate issue required for development, largely because poverty is regarded as an issue of power structures and the abuse of power. A better distribution of development benefits is hindered by ‘a crisis of violent behavior in politics, society and the economy’ and ‘a crisis of moral and spiritual attitude’. Both refer to the leadership system and neglect of social responsibility for communities as required by the elite’s historic role.

⁷³ It can be viewed as a magazine for outspoken criticism, strongly supporting democracy and the new Constitution. It is a major publication venue for critics in civil society but not generally biased in its selection of sources. It is very popular in Thailand and widely read.

Thai NGOs working on sustainable development

A second alternative perspective towards development introduced here is from 'NGO-COD'⁷⁴ which has gained increasing influence as a political entity over the last decade. In March 2002, NGO-COD published an extensive paper on suggestions for the up-coming World Summit on Sustainable Development⁷⁵. The following paragraphs give a brief summary of the publication, particularly concerning the Thai experience with development and the lessons learnt for future policies⁷⁶.

Development and globalization

The biggest crisis-generating factor in Thailand's past development has been the rapid growth of its economy and the de-linking of that growth from the rural agricultural sector. The increase in resource demand put additional stress on rural communities which during the last two decades have not had the necessary political, economic or administrative structures to cope with the changing role of their resource base. In accordance with the 6th and 7th national development plans⁷⁷, the role of rural communities changed from mainly self-support to supporting intensive growth in urban areas. As the government failed to install new social services in line with the changes it left rural communities exposed to the negative effects of intense resource and market competition that in most cases resulted in vested urban interests besting rural ones.

'The economic development of the 7th national development plan increased efforts to adapt to the country's position of a newly industrialized country and introduced an even more rapid pace to development in the country. Simultaneously, the gap between rural resource availability for communities depending on their local environments, and resource demand from the urban private and public sector created a social conflict on an unprecedented scale.'⁷⁸

The ongoing process of economic globalization gives economic interests a major influence in future Thai social development. Intensified competition due to advances in establishing a free market in Thailand, and the increased presence of TNCs in the country, will not lessen local resource demand. On the contrary, economic globalization will shorten the time available for local communities in Thai society in general to adapt to new structures in resource allocation and distribution that have been introduced in the name of development.

Democracy and good governance

Not all changes due to development have been negative for Thailand. Political development in the period after 1973 mostly excluded the general population in regard to their rights and instead centered on efforts to cement the power platform of politicians, the military and related administration. This political development resulted directly in the

⁷⁴ NGO-COD stands for the NGO Coordination Committee. It is the umbrella organization of NGO-based networks of socially, economically and environmentally marginalized people and communities as well as independent scientists, academics, politicians and the general public. It was founded with the express purpose of producing alternative policy papers to positively criticize Thai governments and encourage the administration's work from an alternative point of view.

⁷⁵ Title: 'Recommendations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development by the people of Thailand', the so-called shadow-report for the WSSD. The process leading to the compilation of the report was supported by NBF-Chiang Mai.

⁷⁶ All translations by the author

⁷⁷ During the years 1987 to 1991 and 1992 to 1996, respectively

⁷⁸ Source: 'Recommendations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development by the people of Thailand', page 4

general ‘Black May’⁷⁹ uprising of 1992, with demands throughout the country to install democratic rule on a firm basis of people’s participation and decentralization.

The uprising in combination with increased political awareness throughout the country following the social effects of rapid economic growth resulted in the new Constitution of 1997. Drafted to introduce public control over national administration and increase public participation and decentralization, it is very popular with the Thai people. However, the adaptation of the current social and political structures to the framework given in the 1997 Constitution will take time while social and economic conflicts due to past growth continue unabated. It is therefore important that future political development introduces real local political power based on good governance for communities. This could counterbalance vested interests of the established elite and can help to gradually change the country’s administration into a working democratic system oriented from the bottom up.

Poverty, justice and fairness

The results of past development have not been distributed equally among all strata of society. Rural areas especially, but also some of the middle classes in urban areas, were largely ignored as beneficiaries of development. However, national policies expected them to contribute fully to the development process itself. Laws and administrative regulations supported vested interests of the ruling political and economic elite and established a relationship between affluence and access to justice. Meanwhile those devoid of development benefits were increasingly marginalized socially, the effect of denying these social strata fair and equal opportunities in development being to add further social pressure. Currently, the country is in a situation that encourages selfishness and violent behavior, economically and socially, because Thai society in general has learned that access to fairness and justice can only be gained for the individual through acquiring wealth at any cost. In other words: justice and fairness in Thailand come at a price and the ruling elite does not respect them as public and social values.

Sustainability

Sustainable development needs to consider society as a whole, supporting social, political and economic diversity and establishing a link between human needs and the natural ecological systems that guarantee the sustained well-being of nature and the avoidance of pollution from human consumption of natural resources. Every country has a different perspective on sustainable development due to its different cultural roots, biological diversity, local knowledge, experience in past development and economic and social problems.

It is imperative that any solutions and/or policies to implement sustainable development are decided locally and in accordance with local social, economic and ecological frames of reference of communities. For Thailand, this would mean that aspects of the economy, society, political structures, culture, available resources and environmental conditions have to become well-balanced components of sustainable development implementation. Necessary policies would therefore include:

- ◆ Finding a well mediated compromise between all social, economic and political interests to protect the environment
- ◆ Truly implementing political decentralization

⁷⁹ Sometimes referred to as ‘Bloody May’

- ◆ Focusing on a bottom-up pattern of development
- ◆ Avoiding the concept of materialism as a basis for development-related decision making
- ◆ Existing power, political and economic structures should be cleared of monopolies over development-related knowledge, development visions and directions and environmental and resource management
- ◆ Respecting and introducing local concepts of sustainability as valid guidelines for sustainable development implementation

The People's Agenda⁸⁰: demands for future development in Thailand

The 'People's Agenda' is the final chapter of the shadow-report for the WSSD. It summarizes the core demands for sustainable development synthesized from the shadow-report and its compilation process and identifies the main demands for the development process in Thailand as follows:

- ◆ The political structure in Thai democracy has to be based on good governance
- ◆ The administrative structure must decentralize and move towards local community empowerment
- ◆ Resources must belong to society and the communities alike, and both should have equal power and responsibility with regard to their management
- ◆ Introduce a self-sufficient economic structure to Thai economic development, especially in regard to food security
- ◆ Public commodities and public economic assets, the 'Commons', bio-diversity and cultural assets should belong to and be governed by the people and benefit the communities
- ◆ Local values must be reflected in local constitutions to guarantee community rights and protect communities from political or private external interference. Local efforts to establish sustainability in local development should be encouraged
- ◆ The structuring of social welfare should give members of society the opportunity to take responsibility for themselves
- ◆ International economic structures should install a just market system that respects local communities and values human rights more highly than profit, especially with regard to food patents and medicines

In search of allies

Development conflict in 'newly established' democratic societies such as Thailand

The 9th development plan would want to follow the 'western' model of development. It needs rapid economic progress and change in order to reach that goal. To appease criticism from civil society, political solutions focusing on moral education and – to some extent – a conservative return to the old culture, become an equally important aspect of development. Economic and moral issues become part of the same strategy. The rich are interested in keeping the status quo of social and political power and, at the same time, increasing the economic pace of development towards the western economic model of

⁸⁰ The People's Agenda is the result of a number of meetings by representatives of the general public, NGOs and academics in the years 1999 to 2001 with the objective of assessing development in Thailand and comparing the results with Agenda 21.

affluence. Both goals benefit from the old Thai structure of decision-making: social discipline and the importance of leadership based on power and influence.

However, civil society demands greater democracy to allow those at the lower end of development to live up fully to their potential, gain access to development benefits and correct the abuse of political power and influence by the ruling elite. It also demands economic stability based on economic rights in order to implement civil society demands within a type of development that is in line with good governance. The conflict in development is similar to the one of the last century in the West. It therefore involves mostly political power structures including the economy, society and the environment. This makes development implementation in Thailand a mostly political process. It is necessary to acknowledge this on the local level by promoting political instruments to further development. Sustainable development would be included over the long term. At the global level it is necessary to promote the political process of development and establish political guidelines for future sustainable development implementation agencies.

Development conflict in ‘mostly-democratic’ societies

In comparison, the ‘western’ developed countries have slightly different priorities. Here, generally speaking, civil society and democracy are established entities. Thus democratic governance has become part of everyday life to the extent that it is almost taken for granted. For example, it is widely perceived that the communist bloc collapsed due to its economic mismanagement and the ensuing dissatisfaction of its citizens with the ‘socialist’ system. However, this type of mismanagement and dissatisfaction could only develop due to the communist bloc’s utter disregard of democracy, democratic structures and democratic needs of its populace in the first place.

It is, thus, not the free market economy of the West that won the Cold War, but its democracies and the adherence to democratic principles. The economy was a tool used – most massively under the Reagan administration – to push the communist bloc into a situation where its lack of democratic structures made it impossible to adapt to internal social dynamics ensuing from the economic pressure of the West and its free market. The result was not the military or political surrender of the communist bloc, but the introduction of more democratic structures within ‘socialist’ countries. This led to their gradual approach towards western style democratic government.

The development and sustainable development discussion is, for example in Europe, divided mainly into two different factions (and, of course, all the colors in between). On the one hand, there are mostly government-led institutions pushing for freer markets, in the belief that the superiority of the system has been proven beyond doubt during the collapse of the communist bloc. The equation is: more free market equals more democratic change. The alternative sustainable development point of view, supported by critics in international civil society, looks at the free market economy as a dangerous tool, one that can even be used as a weapon and can bring weak, undemocratic societies to collapse. The equation here is: more democracy equals more opportunities for a beneficial development of the free market.

The focus for both groups is first of all not the political aspect of development when implementing sustainable development, but two opposing concepts of how to utilize the economy based on the free market or based on democracy. Both approaches stress that

democracy would need to curb and control economic structures wherever they threaten democratic structures and assess to what extent such control makes economic sense. Thus, the sustainable development discussion in ‘developed countries’ mostly concerns economic power structures. The on-going discourse is either in support of the free market economy, i.e., how much democratic control can we allow while retaining a free market, or a social market economy, i.e. how much market can we allow and still stay democratic.

Allies in sustainable development efforts: the ‘economic détente’

The differing perspectives of development between the developed (mostly democratic) countries and developing (newly democratic) ones make for an interesting constellation of interest groups seeking allies. On the one hand, there are threatened economic power structures and interests in the West existing within a largely developed democratic system of governance. On the other hand, there are threatened political power structures and interests in developing countries based on a still nascent economic system. The latter group is interested in rapid economic change and therefore finds important allies in the western economic power structures. In turn, these find willing political allies in developing countries to widen the influence of the economy, economic concepts (like materialism) and economic interests. As a consequence, institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) become a pivot for development and economic development. The economic power structures of the developed countries and the political power structures of developing countries form what one might term an ‘economic détente’.

Paying lip service to criticism from civil society, the aim of the ‘economic détente’ is often termed sustainable growth, but mostly means sustained growth, as that is the objective of both allies. The Group of 77, an international political organization of developing countries, wants to bring

‘...the environmental concerns in line with the imperatives of economic growth and development...’ and sees ‘...the right to develop for the developing countries [in this context, which] must be fully recognized.’⁸¹

The economic powerhouses of the West, represented by TNCs and multi-national enterprises (MNEs), but also many governments, can extend their lobbying influence in western democracies and at the international level by promoting and increasing their economic influence in developing countries. This economic influence provides access to local political structures that help increasingly to shift the production base out of developed countries - where democratic structures restrict economic activity - into the developing world with relatively weak and controllable political systems.

The ‘democratic détente’

Critics within civil society form the second alliance in development and sustainable development. In the West, economic demands based on concepts of the free market system have increasingly eroded what is termed the ‘social market system’, i.e., economic structures under relative control of governments. The social market links humanist concepts to a country’s economic development and puts more stress on installing political instruments to interfere with and guide the market economy. The aim is to reach a fairer

⁸¹ Beijing Ministerial Declaration: 19.6.1991

distribution of development benefits throughout all strata of society. Labor unions are allowed to take a leading and active role in the development of society, and through political and administrative decentralization democratic structures provide a sound basis for local and regional 'People Participation' in their development⁸². Many civil society groups in the developing world envision this kind of development. Not so much that they would see humanist concepts as the moral aim of their development, which are concepts historically grown in the West; but rather because the social market allows for active consideration of local needs, values and social concepts in planning and distributing development benefits.

Who needs who more?

The free market does not seem to need democracy, but the 'democratic détente' needs the market. Most governments in the developing world can easily avoid democratic change by providing economic growth instead: the general populace sees change in the form of economic improvement, which can substitute for missing political and economic rights. However, an economic crisis like the 'Asian Flu' in 1997 brings the unequal distribution of growth benefits and the ensuing social and political crisis into the open. During such a crisis, and without firmly established democratic structures, the economic interests of all involved might easily fall victim to radical politics. In the end, the economy needs democracy as much as democracy needs the economy. Both social and economic systems have to develop mutually and issues like justice and fairness must become part of economic thinking. However, this can only be established on a firm social ground, i.e., under respect for the local culture, because the empowered local community is the best safeguard for a sustainable local ecology. Sustainable development must therefore adapt the pace of economic, social and ecological development to the time it takes politically and economically to empower local culture and communities.

⁸² People participation or at least public participation is necessary to enable the social market to initiate structural reforms whenever necessary during the development process of the market. For example, during the last decade the welfare state in Europe needed drastic changes to keep the system sustainable. Calculations on social welfare had over time reached a point where it created unfairness to those working and financing the system when compared to those benefiting from the system. To drastically reduce the number of unemployed, Holland for example, had to establish a variety of measures governing working hours under a new and more flexible structure.

Chapter 6

Limits to sustainable development

The year 2002 will see the second Earth Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa where the world will again, after Rio de Janeiro in 1992, discuss humanity's future amidst the challenges of development. This year's summit is called the 'World Summit on Sustainable Development' (WSSD). The title itself clearly indicates that an emphasis should be given to aspects of sustainability in development efforts. To initiate this process, UNGAS has called for an assessment of activities worldwide during the last 10 years under the paradigm of 'Sustainable Development' as outlined at Rio de Janeiro in its final document Agenda 21. An international report to provide the summit with a summary of national development assessments is currently underway. However, in spite of the relative success of linking the concept of sustainability with development in developed countries, after ten years of coordinated international efforts the developing world is still struggling to improve the most basic ecological, economic and social conditions of its societies.

Although the last ten years have seen an increase in economic activity worldwide, the benefits of economic development have not profited the developing world enough. Furthermore, technological progress that helps to reduce resource consumption is outpaced by the overall increase in consumption while ecological destruction continues unabated. The number of people living in poverty has slightly decreased in some nations, i.e. the middle-class has grown, but the total number of poor people worldwide is still on the rise. The political will expressed by developed nations in Rio to provide financing for (sustainable) development has not been followed up with effective action. Only this year has the world seen its first summit dedicated to the matter (March 2002, Monterrey, Mexico). However, this world summit on financing development became mired in old and rehashed policies. Delegates 'discussed' a final summit paper already agreed between participating nations beforehand; the actual summit avoided using the political opportunity to link financing for development with the upcoming WSSD; and did not contribute to the promotion of sustainability. (See also chapter 1)

Economic globalization and sustainable development

Globalization, the new stage of development, shows symptoms similar to those of the development implementation process after Rio, e.g. social and ecological considerations are neglected and quickly outpaced by an almost unchecked promotion of the free market economy. Economic globalization overshadows and at times supersedes the politics and policies required to introduce social and ecological aspects of sustainability. It also opens up borders to effectively globalize the consumption structures of the western world, thus dramatically increasing the reach and influence of transnational corporations (TNCs); and it exports economic-centered thinking, life-styles and capitalist consumption attitudes to a rapidly growing elite of rich people and the associated middle-classes in the developing world. These elite groups join the global middle and more affluent class in their assumption that economic globalization is the only way to ensure healthy development. (See also chapter 2)

Along with this process, local traditional consumption structures are exchanged for 'modern', standardized consumption patterns, resulting not only in an increase of

environmental destruction but also in a sharper rift between the rich and the poor. Marginalization occurs worldwide to an extent where larger portions of national populations are devoid of hope to ever improve their lot. Simultaneously, the local economic base of their traditional way of life is eradicated on a national level and scale as a direct result of inadequate national policy making. For many of those at the lower end of development, access to justice and fairness have become more important issues than access to wealth or growth. The development process under Rio's 'new sustainable development paradigm' has obviously failed to properly instil principles of development that transcend the economy and truly incorporate social and environmental issues as part of the sustainability vision that was promised. (See also chapters 3 and 5)

Continued social, political and economic exploitation in developing countries contributes to the increasing gap between rich and poor and deepens the vicious cycle of poverty, low quality education and drastically reduced individual development potential. The immediate environments or 'Local Commons' of the poor are still deteriorating due to an unabated and intensified quest for resources that is fuelled by the very consumption-oriented attitudes introduced under current mainstream policy trends in the name of 'sustainable development'. This destroys even the last remnants of the minimum of justice and fairness provided by traditional structures, leaving many poor people worse off than before the introduction of development policies in their respective countries. Thus, marginalization reaches an anthropological and cultural dimension where, under the aggressively promoted mind-set of the free market and its attitude of consumerism, entire nations drift into a process of cutting cultural and social links with the poorer strata of their societies. (See also chapter 4)

Johannesburg 2002

Ten years after the historic Rio agreements, the approach towards future development is facing revision in the up-coming world conference in Johannesburg. However, looking at the recent development results under the supposedly 'sustainable' development paradigm promoted after Rio, it becomes apparent it is time once again to ask questions that were posed in a similar form three decades⁸³ ago: Are there limits to development under Rio's sustainable development paradigm and its policies? Are the visions promoted under the paradigm truly shared and are they implementable? Can the ongoing 'globalization of concepts' provide a working platform for sustainability that considers all human cultures equally?

The main criticism leveled at the current development process is two-fold and expressed from the contrasting points of view of government agencies and critics in civil society: on one side there are the proponents of development as sustained economic growth, who trust in the marketplace as a means to introduce sustainability in human consumption patterns and development objectives. On the other, there are opponents of economy-centered development who condemn the neglect of social and environmental sustainability especially in the on-going process of creating a common world marketplace. Thus for both camps, the current form of economic globalization and its influence on human development under neo-liberal economic policies⁸⁴ becomes a pivot point for development.

⁸³ See: 'Limits To Growth', The Club of Rome, 1972. Pan Books Limited

⁸⁴ 'Neo-liberal economic policies' here understood to be policies based on the belief in the superiority of the 'free market' over the 'regular market', stipulating a development priority for establishing deregulated economic structures over democratic ones as the most important step to further sustainability.

Established power structures regard it as the only viable means to finance sustainable development programs. Criticism from civil society agrees with the potential to finance development but insists on the need for firm assurances to stop the current trend of cementing an almost complete economic supremacy of the developed world. Otherwise, sustainable development as outlined at Rio and expressed in Agenda 21 will come to nothing and, instead of being inspired by the issue of sustainability, sustainable development policies will follow the dictum of market needs contrary to development needs. (See also chapters 2 and 5)

In preparing the Johannesburg conference, UNGAS decided not to re-negotiate Agenda 21, implying that the majority of governments see nothing wrong with the turn development is taking under its implementation. Thus, it seems questionable whether the up-coming conference will consider and incorporate criticism of current neo-liberal economic trends.. Will it instead surrender the sustainability agenda to policies advancing sustained economic growth under the label of sustainable development? Another important issue yet to be addressed is whether the current form of sustainable development implementation sufficiently considers cultural differences between and within its target nations. Can Rio's sustainable development paradigm establish itself as a blue-print for development that satisfies the needs of humanity in all its diversity, in the process translating those needs into political demands and action to actively protect cultural diversity?

*Limiting factors*⁸⁵

The following paragraphs list a few important factors in sustainable development and discuss how they influence the extent to which sustainability can be implemented in future.

Factor 1: Human behavior as described in 'The Tragedy of the Commons'

From a cultural perspective, the single most important factor for human development is human behavior as Garret Hardin described it in 1968 in his paper the 'Tragedy of the Commons'⁸⁶. Hardin states that because of the rationality of human beings, each nation is locked into a system that compels it to increase its economy without limit – in a world that is limited. The dominating self-interest of nations is expressed in a type of human behavior where decisions by the individual mostly benefit only that individual.

⁸⁵ The term limiting factors is borrowed from ecology. It describes factors inherent to the physical situation of any population that determine its potential growth and development. In this chapter, the term is used to describe a variety of factors that have an impact on growth and development of humanity under the currently dominant development paradigm. An important difference is that limiting factors within a population in nature are normally relatively constant. But in using this term in the context of human development, it will always describe factors that are within the human potential for change.

⁸⁶ The article was written during the late sixties to debate the population explosion. Since then, Hardin's article has often been cited in the context of forwarding neo-liberal thinking and especially the privatization of 'The Commons'. However, to use the article in such a context means to 'abuse' it in a fashion similar to when critics of the 'social market' of Europe label this type of market 'socialist' or even 'communist'. Hardin's article mentions privatization only as a first necessary step to firmly link the environmental and social costs created by overexploitation of 'The Commons' with the responsible parties. Thus, the user of 'a 'Commons' would 'own' it in the sense that responsibility would be automatically linked to resource use. And the polluter (or user) would be liable for all occurring social and environmental costs created by consumption. Ownership of 'The Commons' would help to establish a system of resource use that links social and environmental responsibility with the creation of wealth.

Democratic rule, first introduced about 2,500 years ago, is a tool to distribute the results and benefits of individual decision-making as equally as possible throughout society.. The willingness to accept democratic decisions is based on a person's upbringing and the social context of his existence. As such, his perceptions, personal visions for development, and social opportunities play an important role in the implementation of democratic decision-making structures. They are mostly dependent on qualitative factors such as moral and social satisfaction. The conclusion drawn by Hardin⁸⁷ is that the principal problems of the development process are much less in need of technical solutions than they are of moral ones. The preparedness of humanity to implement sustainable development therefore

- ♦ depends to a very high degree on cultural perceptions and the moral basis of any society that takes a decision with respect to development implementation.
- ♦ Thus the sustainable development paradigm is as much a cultural concept as it is an economic and political one.

Factor 2: The current economic paradigm

Human societal development at various levels is dependent on the amount of resource surplus it can create for its population. Only through the provision of surplus resources is it possible to increase human population. The market, i.e. human-led structures regulating resource distribution, production and consumption, is therefore known to almost all human cultures: it is a necessity for human and social growth. However, the surplus provided by economic activity and market structures does not need to be as large as possible but only large enough to cover the needs of the present generation. It would thus maintain reserves for future generations to come.

In modern times, the system applied to create surplus was first described by Adam Smith in the paradigm of the 'free market economy', which is also termed the 'accumulative economy', in 1776 in his publication, 'The Wealth of Nations'. He states that

'... the idea that an individual who intends only his own gain is, as it were, led by an invisible hand to promote the common interest.'

Although his economic paradigm has been altered considerably over the past two centuries, the principal idea that the accumulation of wealth by any individual will in the end promote the common interest as well as individual well-being is still considered valid by proponents of neo-liberal economics.

The ideal of the free market leads social and economic development to attitudes and perceptions that promote the accumulation of wealth. While the degree of accumulation is a physical and quantifiable variable, the same paradigm also introduces social perceptions or attitudes - which are qualitative variables. Specifically:

- ♦ that the accumulation of wealth is a public good per se, and as such morally good and correct behavior.

⁸⁷ Hardin, G. *The Tragedy of the Commons*: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968.

However, the limitation of resources in a globalized world alters the idea of the accumulative economy automatically doing public good into one that

- ♦ threatens the survival of the larger part of humanity, as the accumulation of wealth in one hand prevents the equal distribution of resources in accordance with local economic, social and environmental needs.
- ♦ Therefore, without changes to its basic concept to incorporate the finiteness of resources the free market and its paradigm are in themselves a decisive limiting factor for the introduction of sustainability.

Factor 3: The sustainable development paradigm

The paradigm of sustainable development as established by Rio in 1992 describes three major areas to foster sustainability: the economy, society, and the ecology. In order to implement sustainable development successfully, it is necessary to balance the pace of change towards sustainability so as to achieve a comparable qualitative degree of development for all three aspects simultaneously. Such a pace would firmly bind the concept of the limitedness of resources⁸⁸ into development planning, and thus visions of everyday human action and decision-making, whether on an individual, local, regional, national or international level. However, during the past 10 years of implementation through Agenda 21, the one aspect of sustainable development mostly promoted has been that of development achieved through economic growth. The other two areas of growth, namely its social and ecological aspects, have consequently been relatively neglected.

The most important limiting factor for the introduction of sustainability in human societal development remains

- ♦ humanity's attitude as to how and to what extent to utilize resources.

An ecological definition of sustainability has been forwarded by Rio yet a translation of this definition into political action has mostly failed. The most current example is the withdrawal of the United States from the Kyoto Protocol of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), ostensibly because its implementation would harm US domestic industries. Policy decisions like this are prevalent throughout the sustainable development implementation process

- ♦ where envisioned change stops short of really approaching sustainability whenever economic advantages are at risk.

Humanity is therefore still treading within the vicious cycle of the 'Tragedy of the Commons', in spite of the Rio Summit and Agenda 21. The missing

- ♦ political governance of the sustainable development paradigm and its institutions is therefore another limiting factor for sustainable development.

Factor 4: Globalization

An additional factor that might put severe limitations on sustainable development implementation is the emergence of globalization as a process that reinforces the impact of human behavior, particularly its economic aspects, such that the human being is pushed to the margins of development. Globalization itself is not new and can be separated into three major aspects - economic, socio-cultural, and ecological. The ecological aspect is

⁸⁸ See also: The Club of Rome 'Limits to Growth' (Meadows et al. 1972)

easily described as a process of changing ‘The Commons’ from ‘Local Commons’ to ‘Global Commons’

- ♦ where human ecological impact originating locally is experienced globally.

Socio-cultural globalization can be seen as the increasing cross-fertilization of different cultures and cultural traditions leading to

- ♦ the emergence of hybrid-cultures in affluent classes of mega-cities which then decrease cultural diversity due to standardized international consumption patterns.

Economic globalization has been increasingly forwarded as the worldwide introduction of the free market economy. By giving priority to economic considerations in the globalization process

- ♦ international policies promote structures that through standardization replace cultural and historical consumption patterns with consumerism as a new cultural paradigm for human social development worldwide.

However, economic globalization under the guidelines of neo-liberal economic thinking and consumerism does not solve the principal obstacle in achieving sustainability, namely the rationality of human decision-making under capitalism. This rationality

- ♦ remains unchecked by a set of rights to guarantee social, economic and political equity as a frame for decision-making.

Factor 5: Limits to economic aspects of sustainable development

Economic development is the cornerstone of human societal development and the economy needs structures like the market for a free exchange of goods and services. But in order to become sustainable, the economy needs a firm link to democratic governance.

Capitalism and democracy

To establish such a link is not easy as capitalism, the core of the currently dominant economic paradigm, is not automatically democratic. Capitalism links the free market with the system of competition in order to gain the highest accumulation of wealth. One of the aims of competition is to eliminate other competing actors in the marketplace in order to get cheaper access to resources by lowering or controlling resource demand. This very principle indicates that the limitedness of resources is not unknown to the free market. It is this very limitedness that attaches a price tag to resources in accordance with their abundance or scarcity. However, the accumulative economy becomes a threat to sustainable development on a two-fold basis:

- ♦ Through linking growth to the creation of capital in the form of accumulation or access to those very scarce resources. In combination with competition, a growth paradigm based on the creation of wealth through accumulation of capital must engage in activities to deny or control a competitor’s access to capital.
- ♦ By denying an equitable and democratic government an active role in the distribution of resources and growth benefit, as any share in the control of resources means establishing or preserving a competitor towards those resources. In other words: a private economic interest can become an adversary to a democratic public interest⁸⁹.

⁸⁹ This is acknowledged by leading capitalists and free market economy societies. For example, both Europe and the USA acknowledge the need for anti-trust laws in order to avoid the accumulative economic system leading to monopolies that dominate the market and

Wealth and power

As wealth, e.g. the access to resources, gives economic power to reinvest capital to initiate a new cycle of growth, wealth is also equal to power in social development. To prevent an abuse of that power, democratic instruments to control economic development ought to be established within the economy. Because of the relationship between wealth and power, sustainable development needs to forward economic growth and democratic governance equally. But the priority must be on establishing democratic structures to allow access to the market so that as many people as possible can enter regulated competition.. This latter aspect of sustainable economic development is rarely implemented in developing countries which tend to work with economic monopolies in the hands of a few elites.

Like many other countries, Thailand's current social and political structure in combination with socio-cultural patterns has as yet

- ♦ not established democracy on a level that actually allows control of economic structures or abolishes the abuse of social, political and economic power to achieve an economic advantage.

The current economic paradigm as manifested in economic globalization favors deregulation of economic structures to increasingly establish a 'really' free market. National governments and economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization promote such developments without regard to

- ♦ missing indicators for monitoring governance mechanisms and the protection of economic rights of 'marginalized stakeholders', or in a truly democratic context 'rightholders'.

Thus to achieve sustainable economic development in its social and socio-cultural aspects as well, it is important to

- ♦ establish a civil society that protects the economic rights of society and its communities through understanding and actively maintaining the difference between the national economy on the one hand and the economic characteristics of local markets on the other. Such characteristics would bond economic performance and the community.

Factor 6: Limits to social aspects of sustainable development

The holistic character of human societies, i.e. the interdependence between and inter-relating structures of all aspects of development be they economic, social, environmental or psychological make it necessary to address sustainable development's qualitative factors like justice, fairness and equity. Only by creating a basis for qualitative well-being can sustainable development achieve sustainable and intact social structures.

destroy diversity of choice for the end-user. Currently the case of Microsoft is an example where too many aspects of one particular part of the economy rest in the hand of a single parent company. The United States government, through its courts and legal systems, makes efforts to break up Microsoft in order to reestablish diversity and thus 'healthy' competition to the market, although the current economic trend points clearly away from regulating control but towards building of international trusts in the finance, service as well as production sector. Extending this concept to the current world economic situation, an analogy might be drawn that when 20% of the world population consumes 86% of its resources, a situation has been created that is outside any healthy economic balance and must increasingly lead to crisis.

Poverty

Poverty is not only an economic factor of sustainable development but also a social, political and environmental one. In 2002, more than one billion people live on a income of less than US 1.00 per day. This increasing financial marginalization has a devastating impact on the overall personal development potential of poor people, as well as on their socio-cultural self-sufficiency to uphold socially integrating community structures. In a society based on the free market economy, little or no wealth very often equals little or no social and political power. This in turn exposes the world's poor to a high degree of injustice and a lack of fairness in decision-making by existing power structures. Limited access to resources reinforces limited access to education that in many developing countries is more and more based on privatized education that typically charges fees for at least higher education. Thus

- ♦ opportunities for marginalized people or communities to actively keep up with a nation's development with regard to knowledge and management of conflicts created by some national development policies is strongly reduced. This all but eliminates their chances to actively contribute corrective measures to development plans, and to leave the cycle of poverty.

The community

The Agenda 21 implementation process has put considerable emphasis on developing the community but in spite of a number of successful cases the overall trend points to economic, political and social de-empowerment or even disappropriation of the community. For example, at a regional conference in Thailand on eco-tourism⁹⁰ in March 2002 to prepare for the Eco-tourism summit in Quebec in May, a number of community representatives attended. But by far the larger number of participants represented vested economic interests in the development of eco-tourism. Problems discussed during that conference focused on economic prospects provided by eco-tourism for regional and national development. Pressing issues of social community development, community rights and equal and fair community participation, which would be an important framework for cooperation between the target communities and the eco-tourism business sector, were not equally addressed.

Although the presence of community representatives was widely lauded as an indicator of community empowerment in line with development policies, the reality of political and economic influence turns this into a typical case of community de-empowerment. In fact, representatives of tour operators saw the communities and their potential development as potential local competitors for the economic benefits that can be expected from eco-tourism. Safe-guarding their own economic interests took priority over acknowledging community rights to the eco-tourism resources, the exploitation of which were firmly bound to national development priorities entrusted in the hands of tour-operators. These interests superseded local development rights.

Similar tendencies can be observed in other projects that are linked with sustainable development implementation. For years, local communities depending on community forests have been pushed out of decision-making structures regarding the utilization of this most important resource base. Especially in light of traditional decision-making structures

⁹⁰ 2002 has been declared the year of eco-tourism by the UN

in countries like Thailand that benefit the senior party in power and influence, it becomes apparent that the social aspects of sustainable development implementation

- ♦ still lack a definition and conflate political implementation of community rights with a direct link to economic and environmental policies of administrative institutions.

Without returning responsibility for community decision-making to the community itself, e.g. empowering local communities to take independent and valid decisions respected by authority, the social aspects of sustainable development have clear limitations.

- ♦ The lack of community empowerment actually achieved keeps qualitative indicators for well-being such as justice and fairness out of policies for environmental and sustainable economic development.

The current sustainable development implementation process is about to lose the support of the very groups that are the basis for the bottom-up strategies supported by Agenda 21. The introduction of democracy has not been sufficient to guarantee empowerment of communities and to address the problem of changing national and local social structures resulting from the past development process. A lack of political action including local and national government policy to support democratic decisions by communities and defend them against interests that would rather take advantage of their limited resources

- ♦ creates weak social structures to buffer consequences of change due to development, and destroys the socio-cultural frame that could be an alternative to consumerism.

Cultural patterns

Attitudes and perceptions, i.e. the ‘cultural pattern’ of a society, constitute an important aspect of reaching justice, fairness, equity, and democracy as well as alleviating poverty. Social development in Thailand has for example created two distinct societies - urban and rural. While the latter is to a large extent still based on traditional structures that link economic wealth with social responsibility, urban society mostly worships wealth detached from systems of social responsibility. The result of this development is an increasing tension between rural and urban society that

- ♦ makes it increasingly difficult to establish a common cultural pattern that can harmonize the potential conflicts between national and local interest.

As most wealth is concentrated in urban centers, most political, economic and social power is also concentrated there. However, urban centers with their high percentage of citizens adhering to the new ideology of consumerism will promote and initiate cultural and social change that supports standardized economic and social roles benefiting internationalized consumption patterns favored by economic power holders. Without correcting these disparities in perception towards life and objectives in development between the two ‘cultures within a culture’, social development fails to provide a basis for a form of sustainability that can bridge urban and rural needs. Instead, it results in

- ♦ Political rejection of local community decisions based on the local development vision as well as continued disparities in the distribution of benefits from economic development.
- ♦ National macro-economic disregard for the individual development potential of each community member in accordance with his or her community’s needs, and

the absence of human resource development in communities to protect existing social structures.

- ♦ Denying local control of local resource-use, and establishes the continued threat of environmental over-exploitation.
- ♦ Increasingly usurping and corrupting community leadership by promoting the urban model as an example of 'development' and 'civilization' for community leadership structures.

Chapter 7

Sustainable Development vs. Sustained Growth

The cultural paradigm of sustainable development and the 'Faustian Choice'

The limits of the current sustainable development paradigm obviously do not lie within the paradigm as forwarded by Rio, but rather in its implementation process. A number of key approaches contribute to the current structure whereby implementation limits not only sustainability but also the development of a considerable part of humanity. These approaches are discussed below.

Separatist approach to sustainable development implementation

Some of the directions sustainable development implementation has taken over the last decade display a few characteristics that increasingly deny the interdependence of all sustainability issues. The most prominent of these characteristics are the rapid economic change the world has seen in terms of increased overall consumption, an increasing income gap between rich and poor, and economic pressure put on developing nations by the demands of globalization. Such developments place severe limitations not only on the potential for implementation of Agenda 21, but on the extent to which views offered by the sustainable development paradigm can be accepted worldwide as a future platform for development.

The central role of the economy permeates all sustainability decisions at the government level and results in a separation of sustainable development agendas from qualitative objectives such as environmental protection and social development. For example, justice has been separated from economic development. Democracy has been separated from environmental protection. Environmental protection has been separated from fairness. But they are equally important variables in sustainability. There is no fairness and justice without fair and just economic development and without equity represented by democratic structures. There is no economically sustainable development without the introduction of social and economic rights for communities. There is no socially sustainable development without decisive poverty reduction and no poverty reduction without community empowerment. In the end, the development of economy, ecology and society are all interdependent and the progress of each influences the potential progress of the others.

Sustainable development as a cultural paradigm

However, the interdependence of all aspects of sustainable development goes beyond economic, political or environmental concepts. For example, the last ten years of Agenda 21 implementation have largely ignored the cultural aspect. This applies even to countries that from the developing countries' point of view are very often identified as the same cultural sphere. Thus when the Thai language identifies 'the West' it automatically assumes that Europe and America are basically identical cultures. But this is surely not so. The process of economic globalization is pushing more and more aggressively for an economic market system that has much closer links to the original economic paradigm

described by Adam Smith than it has to the economic paradigm used in Europe to establish the social market system. Yet economic globalization, i.e. the push for a capitalist free market is so powerful that it impacts culturally on Europe's future development as well.

After the Second World War, western European nations had chosen a variety of development alternatives that can be included within the term 'social market economy'. This approach did not question the idea of development through growth as such, but put more stress on installing political instruments to control and guide the market economy. The aim was to achieve a fairer distribution of development benefits throughout all strata of society – a goal that was partly based on historical experience during the 'Great Depression' of the late twenties and early thirties with its economic hardship for many citizens. Extensive social security systems, often combined with free access to education and elaborate health-care plans, were initiated.

The new political structures also reflected past experience with fascist Germany and the Second World War. The moral degradation of politics in parts of Europe that ended in the 'Holocaust' and the racially inspired killing of millions of people motivated the following generation to initiate a variety of social and economic measures to allow the populace a much more active role in politics. Labor unions were allowed to take a leading and active role in societal development and, through political and administrative decentralization, democratic structures provided a sound basis for local and regional participation. In the longer-run, this would lead western Europe to a path in development where environmental concerns could more easily be translated into government policies. Founding these new structures largely on alternative social and economic ideas developed and partially implemented between the two World Wars, western Europe was able to take a leading role in introducing environmental management concepts and social concerns to the worldwide development process later on⁹¹.

And the winner is...

The last twenty years - starting with the use of the economy as a political tool by the Reagan administration in the 1980s whose express purpose was to bring down a rival system of political organization - put the system of social welfare to a test of political survival. The partnership and mutual trust between governments and their citizens that had been established in the prior decades was increasingly eroded when economic demands in the name of national and international competition began to dismantle the relationship between an individual's economic performance and an individual's social security. As a result European culture became much more aggressive, unforgiving and intolerant of political views outside the norm. Simultaneously, economic consumption structures introduced in the last two decades promoted globalized sales and marketing concepts, building new images of socially accepted and desired behavior modeled after needs in economic strategies of product marketing. Currently many Europeans feel they are being 'Americanized', meaning that their quality of living introduced under economic globalization results less and less in a typically European pattern of life. At the same time it closes ranks with an international class of consumers.

⁹¹ However, the European model may be limited to its own societies as its ethical foundations may not necessarily apply beyond its borders. The European political ideal in sustainability looks at sustainable development as a worldwide model. However, political reality still struggles to abolish internal European structures that contravene sustainable development. The most prominent example is probably European politics in the agricultural sector.

Another factor contributing to the impact of the neo-liberal economic concept of development is the absence of an alternative paradigm, i.e. the absence of competing visions of development. While the socialist bloc was still an – however badly functioning – alternative in human social organization, the western so called ‘bloc of free nations’ had to take seriously such issues as democracy, social development, economic performance, and on the qualitative front, fairness and justice. Any discussion of development could be established on the consensus that the best option might be found in a compromise between the two options, capitalist and socialist. Regarding the ‘cultural market place’, the western paradigm of growth and development had to compete with the eastern paradigm of ‘socialism’. However, with the end of the communist bloc, the free market had achieved a cultural monopoly, and like all monopolies brought bad news to the customers. The governments of the world now prepare to introduce sustained economic growth – the main paradigm of the cultural and political winner of the cold war - as the new main direction in sustainable development. If their wish is granted, a globalized concept of the market and the function it has to perform within society will be promoted between the up-coming and the following World Summit in 10 years time.

Social trust in development and leadership

However, looking at sustainability as a cultural paradigm one has to deliberate what the supposed function of all the structures linking the economy and society is supposed to be. For Europe and Southeast Asia, if not many other countries in the world as well albeit to different degrees and on different levels, trust in society and leadership are essential aspects of how to utilize social and economic structures. With the current drive of economic globalization, humanity is asked to replace this trust with trust in the economy, putting not only the world at a crossroads regarding future development options but also the individual. The choice offered here, i.e. continue development with a regulated market or establish a market as deregulated as possible, is a ‘Faustian Choice’. The world might be asking for forces to rescue development that can fulfill many wishes, especially in regard to consumption and patterns of living. But these are forces that in the end might be too large to control, and that would lead to undemocratic and unjust development weakening cultural identity and strengthening only the economically powerful, independent of geography, nation and culture.

The ninth development plan of Thailand is a perfect example of the choice that future human development is given. It promises especially those with economic, social and political power integration into the world market, adoption of the global consumption and production pattern - with all its distinct impacts on social roles of the individual which will benefit marketing and economic efficiency – and yet at the same time stay ‘as Thai as Thai can’. But is this choice a real one? Leading the elite and consumption-oriented middle classes, decision makers and power holders want to harness global economic forces to guarantee social coherence and increased consumption opportunities at the same time. To achieve this, advancing market deregulation is viewed as a major tool to free those economic forces to help provide healthy social development.

However, the linking of economic globalization with sustainable development implementation entails massive cultural change worldwide. What is termed the loss of cultural diversity is the direct result of international economic forces being allowed to introduce internationally standardized consumption patterns that follow only economic concepts of social development. And this loss of cultural diversity not only involves the

‘disappearance of a few hill tribes’ which power holders in urban centers might consider a light price to pay, but also the loss of unique culturally anchored social roles and structures. It is these that provide Thailand with its national and cultural identity.

What can be done?

Global economic interests: the ‘Grey Eminence’ of social development

The economic prowess of TNCs and Multi National Enterprises (MNEs) creates a role for the economy that - expressed in political terms – one can call a ‘grey eminence’. By being allowed to replace historically grown local consumption patterns that link the market with social and political development, with a model of internationally standardized structures that meet the economically grown needs of large international corporations, such entities achieve enormous influence. If sustained economic growth becomes the new approach to sustainable development and guides the next ten years of Agenda 21 implementation, the economy and economic interests will be firmly established as a political entity.

However, to prevent giving economic interest too much political power, it is hardly advisable to turn against the market itself. One should instead concentrate on clearly defining a frame of conditions under which a globalized market can establish itself . Some measures in this direction could for example increase the real political power of the United Nations to guide and govern the process of economic globalization under democratic rules. Or the role of an ‘Upper House’ could be introduced for the United Nations, e.g., a United Nations body must ratify international treaties agreed upon by international but not democratically elected institutions like the World Trade Organization. Another important issue concerns the pace of economic change introduced to any national structures. This should be adapted to the pace necessary to upgrade social and political structures within that nation.

It is important to acknowledge the distinction between a market or local economy and the macro-economy in development policies. While the macro-economy acts as a global or national force in development, the local economy can act as an agent to support socio-cultural structures. As shown in the previous chapters, all aspects of sustainability are interlinked. It is therefore hardly possible to forward the social aspects of for example fairness and justice without linking them to economic aspects that are locally expressed in attitudes towards ‘doing business’. The local economy must therefore be protected while alternative approaches to the standardized model of global consumerism are protected. Conserving the culturally grown role between economic structures and social organization is also important. For example, the historic Thai structures and their concepts described in the previous chapters are increasingly becoming a ‘new’ source of inspiration for rural development. Thus Naan Province has successfully launched a series of – by now– 30 markets under the title ‘*talaad ua-athorn*’ (freely translated: the hospitable market that cares) where local communities are actively encouraged to introduce their products without middlemen and links to the modern food-processing industry. The markets offer low prices and a barter system in accordance with people’s needs and (financial) potential based on historic community structures and their social responsibility. The markets are⁹²

⁹² The Bangkok Post, Thursday, May 23rd 2002

‘...throwing down a challenge to the increasingly globalized sales concept that cherishes profit over humanity. [The ‘*talaad ua-athorn*’] is trying to assure that the market lives up to its ideology by minimizing exploitative and immoral trade practices, by cutting out middlemen/retailers to allow producers to sell directly to end-users.’

Economic rights

For developing countries, economic rights would contain regulations that guarantee the decision prerogative of any individual or local community over its immediate economic environment. For example, many Thai communities are denied access to local forests that for generations have contributed to local economic sufficiency. When these forests become part of a protected environment as stipulated by the Rio environmental agendas, it must be guaranteed that the local population will get either an alternative economic basis for sufficiency or other economic advantages in exchange for not utilizing the now protected community forests. As it is, in 2002, boundaries of protected forestland run right through villages and households, even living rooms and bedrooms, with severe repercussions when villagers insist on using their hereditary community forests. While the boundaries of those protected forests were introduced during the 1990s, the absence of political community empowerment made two things impossible. First, the guarantee of adequate compensation for loss of the communal resource base and, second, control against corrupt economic and political structures taking advantage of the new protected forest areas through illegal logging and carrying out other capital-generating unsustainable activities.

The sustainable development paradigm introduced after Rio envisions sustained development in spite of limited resources. It is therefore important that sustainable economic development is defined and implemented within this framework. As long as sustainable economic development is based on an accumulative economic paradigm, the structure of human societies and their dependence on growth for development will always open doors for the abuse of power founded in economic wealth. It thus represents a severe limitation for establishing true sustainable development. During the world conference on financing for development in Monterrey, Mexico in March 2002, French President Jacques Chirac said that

‘... developed nations have a duty not only to share [their] wealth, but also to encourage sources that produce wealth: economic freedom, political liberty, the rule of laws and human rights, as well as free trade.’

However, these demands of a western government in the context of development might not go far enough to guarantee economic sustainable development. Without the inclusion of a catalogue of guaranteed economic rights, analogous to the internationally defined human rights, the economic freedom and free trade demanded by Mr. Chirac might not contribute to poverty alleviation. However, economic development without decisive economic progress for the world’s poor can hardly be sustainable.

The end of the distinction between developing and developed countries

Humanity is currently trying to develop and implement concepts and structures that go beyond what already exists: sustainability for human development. In this respect all

countries are developing and the old distinction between developing and developed countries is basically reduced to a description of economic and political power. Thus, differing policies to develop sustainability should acknowledge the fundamental differences in potential to contribute to sustainability. Regarding 'developing countries' the issue of political power structures and corrective measures in line with sustainable development should take precedence over the development of economic structures to safeguard against the impact of economic change in a society.

For example, Burma will in future undergo substantial change in internal and international policy. This country would be a perfect case study to verify what advances in sustainable development are possible when international aid is strictly focused on the advancement of internal social and political structures and democratic community empowerment. The country itself is very rich in resources but composed of many minorities with culturally different societies. By advancing political concepts of sustainability rather than economic globalization, traditional thinking of development benefit distribution could be harnessed to approach sustainability without strong social impact from abrupt economic change.

'Empowering' the environment

Regarding 'developed countries' the issue of economic power structures needs to be addressed much more than the issue of political power structures. The biggest challenge for sustainable development here is to realize that leading economic countries have lost their status of being developed with regard to sustainability and transform this knowledge into economic policies. The introduction of the Polluter Pays Principle and other similar measures must bind the economy firmly to its social responsibility in development. The economic globalization process, originating in the most economically powerful countries and actively supported by economic elites throughout the world, must curtail economic structures to such an extent that the political power of the economy remains separated as much as possible from the political decision-making process, i.e. the local community is empowered to make political decisions over local economic resource use. Thus, communities can function as a control mechanism ensuring that economic development stays linked with social responsibility.

Locally induced decisions regarding the environment have in sum a global impact. In order to alleviate this impact, it is necessary to empower the environment. Empowering the environment means to approach environmental sustainability through establishing a minimum of protection for any given ecosphere to survive impact, and define the non-use of resources from that ecosphere as an environmental right of any community living within that ecosphere. For example, communities relying on access to natural resources from the direct environment must have a right to refuse outsiders' access to these resources for exploitation. This scenario demands intact and working democratic structures in place for the administration of the environment. With such a structure in place it would be possible for environmental protection agencies to compete for these local resources in the form of non-use. Not competing in a commercial sense with the aim to exploit, but with the aim of supporting intact communities, because they accept not to exploit their immediate environment for commercial use but instead act as a direct protector.

‘Economic secularization’ through a paradigm shift

In European medieval times, the church claimed that it was ever-lasting and stood for the protection of the very structure of life and orderliness as reflected in earthly kingdoms. Compared to the religious institution and its social function, the person of the ruler, king and emperor was considered to be merely a temporary stakeholder of principles represented by the church. We might find a comparison in our times, when listening to proponents of the free market and its principles over leaders who are elected every four or five years. And indeed, the very structure of democracy can turn into a weakness of the system when politicians are forced to approve economic action that hurts sustainability in the long run, but assures quick rises in income in the short run in order to be re-elected. The question is: does the electorate expect any other form of behavior?

The dominance of the church in social and political affairs only ended in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century with a process called ‘secularization’. It was a political process that installed civilian rule over the formation of and changes to community structures, for example, couples could marry without a religious ceremony, and vast areas of land owned by local churches were returned to the communities and civilian administration. In the year 2002, a similar process might be needed to firmly separate the concepts of political power and economic power, not only in laws and regulations but also in the thinking and perception of citizens.

The very approach towards politics in, for example Thailand, demonstrates that political activity is seen as a tool to achieve first of all economic advantage and only secondly – if at all - social development. Economic decisions taken by TNCs in large urban centers have a direct impact on political and social opportunities for development in rural communities. The very consumption patterns economic globalization is installing worldwide will de-empower local decision-making structures. As with the Christian church in Europe 200 years ago, might it be time again to initiate another secularization, but now directed towards vested economic interests?

Changing emphasis in development

A number of approaches are conceivable to achieve the goal of a strong separation between economic interest and political power and more often than not laws are introduced to curb economic influence on political power. While this can have the desired result, economic lobbying prevents many laws, for example the worldwide introduction of the Polluter Pays Principle, that would more firmly bind economic development to social responsibility, i.e. secularize the economy as an overriding factor in human development. However, laws by themselves might not be enough if economic secularization did not equally address the concepts for everyday human, economic behavior. Economic concepts contribute decisively to environmental protection and social development. Not only through reorganizing consumption patterns (and thus directly economic power structures and indirectly political power structures) of the producing industries and the end-user, but also through introducing alternative economic paradigms.

Such paradigms would not need to be in opposition to the free market. It would be quite sufficient for them to put a different emphasis on ways and methods how to include the environment into development. For example, the USA has for over 25 years under the guidance of the Institute for Over Self-reliance tried to establish the Carbohydrate

Economy. The carbohydrate economy tries to replace as many non-organic resources as possible within any single production process with replenishable resource bases in carbohydrate, which can be grown. Another alternative approach is from India and termed 'Progressive Utility Theory' (PROUT). PROUT envisions to protect the environment through a process of sustainable development that focuses on other than mercantile outlook as proposed by the West. Under a concept of economic democracy it envisions the establishment of local community development plans that give room for the community's spirituality and vision of progress. It is supported by active government policies that focus on establishing local community rule and access to the market. PROUT is an outstanding example of how a different approach in sustainable development can be focused on sustaining the local community and thus achieve sound sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

Another point of view comes from Thailand, the concept of a self-sufficient economy, which is based on traditional values of rural communities. It is strongly linked to the concept of *Ruu Djak Pho*⁹³. The historical rural concept of development always formed a strong alliance with local environmental development. Over the last few centuries, Thai communities have learned to sustain themselves in local communities under the virtual absence of regional or national infrastructure⁹⁴. This meant that community sufficiency had to rely on a minimum of resources reaching the community from outside and local economies that were drawing most of the items needed in every day life from their 'Immediate Commons'. Considerable care had to be invested to use the natural environment to a maximum without destroying it for future generations.

His Majesty the King of Thailand has developed this local approach into one that might be used nationwide. It can be considered a serious alternative for the development of the country, especially as it focuses not on the newly acquired capitalist outlook from the west but on traditional concepts of living in peaceful coexistence with nature that have strong roots in the country's Buddhist religion. Besides the technical solutions needed to solve environmental problems that are an inheritance from past generations, a sustainable environmental approach strongly looking at social and economic development in terms of mutual coexistence between humans and nature is needed if the current generation wants to preserve an intact resource base for the future generation.

A ray of hope - from stakeholder to rightholder

To achieve such goals, it is surely not sufficient to lobby for sustainability in the upcoming WSSD in Johannesburg. Civil society opposition has not enough political (and economic) influence to really change the outcome of the summit if the economic elite is determined to implement sustained economic growth as the new platform for sustainable development. More and more civil society publications on World Summit on Sustainable Development policies read like desperate pleas 'not to forget the ecology and social fairness'. Although 'Realpolitik' or simply 'the economic reality as a political force' might seem to offer this kind of visionless sustainability promotion as the only 'real' choice, it remains important that attempts to influence the World Summit on Sustainable Development do not act from within the only remaining cultural paradigm with enough

⁹³ Freely translated *Ruu Djak Pho* means to know when to be satisfied, to know when you have enough.

⁹⁴ It is only during the last two decades that communications infrastructure development has made extensive progress in the country. Before that, the rural community was relatively isolated.

economic and political influence to matter - the free market based on accumulative growth - but act out of true opposition and try to establish an alternative vision.

Thus, besides pacifying and influencing power holders from within the system, an equal amount of energy and effort should be made to establish sustainable development as a cultural concept in the minds and perceptions of individuals, to make them realize that the development choice offered is, indeed, a 'Faustian Choice'. Development as a cultural concept must lead not only to political statements but to political action and political reform in the democratic system. This would turn sustainable development implementation into a largely political process as opposed to the dominance of the current emphasis on the economy. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, critics in civil society were able to establish a public conscience about the environmental impact of human consumption. As a result, many countries have seen 'green' parties evolving and gaining access to real political power under democratic structures. If a similar process can establish a public conscience about the impact of mindless consumption and standardized international free market structures on cultural diversity and the culture of the consumers themselves, critics of economic globalization might be induced and empowered to shift the focus of the development paradigm towards social justice as the core value of a human centered development paradigm. This could enhance the demands and visions of critics of economic globalization, as yet mostly organized in street demonstrations, and offer a parliamentary extension with direct access to decision making. And what is true for 'the streets' must hold true for everyone: involvement of stakeholders without a democratic mandate, for example WTO, in decision-making must be bound to a stakeholder identification that is entirely democratic and establish the rightholder much more than the stakeholder firmly in the development process.

Societal space for Thai women under the paradigm of sustainable development

By Ms. Wilasinee Poonuch-Apai

Humans exist within time and space. Therefore in every culture, humans keep questioning themselves as to what is space? And what is time? People of different cultures view the concepts of space and time differently. Once humans have figured out what they mean by space and time, they arrange the various things in their lives (both those that exist in reality and those that are outside the realm of reality) according to their understanding. (นิติตีเสียวศรีวงศ์, 2538 (1995) Page 131). However, this arrangement by humans is artificial. Humans set and determine their own systems of what relates to what and why they are related. By setting and defining each relationship, humans create their own “meaning (ความหมาย)”. Once humans know the meaning of each object, they will manage it according to what they believe to be appropriate, and according to the circumstances.

Meaning (ความหมาย) and power

Humans began to define space and relationships when they set out to divide the work that is to be done in society (division of labor) and which lays out the roles and duties of men and women. These pre-determined roles and duties are linked to the power structure of society. This shows that culture cannot (just) happen but must be built or created. Thus, a set of “power relationships” is created. A “power relationship” is one whereby one party has to be better than or to be able to dominate the other. This statement is illustrated clearly by looking at the definitions that society gives to each gender. For example, the better aspects of humanity, such as strength, stability, calmness and quick decision-making are the characteristics that describe men. Such is the myth or the process of building reality (here applied to gender issues) (ชลิตดาภรณ์ สงข์สัมพันธ์, 2541, page 92).

Power, space and tradition

The concept of space and the process of building reality have led us to focus on the process whereby society gives meaning and definition to different things. It also allows us to concentrate on what constitutes image building. Not only can the different views of space help us to understand the complexity in defining meanings, but space itself is also an inevitable component in setting definitions. In other words, defining meanings relates to power building, the idea behind such relations lying in the issue of who gets to benefit from such space, or who should not be allowed to enter such space.

In competing for societal space in terms of power and definition setting, humans have created cultural mechanisms such as religions, belief systems and traditions to control each party’s societal space. The purpose of this paper is to identify some aspects of Thai culture that have influenced how societal space for women has been determined in the past and to show how such influence still exists today. Moreover, the paper will attempt to show how modernization and development that emphasize (solely) economic and industrial aspects have affected the role of women in society. It is hoped that the issues raised in this paper

can shed some insight on “women in development” for the future to prepare for the era of ‘gender in development’ in Thailand.

Cultural Perspectives in Thailand that influence how societal space for women in Thailand is defined

In order to be able to comprehend the status and role of men and women in Thailand, it is necessary to understand the factors that define each gender’s status. If we believe that social construction determines (the identity) of male and female, then it means that we are dealing with aspects of culture, tradition and societal beliefs. This is because faith and belief in religion are considered to be culture at the ideological level so that beliefs, thoughts, ideas and religion determine human behavior. In Thai culture, the people hold strong Buddhist beliefs, which were reformed at the beginning of the 20th century. They also hold strong beliefs in Brahmanism and spiritualism, all of which stem from culture and are embedded in folklore. The following examples presented show traditional Thai beliefs of the relationship between men and women, which is the belief in dualism which has been deeply embedded in the very roots of Thai society and can still be seen today. For example:

What is considered as having a higher value or a lower value (ของสูงของต่ำ):

Everything that belongs to women is considered to be of lower value than that which belongs to men, for example skirts (ผ้าถุง) and lingerie. These cannot be washed with men’s clothes. When hanging them to dry, they have to be hung on a lower clothesline than dressing gowns of men. The reason behind this is that Thais believe that men possess some kind of holy spirits and these spirits would leave the men’s bodies if they walked under a clothesline carrying women’s clothes and in consequence will have bad luck and meet misfortune. Similarly, women’s monthly periods are considered to be filthy and a bad omen for men being close to a menstruating woman. In accordance with this belief/attitude women are not allowed to have sexual intercourse during this time.

The old and the young (ความอาวุโสและความอ่อนเยาว์):

In general, most Thais regard men to be senior (the older person, entitled to higher social respect) and women to be junior (the younger members of a group, not automatically entitled to higher forms of respect). Most Thai men will thus only marry women who are younger than themselves.

Right and Left (ขวาและซ้าย):

Thai people in the North believe that “right” represents men, while “left” represents women. The right side is always given higher priority than the left side, thus indicating that men have more power and authority than women. It can still be observed at any formal dinner or social gatherings that the wives always sit to their husbands’ left hand side, thus reflecting and enforcing cultural beliefs and attitudes that give women a generally lower status than men.

Roles under the cultural gender-paradigm

Traditional beliefs of the role of men and women still exist in today’s society and - in form of ‘cultural gender ideologies’ - play a significant part in today’s societal structure. One

aspect of women's roles that is clearly rooted in societal structure is that women must conform more to the norms of society than men. This means that women's roles are mostly still restricted to the field of household work and hardly ever enter the men's space, while men have more cultural lenience and room to maneuver socially and are not restricted in any sense while being at home in the space traditionally reserved for the female gender. However, women are not easily welcome to join the male activities, most of which take place outside of the home. The traditional ideal role for women is to become housewives and to take care of their husbands. Other traditional roles and social expectations towards women unfortunately still fully comply with the old cliché of 'being loyal and obeying to their husbands and have children'. These roles or spaces defined between the different genders are extended into attitudes towards education, politics and economics, where in spite of changing times, they still very much determine a woman's options and alternatives in personal development.

▪ ***Educational context:***

In the olden days, parents had little preference in sending their daughters to schools furthering their education for the parents believed that their daughters would eventually get married and were expected to only look after their husbands and to care for their homes and children. Another constraining factor, then, was that most of the schools were located in local temples and, while parents could easily send their sons off to the temple for education, girls were considered 'unclean', should not be close to monks and what was (and is) generally still believed, cannot be taught by monks. Thus, tuition at the temples came cheap for the male gender and could help economizing on a family's budget. Daughters on the other hand had to attend private schools and any decision to educate a daughter was expensive.

The problem of safety of the daughters was another constraint. Economically, this meant an additional burden, as daughters had to be accompanied to school, a fact that is still responsible for a considerable portion of the famous Bangkok traffic jams, when many parents rush to school to send or pick their daughters. Another factor was that daughters tended to be helpers within the family in terms of household chores and helping out with the family businesses. This factor encouraged parents to keep their daughters at home and help out rather than send them off to school. Girls from upper class families tended to be more fortunate. Such families could afford to educate their daughters by sending them to private schools. But even in the upper classes, the role-expectations towards those more fortunate girls forced the majority of them to focus on studies in home economics, only.

At present, there have been changes in society whereby young girls are provided with more opportunity for education, but in most rural communities parents still tend to provide their sons with a better education than their daughters. And they still have ample reason, even if their decision were not biased by cultural factors alone: Men enjoy better incomes than women even if the level of education between both genders is the same. Men are given more opportunity to train to further their skills than women. The social and economic aspects described above for sending sons rather than daughters off to school was emphasized by political rules whereas in the past women were not allowed to work for the government or become bureaucrats. This was just another reason why parents were reluctant to support their daughters' education. Another point worth mentioning is that (totally male) government bodies set the school curricula. Curricula for boys and girls were clearly separated, each specifying what boys should study and what girls should study. This resulted in boys and girls, men and women, having different knowledge and

being geared for different professions. The state (government) then made matters worse by discouraging equal opportunity of employment for men and women.

▪ ***Political context:***

Political space can be described as the space outside the home. This space is considered to be where power lies. Political activities mainly include meeting and talking with voters or people in constituencies and negotiating. Women are regarded as not being able to perform these functions or activities as well as men. Personally, I see this as one mechanism that men use to obstruct the development of women as well as preventing women from invading their space or turf.

▪ ***Economic context:***

In the past, women controlled the finances of a family, both inside and outside the home and/or the household, which could constitute more than one home. A lot of the income generated within or by a family was solely administered by women and they approved all expenses of the family. In today's society, we see that more women are involved in small-scale trading activities than men. But the issue here should not concern the number of women involved in small-scale trading or earning income, but should consider whether such activities are regarded as important or not. Does society accept small-scale trading as an important activity? Or does society regard this activity as just another activity that does not make much income? Answering these questions could explain why men have left small-scale trading to women while they (the men) carry out other activities that are more significant such as public activities that produce better income.

A third space

Reorganizing culture in a manner that restricts the role of women domestically and publicly would definitely result in gender inequality (ปราณี วงษ์เทศ, 2544 page 13). This is because once women restrict themselves only to domestic work they are not in a position to achieve what is called "fame, power, reputation, and cultural values". The most surprising and interesting thing is that in reality, activities that men are involved in are still viewed as more important than those of women and that the Thai cultural system still gives more value and power to the activities of men.

From my perspective, it is legitimate to question whether it is necessary for women to try to move into men's space. If we (women) step into men's space it would mean that we have accepted the fact that men's space is the realm of power. Also by stepping in, we would accept the belief of dualism, which sees issues only in two lights – black and white. I therefore believe that between the two spaces (of gender), there is in fact still enough room for a third space which can either exist within or outside these two spaces. But wherever the room for a third space may be, it must be flexible and adjustable enough to accommodate the different contexts of economics, politics, society and culture at each time interval. The newly defined space could serve as an alternative for women to choose in the midst of modern day development.

Sustainable Development and its effects on the role of women

During the past forty years there have been tremendous efforts to follow the development plans set by the National Economic and Social Development Board and many facets of Thai society in terms of its economy, social structure and conditions and current policies and politics owns their specific character to them. More recently they have been put into the context of the sustainable development debate following the World Conference on Development in Rio De Janeiro in 1992. If development is measured by economic indicators alone Thailand's development can be considered to have been truly extraordinary. But the past development has largely ignored cultural mechanisms and related impacts. It fails, for example, in introducing new and improved mechanisms that attempt to abolish gender inequality or to provide social security of women.

Past and 'developing' present

Thai society in the northern part of Thailand has a system that respects their ancestors' spirits or what is called "Phi Phu Yha" (ผีปู่ย่า). This custom/belief has been passed on from one generation to the next by women. The oldest woman of the family is the head chief, who is called "Khao Phi" (เฝ้าผี) and plays an important role in the ritual ceremony of paying respect to the ancestors' spirits. She is also the one who keeps an eye on the children and grandchildren of her family. The belief in ancestor spirits is complementary to the custom that husbands have to go and live with the wives' families after marriage, at least in the beginning, to pay respect to the spirits. The husband will work and tend his wife's agricultural land and he will have to obey the rules of his father-in-law as long as he is under his father-in-law's roof. Once he and his wife have moved out, certain rules do not apply anymore. This tradition ensures that land allocation is carried out from the women's side of the family. The women are the sole beneficiaries of inheritance. There are two patterns for how this is to be achieved. In the first pattern, the parent will leave the house and land to their youngest daughter who takes care of them. An alternative is the traditional pattern of marrying into the wife's family.

At present this traditional mechanism has been destroyed by many factors. For example, the shift from agriculture to industrial production. Such a shift has resulted in the movement of labor from rural to urban areas. With this shift, many women have moved to work in cities. Another factor that destroyed the traditional mechanism is the introduction of scientific knowledge and reasoning. Such knowledge has changed the thoughts of the younger generations to the extent that they do not believe in ghosts or spirits anymore. In addition, the newer generations do not prefer the extended family and this has caused the decline of some of the traditional social mechanisms. As such, the traditional roles of women in homemaking and managing household activities have been changed. This has resulted in an extension of the men's roles in society to include him as head of household, a former female domain, and has given both legal and cultural recognition in this new role. Thus the men rather than the women have become family leaders and are the decision makers on many household issues. Apart from this, the development of the capitalist system has imposed greater roles and responsibilities for women. However, the factual situation for most women in Thailand is that despite of working in a dual role as breadwinner while working outside of the house and as well as house-keeper while maintaining their families' homes, their legal rights in managing and possessing assets have decreased. The law specifies that sons and daughters be entitled to inherit equally but this legal constraint is contrary to the traditional norms of the (northern) communities. Consequently women experience a decrease in material security for themselves and their children within their communities.

Caught in-between: women's roles in transition

I see that in the midst of a capitalistic development that is taking place in Thailand, there is still the traditional belief in the role of women. Women have tried to find their third space in society and created a hybrid identity for their roles inside and outside the house. The creation and definition of this third space and hybrid identity is not yet complete. There is neither the recognition of women's third space nor is there the cultural and social demand for the man to extent their roles at home in accordance with their increased legal rights. Unless such problems are addressed by society and policies the third space developing is just a way of increasing women's burden, as women still carry the same workload inside their households but now share the additional burden of generating income away from home with their men.

Speaking of which, society still has a hard time accepting women's role in working professionally. Therefore, one important prerequisite in developing both the third space and the hybrid identity for women is for men to increase their share of women's household workload. They should at the same time accept the role of women in being able to work professionally and in the political sphere. At present there have been attempts in many countries to build alliances to develop women's new roles and duties. For example, Agenda 21 clearly specifies the role that the state (government) should pursue in order to increase the caliber of women so as to increase their roles and involvement in issues pertaining to sustainable development (Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs ๒๕๒๖. Page 58).

Agenda 21 sets the guidelines the state should consider as follows:

- ❖ Provide women with a greater role in ecosystem management (environmental management) both at the national and international level, as well as to control environmental degradation;
- ❖ Provide medical care for all women;
- ❖ Reduce the burden of existing work of women and children. And cooperate with employers and organizations in establishing kindergartens or day care centers for children at an appropriate price. To outline a national plan that will encourage men to relieve the burden of women by accepting an equal amount of household chores as women;
- ❖ Provide loans in various forms for women, especially loans that are given to small and non-established businesses;
- ❖ Provide women with assets and the knowledge to understand the factors and equipment used in agricultural activities; (?)
- ❖ Pursue measures that eliminate all kinds of sexual harassment of women. Eliminate the negative image of women, or being stereotyped to women, or having attitudes and pessimism towards women;
- ❖ Make sure that women are aware of reducing or eliminating unsustainable consumption;
- ❖ Consider the economic worth of women's work, such as housework or other work that cannot be accounted for using monetary values, and to include these factors in measuring the economic status of the country.

Though these guidelines may be able to improve the equality of men and women in society to some extent – if and when implemented, sexual discrimination issues can still be seen in everyday society, as 'guidelines' do not change society's perceptions or attitudes towards gender issues. In addition, development under such guidelines only, would be development in form rather than in content.

In search for a new perspective

Does this mean that women have to strive to be in men's space, or to accept the values of men's space? For example, there are at present many development programs whereby the state (government) tries to set quotas to ensure that women are well represented in any given committee. With this method, the space that women obtain is governed by rules, regulations, and control. The fact still remains that society does not accept the skills or potential of a women in accordance with her ability, but rather in accordance with her gender. The question then lies in whether the quota mechanism can help to solve the problem of gender inequality. As long as the principal system of belief of Thai society clings to the notion of dualism: male – female, high value – low value, north – south, inside the house – outside the house, then the creation of the “third space” is meaningless.

Or should we consider this competing for space between the genders from a new perspective, as suggested by อภิญา เพ็ญฟูสกุล (2543 page 85-86), who made an interesting point regarding the space (that women have to strive to attain)? She explains that the space of resistance is a separate and independent space freed from power or suppression. The view of the third space is an analytical attempt to try to go beyond dualistic thinking. To comply with this notion, a new set of definitions for “politics” and “resistance” is needed. Dualistic thinking created the space for power to be on “opposite and irreconcilable ends” with a space for resistance. Such a line of thought could result in limiting the circle of resistance. The reason being: the person in such a situation will only look for resistance that rejects power altogether, and will attempt to search for new space that is beyond that power. If we agree with Stewart Hall that there is no popular culture that is free from the power and control of a bigger system such as capitalism and colonialism, then the question is where does resistance begin?

If the key to power is a clear framework of definitions of identities that divides the line between “is” and “is not” so that “is” remains a still target, then such framework restricts itself from engaging with other possibilities. If that is the case, the third space becomes a rejection to abide by any conformist identity. **This form of third space does not have to be separated from the space of power or suppression.** This is because there is no power relationship that is complete or perfect. As long as the space for power is dynamic, then there will be room for individuals to move within the space of power. From this perspective, power and resistance cannot be independent from one another. Resistance only means dislocation (refusing to stay in a defined place). There are many tactics or stratagems to dislocation, ranging from making the line dividing the space vague or confusing, to creating hybrid identity. However, a society based on true sustainable development criteria needs the full potential of both genders, be they performed in a first, second, third – or best – in a common societal space. Such a common ground needs to provide equal space for both men and women, so that it can provide both genders with an opportunity to live to their maximum capacity to the advancement of society.

Guest Essay

Art & Sustainability

**An essay on the question of modern visual arts in, through and for society,
based on the example of the visual arts in Thailand**

by Dr. Jörg Löschmann

The visual arts hold an extraordinary position among the art forms in Thailand and it is the visual arts scene that has experienced great transformation in the last decade. At the end of the 80s, exhibitions and galleries still displayed primarily pictures and sculptures whose style and motives adhered to neo-Buddhist art, impressionist landscape painting or royal iconography, yet this state of affairs changed in response to the fast pace of social development and its contradictory effects at the beginning of the 90s. Increasing numbers of artists began to move away from traditional forms and content, to address socially relevant questions and search for esthetic solutions as well as adequate means of artistic expression. As a result of this radical change, artists, gallery owners, curators and important representatives of the country's cultural institutions initiated a multitude of activities into which flowed modern approaches, different viewpoints and design forms. New forms of galleries such as the About Café or Project 304 were established.

The dramatic events in May 1992 and the crisis of 1997/98 affected all levels of society and revealed two important developments: first, both events displayed the strong anticipatory power inherent in art (as some works reflected the tension and other elements of the crisis developing beneath the surface); second, they acted as a catalyst for the breakthrough and the acceptance of more socially oriented art as well as its means of expression, an example of the latter being installations.

Since similar, i.e. analogous developments have occurred in other Southeast Asian nations within the examined period, the question arises why United Nations General Assembly (UNGAS), as the decisive institution for the promotion of sustainable development for the second World Summit in Johannesburg 2002, is sponsoring a *drawing competition for children* – and not *mature artists*. Has the commission possibly remained oblivious to the developments in art and culture in regions like Southeast Asia? Did they want to be assured of clear forms and a content that would be easily and rapidly grasped? Irregardless, the decision to hold a children's drawing competition not only implies vast underestimation of the role that art has come to play from a socially relevant perspective in many Asian and African countries or even of what art generally has to offer. The decision also forfeited the chance to promote a mutually beneficial exchange between artists and politicians.

This essay aims to discuss the relationship between art and sustainability on seven distinct but interrelated levels: thematically (How did the sustainability debate affect the thematic choices in the art process?); exhibition design (How are exhibitions designed initially? How sustainable are they prepared and how are they realized?); the organization of the art business (especially regarding education structures and exhibition design choices in galleries and museums); the art market (What is the situation with private galleries? Which dangers exist for the constancy of the art market?); the art work itself (Are pictures and sculptures created under the aspect of longevity? Which measures are taken when it comes

to storage and maintenance of art works?); the media (How is art reflected in the media? Do sustainable concepts for magazines exist?); and the level of networks (Are contacts between artists and between artists and representatives of cultural institutions at national or regional level organized with a long-term vision?).

On the *first level*, the thematic focus, the shift to socially relevant topics is particularly obvious among younger artists (up to 35 years), a movement that was observed in the last “Art Thesis” exhibitions of the graduates from the country’s art university, Silpakorn, and from the country’s second biggest education institution for artists, the Chiang Mai University Faculty of Fine Arts at the Chiang Mai University. A glance at the exhibition calendar of the largest art houses also indicates the shift - they include the Chiang Mai Art Museum, the National Gallery, Silpakorn University’s Art Center, the Art Center of Chulalongkorn University’s Center of Academic Research, the Art Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Khon Kaen University. The exhibition organized by the Heinrich Boell Foundation’s Southeast Asia Regional Office, “The End of Growth? Ways of Development into a Sustainable Future” in Chiang Mai in February 2001 and Bangkok in May 2001, took up this trend and delivered a still unrivaled climax on at least three counts: the regional dimension (60 artists from 6 Southeast Asian countries with very different cultural background - Buddhist, Islamic, Confucian, Christian), content based consequences and the general impact. Several other exhibitions, where aspects of sustainability in personal as well as social decisions and their consequences played a significant role, can be recognized as milestones along the way: “Chiang Mai Social Installation” 1997 (in the whole city), “Bangkok Art Project” (also spread across the city), “Womanifesto I – III” 1997-2001, “Eurovision’s” 2000, “Art after Death” 2000, the installations of the “Alien (Generation)” 2000, “Power of Nature 2000” and “Month of Photography” 2001.

Most decisive for the socialisation of the visual arts in Thailand, however, were private initiatives such as founding galleries, art centers and artists’ groups whose conceptual framework from the start sought to closely link to problem situations in society. Among these galleries and art centers the Gallery 253 or Space Contemporary Art, the About Café, Project 304 and the Tadu Gallery must be mentioned alongside the Bangkok or the Marsi Galleries. Among the artists’ groups Womanifesto and Scopolamine can be emphasized. The latter group’s program, though not free from conceptual contradictions and shifts in quality, illustrates on the one hand the boundless will especially of younger Thai artists to speak up on social developments and conflicts using creative design formats and to find esthetic forms of expression for critical positions (as an aside: such a critical stance and equal pointedness is possible only in one other country within the region: the Philippines). On the other hand, Scopolamine’s program mirrors the point of development Thailand has reached some time ago - it is, in fact, a country that has in many areas already surpassed the “threshold.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ With a very differentiated society, a well developed, broad social life, multifaceted structures, a parliamentary democracy that is steadily improving qualitatively due to tackling the problem of vote-buying, a strong, functioning state structure, a solid infrastructure - and of course also with numerous problems, a fundamental one being the unchecked, uncontrolled (economic) growth and the belief in this growth. The approach of the HBF exhibition “The End of Growth?” and a parallel, closely connected conference was specifically to shake up that belief, to set question marks into a space where awareness in various ways lags behind the created material and spiritual/mental infrastructure, failing to provide opportunities for an exchange and to support a variety of projects and shared actions. Especially this last aspect holds an enormous significance for everyone: to bring together scientists, politicians, representatives of organizations and institutions and of course artists in order to promote their exchange to allow the birth of impulses to incorporate new insights - affected by the perspective of a growth criticism - into one’s own field of activity.

The powerful impulses for socially relevant art emanating from artists in Thailand also affected the awards presentation of the Philip Morris Asean Awards, the most important art prize in Southeast Asia. Here, Piwat Nophiran won first prize in 2000 with his conflict-ridden picture “The Contemporary Smile of Society,” while Therdkiat Wangwacharakul received the competition’s shared second prize in the same year.

On the *second level*, the conceptualization and realization of exhibitions, it is unavoidable to note from the first that large deficits remain in this area. When artists collaborate in the context of a group exhibition, they often tend to adopt vague titles such as “Heaven’s Garden”, “The Spirit of Buddha”, “Abstractions of Mind” or “Love and Freedom”, the goal being to exhibit all the available works at all costs under the title’s all encompassing embrace. The struggle to find a fitting concept is obvious both with regard to exhibition design and exhibition calendar of the private initiatives - especially the aforementioned About Café, Project 304 and Tadu Gallery -, but also within certain limitations (to be further discussed below) at the Silpakorn University Art Center and Chulalongkorn University’s Art Center of Academic Resources. Several have experienced the gradual emergence of a gallery profile, even if this process succumbs to fluctuations and is accompanied by periodic breaks; yet many of the young galleries in the quarter behind the Hackesche Höfe in Berlin or in London’s East End face similar problems.

The fact that this topic was addressed at the first Asean Art Symposium, organized by the Siam Society and the Center for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO-SPAFA) in March 2001 in Bangkok and was also discussed on the second day despite not being in the official program, indicates that many art critics in the region and especially the directors of private galleries are aware of the urgency of this problem situation. Their experience has also taught them that the absence of a profile is not feasible in the long run and would influence business negatively. Thammasat and Chulalongkorn Universities have also recognized these deficits and at the beginning of 2000 introduced courses on cultural management into their curricula that run two semesters, are open to graduate students and are offered in Thai and English, respectively.

Foreign cultural institutes have also been actively involved in this area. Thus the Goethe Institute offered a seminar on the topic of “cultural management” in the summer of 2001, attended by 60 interested participants, mainly students. The result of the seminar, a catalogue compiling marketing suggestions for the National Gallery, was handed over to this institution upon completion. A participant furthermore received a scholarship for the best marketing design. The Institute also attempts to consistently add the component of conceptualization and design to exhibition projects. The German artist Hans Georg Berger exhibited therefore not only his photographs at the Goethe Institute in Bangkok in 2002 but contributed also his knowledge to the process of setting up a faculty position in this field. The French Embassy’s cultural section, in cooperation with the Cultural Department of the Thai Education Ministry, in 2001 also initiated a project for all museums in the country with seminars and workshops on the topic of museum organization. France and Germany are cooperating with a consulting project for the Democracy Museum of the Prajapok Institute, including a seminar on museum pedagogy and a Thai delegation’s trip to both countries. These projects indicate the direction that European Institutions and internationally active cultural organizations should be taking with greater commitment than before. The goal is two fold: to not only and primarily promote an exchange between artists - more often than not culminating in a dubious workshop-exhibition in the respective western country (yet a result that appears to reasonably excuse the invested

funds), but also to concentrate on the management and gallery owners, curators, critics and those responsible in state art and cultural institutions. On the other hand and with regard to the presently attained state of development in the field of art and culture, it can be expected that the partners in the Southeast Asian countries articulate their needs more clearly than before and try to push through related interests.

In conjunction with this analysis, the Heinrich Boell Foundation's Regional Office in the context of its second large exhibition project, working title, "Identities versus Globalization?" plans to cooperate with Thai and other South East Asian partners in emphasizing the perspective of an exhibition's conceptual development.

On the *third level*, the organization of the art business, it must first be noted that during the time period between 1995 and 2000 the state invested deeply in the creation of capacity building education and training in the field of art and for the first time not only discussed decentralization, but also provided enormous financial input for its implementation. Included are several sites: completed in 1999, the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Chiang Mai University (whose staff and spatial design need no longer shy away from comparison with a European university town of the same size); the construction, also completed in 1999, of the country's very first substantial museum of modern art in Chiang Mai; the building of a gallery in Khon Kaen; the completion in 2001 of a second art center of Silpakorn University in Nakhon Pathom near Bangkok (where 5 departments of the University have already been operating for a longer time now); the recently opened, architecturally stunning Museum of Science and Technology in Bangkok, which also possesses a large exhibition area. The fact that these projects were planned at the beginning or the mid 90s and were even completed to a great extent after the crisis of 1997/98, proves how highly the state regards the arts. It is nevertheless necessary to mention at this point that the funding provided by the government under prime minister Chuan Leekphai to the three universities in Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen and Songkhla over the space of three years have yielded broadly differing results: thus, the gallery in Khon Kaen can be used to a rather limited extent due to its concave walls, while in Songkhla only a small room was built; one cannot help but inquire where all the money has disappeared to.

Private investments in the commercial galleries also reached a high volume in the same time period, as witnessed in the founding of Gallery 55, the Siam Art Space Gallery, the Mercury Art Gallery or in the moving of the Thavibu Gallery to a new space on Silom Road.

The general progress on this level, however, is certainly not irreversible, nor is it appropriately sustainable, as the discussions and activities throughout 2001 surrounding two of the larger art houses have proven: the Bangkok Metropolitan Museum of Art, which has already passed through all stages of planning and was awaiting construction; and the above mentioned Chiang Mai Museum of modern art, which at the beginning of 2002 suffered under the almost total withdrawal of financial support by its initial backers, the state run Chiang Mai University. Although the project for a Bangkok museum for modern arts had progressed far under Bangkok Mayor Bhichit Rattakul (advertising, selection, location, financial plan [700 million Baht, 300 million from state coffers]), restrictions imposed by a state wide pressure to economize caused his successor, Samak Sundaravej, to alter it to the extent that little remained of the original conceptualization; thus the plan became to install the museum on the two upper floors of a shopping mall to be built by a Japanese company specializing on parking garages. Many artists, however,

were unwilling to accept this development and organized gala evenings (“Artists unite for the Art Museum”), benefit events, protest actions and also the practical use of democratic mechanisms (demanding to set up a parliamentary hearing commission), the actions reaching a climax in the demonstrations and “poster chains” involving thousands of artists and sympathizers at the end of October 2001. The shopping mall idea was scrapped and this partial victory can be used as a basis for future discussions, although the entire museum project is currently on ice.

The withdrawal of state subventions for the barely three year old museum in Chiang Mai in the process of a step by step university privatization scheme also represents a harsh setback and shows just how vulnerable the progress achieved in the field of art and culture over the past ten years can (still) be. However, the university has agreed to the compromise of freeing five staff members from their work at the Faculty of Fine Arts in order to work for the museum and to continue paying them: these include the director, two designers and two craftsmen. Yet perhaps this separation could also be considered an opportunity for the museum to rid itself of certain dependencies and formal pressures (compulsory exhibitions!), to fuse hitherto split energies (the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts was simultaneously the director of the museum, and he felt more obliged to his work at the university than to the museum, especially near the end of his service time) and to thus make its name as an independent art center that is able to develop and realize exhibition concepts from the position of a self sufficient art institution that no longer has to cater to a variety of interest groups (or their animosities). The other decisive question will be whether Thai society (in this concrete case the Chiang Mai city administration and middle class enterprises) is ready to fully support such a museum.

Foreign cultural institutions represent a moment of continuity in Thailand’s art scene. Apart from the culture centers of the universities and the national museums, very few cultural institutions have existed or currently continue to exist over an extended period of time. The Bhirasri Cultural Center in Bangkok was probably one that lasted the longest and the most sustainable; although its doors have been closed for fourteen years now, everyone still knows (of) it. Thus it is no exaggeration to conclude that foreign cultural institutions with their long term conceptualization on the one hand became the forerunners of the modern arts, i.e. with regard to a cultural policy in Thailand that pointed in this direction (Thawan Duchanee and Pratuang Emjaroen, for example, first exhibited their works in the Goethe Institute and the foundation of the National Symphony Orchestra is also closely bound to this institute); on the other hand, these institutions continue to serve as pillars in the country’s cultural life of today. They are the founding spirit in many initiatives and more often than not provide the financial means for their realization.

The discussion of this topic on the *fourth level*, the art market, cannot be undertaken in a well balanced manner without a short historical review. Up to the beginning of the 1990s artists sold their works above all to their patrons, while wealthy Thai families bought their art (largely based on impressionist models) mainly in Singapore or Hong Kong. In the mid 90s the art market in Bangkok developed at a fast pace, leading to the founding of a number of large commercial galleries located in the business districts; prices here climbed to dizzying heights in a short time. Many gallery directors bought pictures by the dozen from artists who profited from the boom and were able to become independent as well as set up studios. In response to the heavy financial and economic crisis in 1997/98 the art market also totally collapsed (in contrast to Europe, where a recession almost always tends to affect the art market with some delay), prices plummeted and gallery owners were stuck

with unsold pictures. Thais also disappeared almost completely from the prestige laden VIP lists of the big auction houses Sotheby's and Christie's. The economy regained its strength at the beginning of 2001, which could also be felt immediately in the art market, although the price ranges never came close to those prevalent before the crisis. In this instance the crisis actually had a cleansing effect.

Yet one negative, long term and hard-to-eliminate effect of the high price phase prior to the crisis is that during this time artists began to copy their own work, varying one topic to a high degree. This gave rise to a strange situation: at some exhibitions works were being put up for sale - and even sold - up to a dozen times with only minimal thematic variations. But the boomerang effect of such a short-term vision did not bide its time and took effect with the advent of the economic crisis. The author himself knows several Thai and foreign art collectors who removed artists from their collection for this reason. A very similar development could be observed in Vietnam, although here it has reached greater proportions, as the short term corrective influence of the crisis is missing and the pictures are bought almost entirely by foreigners; only in the mid range will it be shown here, too, that a large group of even renowned artists have sawed off the branch on which they themselves are sitting.

In relation to the *fifth level*, the art work itself, much has occurred in the last five years. Here one must emphasize numerous activities of the Silpakorn University and the country's art faculties in cooperation with foreign art lecturers and curators. One example is the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Chiang Mai University, where five larger and three smaller workshops exclusively on this topic took place between 1999 and 2001. The sustainable creation of art works is listed in two sections in the curriculum of every subject area in the first two years of study. These measures have led to a strong increase in awareness of the significance of an art work's longevity, beginning during the initial creation phase of a work. Certain other circumstances have also brought this to light as well, for example, that a relatively high priced German specialty company could be sold in two stores with a color department, or that even beginners attempt to use good quality color when possible. The fact that an artist in Chiang Mai has built up a workshop for quality teakwood frames as his side (in reality his main) source of income also indicates the demand. The least progress is recorded with regard to canvases, albeit due to the crucial question of money (the price difference between the simplest and the best quality is almost 400 per cent). However, when viewed on a larger scale, the situation here has also been transformed; one only needs to test the average canvas quality of the pictures (mainly from the 80s and early 90s) in the National Gallery. It can thus be concluded that the question of sustainability has on an individual scale by and large received the attention it deserves. A wholly different issue is the conservation and maintenance of pictures and sculptures in the public domain, although this question admittedly is not as prevalent in Thailand as in Europe or the USA, there being no museum or gallery in the country with a permanent exhibition. The one exception is the National Gallery, whose exhibition, however, languishes in a dismal condition and even the pictures offer a miserable sight; creating a conservation section is urgently advisable. Yet since it is expected that Bangkok receive a new museum for modern art (see the third level), the responsible party has probably been avoiding the issue. Now, however, with the museum's construction seemingly part of the distant future, a short term solution must be found as soon as possible.

Regarding the *sixth level*, art media and criticism, it must first be recorded that in the past few years art criticism and the profession of art critics have successfully established themselves and that several impressive attempts have taken place to enrich and professionalize art criticism with interesting projects. The most important of the art print media are the art pages in the Monday edition of the *Nation* and the Thursday edition of the *Bangkok Post* as well as in the monthly city magazine *Metro Bangkok*, the quarterly art magazine *Art Record* (since 1994), the *Over Magazine* (3 editions since 2001), the magazine *Defy* (3 editions since 1999), the *Contemporary Art and Culture Newspaper - Bang*, published under the management of Project 304 (seven issues since 1998), the magazine of the artist group *Scopolamine* (3 editions since 2001) and also the architecture magazine *art4d*, published every two months and sometimes also featuring articles about the visual arts. It is not surprising in this context that lifestyle magazines have discovered the field of arts and that the magazine *WC*, founded near the end of 2000, presents a contribution on the arts in every feature.

Over Magazine is the most spectacular among the art media, one example being that there are 2 CD's in every edition that deliver music and photographs to the pictures in order to allow readers to experience them sensually. *Scopolamine's* content is avant-garde and a very courageous initiative against the culture establishment, as the group itself was founded in order to gain greater independence from galleries, curators and connections in cultural politics; however, the magazine's presentation requires great improvement. *Defy* is the qualitatively best and also the most critical of the magazines, yet it, too, exemplifies a general, widespread problem that directly relates to the aspect of sustainability. The magazine was founded at the same time as Gallery 253 (Ekamai 21), funding secured from a patron for one and a half years. During this period the two curators of the gallery, who simultaneously took on the role of editors for the magazine, proved extraordinarily active and offered a furious, dense and creative program; the gallery eventually became the center of the art scene. Yet in the course of one and a half years both gallery and magazine were unable to expand, to find other sponsors and to develop into a self sufficient institution; the patron was obviously unwilling to continue funding. Shortly thereafter, the gallery even had to shut down (officially melding with the neighboring *Contemporary Art Space*) while the magazine has been suspended until further notice; it was, after all, only a momentary spark, even if lit up the landscape like a raging, but brief, forest fire. The fire of the Bhirasi Institute, probably the cultural center with the most versatile and successful program in Thailand, burned longer, but it was extinguished fourteen years ago and no one has rekindled it. The roots of the problem lie in the patron client relationship that is still widespread in Thai society, an inadequately developed farsighted planning ability and an underdeveloped interest among specific circles and classes for a continuous promotion of the arts. As the author heard from one of the Gallery 253's curators, on the one hand nobody else wanted to sponsor the gallery, even not in its most successful moments ("Isn't that Mister T.'s gallery?"), while on the other hand it appears that the patron himself was unwilling to share the glory.

The second aspect to be illuminated on this level was the quality of art criticism especially from the perspective of sustainability. In comparison to its state at the beginning of the 1990s, art criticism has improved immensely. Several of journalists have specialized on art criticism and write regularly also in dailies. The status of art criticism has risen significantly in society as a whole, as demonstrated by the choices of participants for a round table discussion to the topic of "The Next Society," organized by the Nation Group in February 2002: the 12 participants included an art critic and a gallery director. Yet

despite the progress in this area, a growing hindrance is the continuing lack of specific academic training or courses in this subject area at university level. It is telling in this context that the journalist responsible for the art resort of the Metro Magazine is from Singapore (one of the best of his trade) and that the critic responsible for Thailand in the *Asian Art News* is an Englishman.

The *seventh level*, the one of networks and contacts, is marked the most by the mentalities, norms and characteristics of interactions between people in Thailand and it is here that the majority of contradictions surface. In a society still strongly influenced by separatist structures as well as groups and hierarchies that often act in isolation from one another, it is not easy to build networks sustainable. If this process is to succeed then it would most likely do so with the generation that grew up with the Internet, i.e. those who have already launched their careers. Yet here, too, initially hidden hesitations can be observed, only to later burgeon into conflicts that cannot be settled openly. Nevertheless, various projects such as the photography project implemented in nine places in December 2001, show us that mental blocks, especially a traditional group thinking process, can be overcome.

The interest in meeting and exchanging experiences with artists or partners from the ASEAN countries remains underdeveloped - not surprising for some experts of the region - and many artists prefer going to a western country to offer their services there. Here the Heinrich Boell Foundation Office has recognized an important area of tasks, which is why the attendees of the conference and opening of the exhibition "The End of Growth?" - 20 artists from most of the participating countries as well as ten artists from both Bangkok and Chiang Mai - were invited for the express purpose of creating contacts and regional networks. Unfortunately, the Thai artists displayed some hesitation in approaching other artists or continuing a contact the following day. It is certainly an issue here that many spoke only rudimentary English, which contributes to a more reserved stance, i.e. the tendency to withdraw. Others also pursued other commitments, which they giving these a greater priority than the chance to use the exchange of several days to build contacts to artists from neighboring countries and thus inject impulses into the relationships in the realm of arts and culture.

When concluding the discussion on the connection between art and sustainability in Thailand as portrayed above it is imperative to note that on the one hand enormous progress can be recorded in a historically short time period; yet on the other hand the problems identified and only sketched in this essay must be dealt with soon in order to prevent a declining development curve - which would lead, once again, to questioning the progress itself. The larger debate about the sustainability of development, disseminated also via the media - as well as the first exhibition of the Heinrich Boell Foundation, "The End of Growth? Ways of Development in to a Sustainable Future" - have taken the term and its related issues out among the artists and art managers and lead them to astonishing art works and exhibitions, which in the mid range and short range brought forth the term's drastic dimensions - backfiring not excluded!

ANNEX

Acronyms

CBO	Community-based Organization
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
CSE	The Center for Science and Environment
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the UN
FNCCC	Framework Convention on Climate Change
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
IFG	International Forum on Globalization
MNEs	Multi-National Enterprises
NGO-COD	Non-Government Organization Coordination Committee
NIC	Newly Industrialized Country
PPP	Polluter Pays Principle
PROUT	Progressive Utilization Theory
SEA	South East Asia
TNCs	Transnational Corporations
UN	United Nations
UNGAS	United Nations General Assembly
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

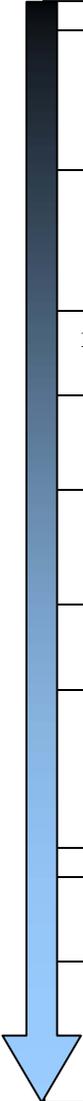
Time-line: Development related milestones 1942-2000

The following timeline gives events of the last 58 years that had and/or have a direct or indirect impact on aspects of development, which are:

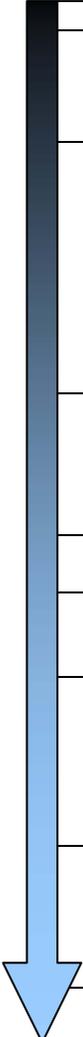
- * Human activities
- * Events that shaped human environmental, social and economic perception and conception
- * Laws and regulations
- * Conventions and political bodies

This list is by no means complete and represents merely a selection to aid the objective of this reader, ‘Debating Limits to Sustainable Development - A case study of Thailand from a cultural perspective on sustainable development in Southeast Asia’, and might be interesting to follow-up in a development context. There are a large number of other events that could rightfully belong here, too:

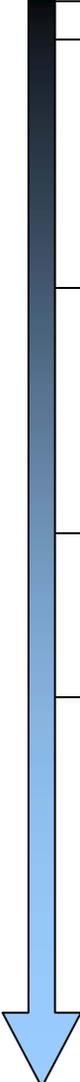
Year	Historic Events	Policy	International Agreements	Conferences	Institutions
1942	Declaration by “United Nations” - first official use of the name “United Nations” suggested by Roosevelt				
1944			Bretton Woods Agreements signed		Creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund
1945	August 6 th and 9 th , atomic bombs dropped on Japan				International Court of Justice established in The Hague
	The end of World War II				
1946	Trygve Lie (Norway) becomes first Secretary-General	Promotion of Trade liberalization	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) established		World Health Organization created
		General Assembly adopts its first resolution Peaceful use of atomic energy and elimination of atomic and other weapons for destruction			
1948	GATT entered into force	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by U.N. General Assembly			First UN observer mission established in Palestine
	UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)				
	Universal Declaration of Human Rights	Environmental Education concept introduced to the U.N.			



Year	Historic Events	Policy	Conferences	International Agreements	Institutions
1949		Harry S. Truman coins the term 'under-developed' for poor countries, as opposed to 'developed' for affluent countries			
1953		The United Nations Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution to provide maps based on common world specifications with a scale of 1:1,000,000			
1957-58	International Geophysical Year Measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide begin				
1959		United Nations Development Program evolved to maturity			
1961					World Wildlife Fund created
					Creation of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)
					Creation of UNESCO
1964			UNCTAD United Nations Conference on Trade and Development established		
1968	Increase in worldwide human populations clearly perceived as a threat to humanity's future (Ehrlich publishes his article 'The Population Bomb')	Garret Hardin publishes his article 'The Tragedy of the Commons' and introduces the concept to human <i>environmental perception and planning</i>			Club of Rome organized
1969	First (hu) man on the moon				
1972	<i>Limits to Growth</i> published by the Club of Rome		Earth Summit I First U.N. Conference on Environment (Stockholm)		
1973		The World Bank concedes the failure of the development paradigm in alleviating growth			
		U.N. Environment Program launched			

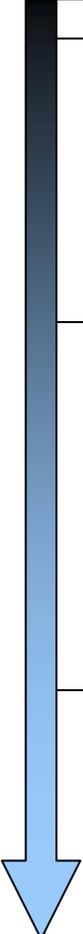


Year	Historic Events	Policy	International Agreements	Conferences	Institutions
1979				First World Climate Conference Geneva concludes that CO2 emissions could have long term impact on climate	
1980	Brandt Commission (Independent Commission on International Development) chaired by Willy Brandt. Report North-South: A program for Survival linked economic equity to development and is the first time the term “sustainable development” is expressed	World Conservation Strategy launched by UNEP			
1981	IBM launches its personal computer				
	Publication of the last sheet in the FAO Soil Map of the World Project				
1982		UN Convention on the Law of Sea adopted			
1983					UNGAS establishes the ‘World Commission on Environment and Development’
1984	Industrial accident kills thousands of people in India				
	IBM AT personal computer starts to have a significant effect on desktop personal scientific computing				
1985		Tropical Forests Action Plan (TFAP) established			
		International Tropical Timber Agreement reached in Geneva to provide an effective framework for sustainable utilization of tropical forests enters into force			
1986	Melt-down of the atomic reactor in Chernobyl				

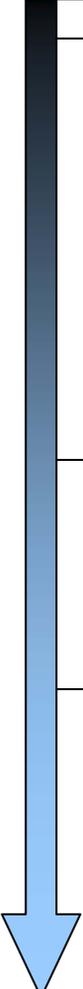


Year	Historic Events	Policy	International Agreements	Conferences	Institutions
1987	Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development). Report: Our Common Future which defines “sustainable development” and introduces the sustainable development paradigm		Montreal Protocol signed		Institute for Global Communications created to facilitate NGO communications
	Bellagio Conference Scientists point out that consequences of sea-level rise would outweigh any direct temperature effects of climate change in coastal regions			Ad hoc working group to look into a biodiversity convention requested by UNEP governing council meeting	
1988	First meeting of the ad hoc working group, which endorses the need for a convention to protect natural habitats within national frameworks	The 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer enters into force		Conference on Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security Toronto calls for establishment of a world atmosphere fund at least partly funded by a levy on fossil fuel consumption in the industrialized world	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) created by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
1989	Berlin Wall falls (November 9), USSR begins to disintegrate	The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer enters into force		Small States Conference on Sea Level Rise in Maldives	
	The General Assembly decides to convene a UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (= RIO + 10)				
1990	Fourth Plenary Session of IPCC convenes in Sweden to formally adopt a report which estimated that under business as usual scenario, global temperatures would increase by about 1degree C above 1990 values by 2005 and 3 degrees C before the end of the 21st century	Global Agreement on Forests proposed by Swedish Prime Minister Ola Ullsten	A Biodiversity Treaty negotiated by the first meeting of the ad hoc working group	World Summit for Children	
		Tropical Forest Convention to be negotiated by 1992 as asserted by the Houston Summit of G7		Second World Climate Conference in Geneva. 137 countries agree to negotiate a world climate treaty	
		Forest Convention at UNCED opposed by Malaysia		Conference of Select Developing Countries on Global Environmental Issues puts the responsibility of climate change on industrialized countries	
	Human Development Index developed by UNDP				

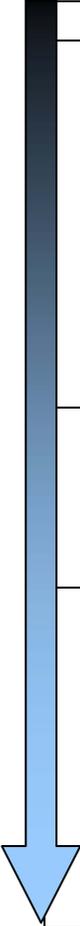
Year	Historic Events	Policy	International Agreements	Conferences	Institutions	
1991		OECD countries accept responsibility for climate change	Earth Pledge signed by several dignitaries committing them to action to improve the earth's environment	Second UNCED Preparatory Meeting NGOs and Western nations step up pressure	First Meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-1)	
		Factual paper on trade and environment requested by ASEAN from GATT		Intergovernmental Negotiating Committees, sessions held by the ad hoc working group produce a CBD (Convention on biological diversity) text in final meeting		
		Group of 77 meet in Beijing and demand 'the right to development'				
1992	Digital Chart of the World published	U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Rio de Janeiro. Chaired by Maurice Strong. Produced Agenda 21; Convention on Biological Diversity; Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Rio Declaration				
		Parallel Conferences publish 'Alternative Treaties'				
		Forests for the Future Initiative announced at Rio Summit by US, to double assistance to rainforest conservation	The 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal enters into force			U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development created to advance Agenda 21
		UK and Germany swing ministers into action to negotiate forest convention. Oil producing Gulf countries support convention idea	Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) signed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro			
		Pronk-Iglesias Report on proposed CSD role and structure ignored				Convention on Biological Diversity opened for signing at the Rio Summit. Rejected by US
Developing countries win round at Rio with relevant Agenda 21 section accepting all kinds of appropriate internationally agreed agreements						
1993		Negotiations begin over International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA)		World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna	Intergovernmental Committee on the Convention on Biological Diversity established by UNEP	
		Brazil, Ghana, Indonesia and Malaysia demand new agreement to cover temperate forests.				



Year	Historic Events	Policy	International Agreements	Conferences	Institutions
1994				International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo	World Trade Organization formed at the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations as an international legal institution to administer the global framework of trade rules and agreements
				UN Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States	
				International Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction	
1995	President of the Philippines issues an executive order to regulate bioprospecting	India breaks deadlock in negotiations on emission cuts by urging industrialized nations to cut their carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent by 2000		Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing	Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) set up at the third meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD3) in New York
				FAO meeting in Rome	
				First Session of the Conference of Parties to the FCCC Berlin	Biosafety Working Group created in Jakarta
				Ninth UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders	First meeting of Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of UNFCCC
				World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen	
1996		Peru and Switzerland fund working group to review existing institutions and instruments in forestry	A law regulating genetic resources within the Andean Pact nations of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela comes into force	HABITAT II Istanbul	
				SBSTTA 2 Meeting	
				World Food Summit	
				UNCTAD IX Ninth UN Conference on Trade and Development	
				Second Session of the Conference of Parties to the FCCC Geneva	



Year	Historic Events	Policy	International Agreements	Conferences	Institutions
1997	US automobile manufacturers, oil companies and trade unionists launch a US \$ 13 million advertising campaign that a treaty on climate would result in skyrocketing prices		All industrialized countries agree to reduce GHG emissions to 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels by 2008-2012. Japan agrees to reduce six per cent, the US seven and the EU eight percent below 1990 levels	Third Session of the Conference of Parties to the FCCC Kyoto protocol on climate change	CSD establishes Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) to present a final report at CSD-8 in 2000
		Byrd-Hagel Resolution passed by US senate, saying US will not ratify any climate treaty unless it includes commitments for developing country parties			
		At CSD-5, IPF presents options that are not necessarily mutually exclusive	No agreement at fourth and last meeting of IPF in New York in February	UNGAS on Rio+5	
		An international process is initiated (Group 77, USA, EU) for a conference on financing for development			
1998		8th meeting of the subsidiary bodies of UNFCCC in Bonn concentrates on emissions trading		U.N. Climate Change Conference in Buenos Aires	
		Massive worldwide protests stop the Multilateral Agreement on Investment negotiations (MAI) in OECD			
		Kyoto Protocol opens for signature in New York			
1999		The 54th session of UNGAS calls for a high-level, intra-government 'event' on financing for development to be held in 2001		World NGO Conference held in Canada to promote planning for "The People's Assembly"	
		WTO ministers meet in Seattle, fails to launch a new round due to massive protests of anti-globalization movement		U.N. Climate Change Conference in Bonn	
		IFF-3, last substantive meeting before forum submits report to CSD in Geneva		SBSTTA-4 Meeting	



Year	Historic Events	Policy	International Agreements	Conferences	Institutions
2000		Lack of consensus during IFF-2 in Geneva continues		NGO Millennium Forum New York, precursor to the “The People’s Assembly”	
				UNDPI/NGO Forum New York, to strengthen civil society in UN operations	
				The Hague Conference on Climate, negotiations break down	
				First organizational meeting to prepare the ‘event’ on the financing for development	
		Earth Charter		MAI negotiations are continued in Paris	
		UNGAS decides to call for the next Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 under the title ‘The world Summit on Sustainable Development’			
2001	Attack on the twin towers of World Trade Center, New York and Pentagon, resulting in “War against terrorism” led by US	National Debates on Thailand’s People’s Agenda on Sustainable Development	COP 6 of UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany and COP 7 in Marrakesh, Morocco, resulting in final agreement on rules for Kyoto Protocol		
				Global Green Conference – Summit of Green parties from all continents, Canberra	
				1 st WSSD – Prepcom, New York	
2002	Birth of the Democratic Republic of East Timor, Xanana Gusmao sworn in as the first President	National Consultation on Sustainable Development in Thailand		UN – Conference on Finance for Development, Monterrey, Mexico	
				2 nd World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil	
				2 nd Prepcom for WSSD, February, New York	
				3 rd Prepcom for WSSD, April, New York	
				4 th Prepcom for WSSD, May-June, Bali	
				WSSD, September, Johannesburg	

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Beginners Guide to the Earth Summit 2002:

<http://www.earthsummit2002.org/es/2002/Earth%20Summit%202002.pdf>

Civil society presentations on the Internet:

http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/NGO/1100hear/panel_list1.htm

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Declaration of the United Nations conference on the human environment (1972):

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Global Policy Forum - Social and Economic Policy:...
Joint activities with environmental associations or organizations to facilitate communication within Thai society:
http://www.thaienvironment.net/eca/eca_home.htm

= "THE JO'BURG MEMO "
<http://www.joburgmemo.org/>

Kyoto Protocol of the united nation framework convention climate change (FCCC):
<http://www.bigeye.com/kyoto.htm>

Kyoto Protocol On Climate Change Implications For The Future:
<http://www.aaas.org/international/whatshe/bollhsph.htm>

MAI - What is it?
<http://www.flora.org/>

MAI: Package of commentary, analysis and links to websites about Multilateral Agreement on Investment.
<http://www.oneworld.org/guides/MAI/index.html>

Main areas of work and initiatives of the UN-secretariat in preparation for the 2002 world summit on sustainable development:
http://www.un.org/rio+10/web_pages/brief2002dec1.htm

Malmö Ministerial Declaration:
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Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI): A proposed multilateral international agreement that is currently under negotiation at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris.
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The Global links and networks between sustainable development stakeholders, and across regions:

www.earthsummit2002.org

... This is the main GPF page on the subject of Financing for Development, including the UN conference process leading to a global summit in early 2002. ...

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/ffd/indxmain.htm>

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United Nations Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification:

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<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/majorg.htm>

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http://www.thaienvironment.net/tlab/tl_home.htm

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Document search on-line servers:

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<http://www.ciesin.org/docs/003-312/003-312.html>

About Globalization.Com – fresh opinions on Globalization of labor:

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US-Congressional Research Service:

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HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION

The Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with the Green Party and headquartered in the Hackesche Höfe in the heart of Berlin, is a legally independent political foundation working in the spirit of intellectual openness.

Heinrich Böll (1917-1985) is considered one of the most important writers and social critics of the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1972 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature (for more details see next page).

The Foundation's primary objective is to support political education both within Germany and abroad, thus promoting democratic involvement, socio-political activism, and cross-cultural understanding. The Foundation also provides support for art and culture, science and research, and developmental cooperation. Its activities are guided by the fundamental political values of ecology, democracy, solidarity, and non-violence.

Through international collaboration on a long-term basis with a large number of project partners – currently about 130 in 60 countries – the Foundation aims to strengthen ecological and civil activism on a global level, to intensify the exchange of ideas and experiences, and to keep our sensibilities alert for change. Additional important means to foster international cooperation include visitor programs to enhance the exchange of experiences and political networking, as well as basic and advanced training programs for committed activists.

In addition to its own educational work, the Foundation operates two institutions, namely the “Green Academy” and the “Feminist Institute”, that provide in-depth analysis and sensitisation on these important concerns.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation has about 160 full-time employees as well as approximately 300 supporting members who provide both financial and non-material assistance.

The Foundation currently maintains foreign and project offices in the USA, Cambodia, the Czech Republic, El Salvador, Israel, Kenya, Pakistan, South Africa, Turkey, and an EU office in Brussels. New foreign offices have more recently been opened in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Arab Middle East, with Brazil and Chiang Mai in Thailand as the latest openings.

The office in Thailand was opened in February 2000 with a series of workshops “Debating Green” to introduce its profile in the new host country. The foundation’s major focus of cooperation with partners from Thailand and South East Asia are the promotion of sustainable development, social and gender justice, citizen’s empowerment and participatory democracy.

About the authors

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HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION

The Heinrich Böll Foundation publishes the World Summit Papers in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Summit will take place in South Africa ten years after the benchmarking UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992).

We consider this Summit an important opportunity to put the challenge of Sustainable Development on the top of the international agenda.

The World Summit Papers are published irregularly and contain a diversity of background information, studies, essays, documentations etc. related to issues of the World Summit. The series is published in various languages both in the Foundation's head office in Berlin and in several offices of the Foundation abroad. Our intention is to contribute to the preparations of the international community for this Summit.

The World Summit Papers are available free of charge at the Heinrich Boell Foundation in Berlin (consignment within Germany), or can be downloaded at www.boell.org.