

1st ROUGH DRAFT:

A Strong Healthy and Just Society: meeting needs, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion and creating equal opportunity for all.

Introduction:

This is one of the 5 UKDSDC principles which merits little mention in the discussions by environmentalists about sustainability. It is as though environmentalists are concerned about the planet (climate change, and biodiversity loss) but find it difficult to incorporate social justice, wellbeing and equality into their thinking and actions.

One only has to think about the enthusiasm for Feed In Tariffs to encourage the take up of renewable energy micro-generation. FIT advocates and defenders conveniently ignore the fact that the FIT is provided by all consumers, including those suffering fuel poverty for whom this additional contribution is a regressive tax.

We have the bizarre situation of massive food waste (some of which is used to generate energy), while an increasing number of people are relying on 'food boxes' to ensure they have enough food to eat.

Energy costs penalise the low users (see Which? Report) and encourage high users at a time when we need to both far more energy efficient but also be reducing our energy use.

Why are properties being built on flood plains and which communities will benefit for flood defences and which will have to be relocated as sea levels rise ?

Climate change is often seen by environmentalists as a great equaliser, affecting rich and poor alike. Wilkinson and Piggott have made the point that an unequal society is less likely to have the social coherence that is needed to manage change. Naomi Klein argues that environmentalists "*fail to account for the myriad ways by which the super rich would protect themselves from the less savoury effects of the economic model that made them so wealthy*".(Guardian G2 7/11/12 pages 6-7).

The road to sustainability needs to take on board both contradictions in policy and injustice in the way resources and opportunities are allocated. There are fundamental questions and doubts about how society is developing and whether it is sustainable in social, economic and environmental terms. It seems to TENP that we should be concerned about the veneer that is constructed and myths that are reified that enable our

current progress and associated inequalities to be maintained and even increased. As Stefan Collini explains:

“Current discourse is almost silent on what happens to those who are left behind when the ‘talented’ and ‘able’ have sped off along the highway of success. The assumptions seem to reveal a profound pessimism:

First, about there being any way in which society can reshape its socioeconomic structure - staggering inequalities of wealth are seen as a natural, and

Second, about there being any way for people to agree on what is valuable in life other than in terms of market-modelled consumer satisfaction.

The only goals people may be assumed to share are a desire to “get on”, to move up some imaginary (but misleading) social ladder. The only function of Government, it seems , is to ensure that those with sharp elbows have a “fair chance” of using them.”

Since the previous edition of this Directory was launched (Jan 2010) inequality has increased as a result, in part, of austerity measures (Figures?). Current public expenditure plans will reduce public spending, as a proportion of GDP, from a peak of 47% in 2009 to 40% in 2017 (below the current rate in the USA, although Republicans would like to see that figure to be reduced to 20% in due course!). The future is American !

We have also seen the rise of a global ‘Occupy’ movement which continues to highlight and search for practical solutions to a 99%-1% ‘divide’. At the same time we are witnessing the worrying response, to EU/IMF induced austerity measures, of the rise of the extreme right (in Greece) and calls for regional independence (eg Catalonia). Both reflect forms of fragmentation and self interest which threaten to overthrow the post-war consensus and introduce a period of de-stabilisation.

In addition commentators in the UK are already comparing current public policy and attitudes to the poor with those adopted in the Elizabethan Poor Law (ref?). It seems strange that ‘poor’ in economic terms can so easily be interpreted as ‘poor’ in terms of character and potential. Equally, it is strange that we talk of the undeserving and deserving poor but not of the ‘undeserving rich’. National Insurance contributions are paid to insure against periods of unemployment and ill-health, yet people claiming their entitlements are often stigmatised as ‘scroungers’ and feckless.

Other commentators, supporting the ‘Occupy’ movement, interpret current trends as the latest episode of ‘shock and awe’ which is a technique for pre-occupying the population with the management of austerity as a means of deflecting attention away from the introduction of ideologically driven neo-liberal economic policies (de-regulation, minimising the welfare state, privatisation, and industrial restructuring, etc.) Social media networks have undermined the relative isolation that has benefited this approach in the past.

As this section will show, there is international and national policy rhetoric and local initiatives which seek to combine environmental sustainability and social justice, some more convincing and successful than others. But what do we mean by terms such as Equality, Growth and Wellbeing, terms which are bandied around so freely without clear meaning?

Equality : of Opportunity or Outcome?:

The 'Wealth of Nations', sought to demonstrate we could rely upon the individual to promote the interests of the community. Whilst this claim was undermined by the Industrial Revolution it survived because of unparalleled expansion of prosperity shared by the less prosperous classes. By 1876, and with increasing economic competition, it was accepted that the strong survive at the expense of the weak,.

“ the good of the community was still identical with the good of its individual members, but only of those individuals who were effective competitors in the struggle for life...shedding it's weaklings”(page 48 EH Carr).

With the creation of the welfare state in 1945 we find that whilst equality of citizenship was established it also provided a foundation for inequality (Sennett). Beveridge's aim, in his 1942 report, was to intend to offer a “foundation for personal freedom and individual initiative” underpinned by universal social insurance or all.

“It stressed the reciprocity of contributions and benefits and collective risk sharing across the whole population. [Current] policies on low incomes and unemployment return the UK to the pre-Beveridge era's emphasis on poor law deterrence and the demonisation of paupers” . Prof Veit – Wilson, Newcastle University.

The result is that inequality is our permanent companion (ref Marshall and Tawney) and social justice is a matter of negotiation and the outcome of a resolution of competing interest and forces. For some, gross inequality and injustice, (and the associated levels of unemployment, volunteer labour, wage freezes and the exploitation of migrant labour), is a price worth paying, in fact essential, for the restructuring of society/the economy in order to be able to compete with the emerging nations. Managing the adverse impacts is, increasingly, passed to the voluntary sector, individuals and families , who, it is asserted, have to become more responsible and self sufficient. As the levels of borrowing have increased over the last 6 months (May-Oct 2012) this is seen by the optimists as a sign of recovery, confidence is returning. Others point out that increased borrowing (the very trend that led to the crisis in 2008), particularly from unscrupulous lenders, reflects the desperation of an increasing number of people affected by the new benefit regime.

Discrimination has been the subject of legislation yet inequalities of opportunity persist due to attitudes and deep-seated institutional arrangements (give examples). The current economic 'crisis', (which may last 10 years or become permanent!) is accentuating the gap between rich and poor and with it the gap between the practical implementation and symbolic function of equality policy and practice.

TENP is clear that as an environmental organisation it is limited in the actions it can take but, as an important SD principle, we are committed to highlighting the role that environmental and sustainability policies and practices can have in promoting equality and social justice and highlighting those policies and practices which undermine and contradict this principle.

We also advocate that the public sector agencies establish a Fairness Commission for Pembrokeshire to audit the levels of poverty and inequality and take appropriate action.

Growth or De-Growth?

Now, in 2012, we have a future threatened by the adverse effects of climate change, one symptom of decades of unsustainable development and agencies and societies struggling with the dilemma of how to ensure that equality and social justice survive the dramatic changes that we face. Already policies to mitigate climate change have jettisoned equality and social justice objectives, eg free water meters for the rich. As Wilkinson and Piggott have explained 'green jobs linked to energy efficiency' is the new growth, with profits the primary imperative. In fact the UK is aiming to double its energy use by ? while Germany is committed to stabilising its energy use

The view that economic growth, equality and environmental wellbeing can co-habit still persists, as reflected in the persistent adoption of the Bruntland definition of SD. Resource depletion is still not taken seriously. In fact growth and economic development are seen as solutions to inequality and environmental problems.

The Treasury advice to the UK Government on the Economics of Sustainable Development, developed during the period 2009-12, indicates a struggle to accommodate SD principles in cost benefit analysis and a clear commitment to increasing productivity and growth. Adverse environmental and social impacts are to be mitigated and compensated for rather than avoided. Issues of distribution across society and generations have yet to be given serious consideration. The attitude and frustration of economists to any alternative paradigm is reflected in the following extended quotation:

"Existing guidance on the application of Sustainable Development is long on exhortation to do things differently, but short on practical help for people trying to take or advise on policy decisions. Secondly, the repeated assertion that the paraphernalia of economic

analysis used in government is somehow 'fundamentally incompatible' with Sustainable Development has become increasingly unhelpful. This criticism ranges from careful critique of inter-temporal discounting, to tirades against economic growth. Typically it lacks any real clarity on what the supposed flaws in the approach are, or how they could be addressed. This often heated debate has generated very little insight" (Richard Price, Chief Economist, Interim report, 2009)

However, over the last three years the 'de-growth movement' has grown as various people seek, call for, or propose alternative 'models'. In May 2011 2500 delegates attended Berlin's 'Beyond Growth' conference, some explaining that a lot of activity is not very useful (buying a gun contributes to growth, but it might result in someone getting hurt!) . An 84 inch TV for £20,000, microchipped socks that sort themselves out for £117 for 10 pairs! This is innovation in 'growth hungry Britain', yet they are nothing more than

"Unnecessary reiterations of basics that already serve us fine. Their ultimate end is landfill".

Neither do such innovations boost our standard of living to the extent that, piped water flushing toilets or the electric light did.

Others made it clear that sustainable growth is a myth and that it's impossible to decouple economic progress from environmental damage.

The need to adopt a new paradigm has been expressed in a number of ways:

Larry Elliott, in 'Going South' "quote....."

Naomi Klein " re-inventing economics so it no longer defines success as the endless expansion of consumption"

Kalle Lasn : "We cannot keep selling off our natural capital and calling it income. It's the most stupid mistake of all ... When they measure growth, they don't measure our real progress" ('Meme Wars: the Creative Destruction of Neo Classical Economics' , Penguin 2012).

And an exchange between David Attenborough (DA) and Chris Packham (CP):

DA: Anybody who thinks there can be limitless growth in a static, limited environment, is either mad or an economist

CP: Economic growth spells disaster for the environment?

DA: Absolutely. We cannot continue indefinitely. We have a choice. We could limit it ourselves at a level that we believe is tolerable, or the natural world will limit it for us, including ourselves.

(Radio Times 10-16 November 2012).

As Illich said many years ago once people seriously doubt that the 'American Dream' is available to all, then the wealthy (the haves) will take any measures necessary to protect their interest and property. Fetishising growth and fostering consumer culture ("which has turned us into a selfish and anxious race" Lasn) are part of the protective mechanism, hence new ICT that makes no significant difference to our quality of life.

The difficulty for public policy is the 'Growth Dilemma', that unsustainable development and uneconomic growth have yet to attain the status or level of 'crisis'. In the UK, Governments have developed policies and taken actions in response to climate change but not at the risk of the status quo, economic growth and efficiency.

If growth is rejected then equality or more importantly, perhaps, the prospect of acquiring wealth and property and consuming more than that of previous generations is no longer a promise that Governments can claim will be achieved at some time in the future. The pressing issue becomes an immediate concern about how scarce and limited resources and opportunities should be distributed across society/societies.(or how the 'pain' should be allocated'). This is a stark and worrying admission for those who have believed, (since the Enclosures!) in private property rights and the market as the most efficient mechanism for allocating resources and opportunity (eg. education and housing). A 'no-growth future' is inconceivable and simply unthinkable! It requires a very different view of the nature of governance and of the nature of economics.

TENP adopts the view that it is impossible to decouple economic growth from environmental damage and therefore that 'de-growth' is not only an option but an inevitability given that resources are finite (the one resource we have plenty of, we can print it, we cannot control= money!!). Therefore TENP is committed to policies and practices which are 'natural resource lite' and to recycling, repair and waste reduction.

(**Note:** we have another resource which we have plenty of, globally, ..the elephant in the room...people..the population boom'. The issue here is women's rights and emancipation. Do TENP want to express a view on this? I'm not sure it is an issue for 'local' policy and practice, but we could sign up to the 'Population Matters' charter).

Wellbeing

The significance of the 21st C is that there are a number of trends, in addition to Climate Change, that make maintenance of equality and social justice even more difficult, including:

- Unsustainable growth, as the costs outweigh the benefits.
- Austerity measures (and the end of a credit based economy?).
- An ageing population with the ratio of working adults to pensioners moving from 4:1 to 2:1 by 2050
- Depletion of other essential minerals within 50 years.
- Increasing inequality within the UK
- Increases in mental ill-health.
- A significant reduction in empathy and mutual respect.
- Demonization of minorities (by faith, ethnicity, etc)
- An increase in the polarisation and fragmentation of society, eg loneliness (recent research into young people and loneliness indicate it is on the increase).
- Increasing paranoia over terrorist threats threatening civil and human rights.
- Inter-generational tension (as the 'baby-boomers' pull up the ladder'!)
- Overdependence on imported energy, food and skills..

These trends will coalesce during the 21st Century putting the cohesion of communities and society under severe stress. The thought arises that we may look back on today, in 50 years time, as the 'halcyon days' !!!

How, then, is wellbeing defined when the current social, environmental and economic circumstances would seem to indicate that communities are less supportive and individuals more anxious, less empathetic, more competitive and insecure ?

Wellbeing seems to be a concept that has been grasped by policy makers as conveniently ambiguous but worthy, for that very reason, of adoption. It is as though, in an age of austerity, wellbeing is something we have ignored (failed to fully appreciate) and so need to be reminded of how fortunate we (all of us?) are.

Certainly wellbeing has been adopted as a policy objective by Governments, and the term is seen as a quality of life issue which links to good health, culture, environment, safe and strong communities, and fulfilling individual potential, and protecting the vulnerable (child and adult care) ,etc.

The difficulty with this concept is the uncertainty about where responsibility lies, the individual, families, Government, the voluntary and private sectors? Is wellbeing about personal satisfaction or is it something that can and has to be measured? If both, what is more important?

The UK Government has suggested that wellbeing is directly related to income and consumption levels (ref and quote). This implies an economic and resource use based interpretation, which is only part of an equation which clearly needs to be recalibrated

The economic dimension of wellbeing is beyond the scope of TENP as an environmental organisation. However we recognise that environments (urban-rural), bio-diversity, ecosystems, landscape, etc, all contribute to, and in some cases act to the detriment of, wellbeing. Inevitably difficult trade-offs need to be made (wind turbines or landscape).

We also recognise that the condition of our environment is the result of the impact of global policies and actions as well as local ones. We also recognise that our environment, and therefore wellbeing, has imposed costs on other nations, communities and environments (e.g., the impact of oil extraction on indigenous nations).

TENP will seek to raise awareness of the tensions between personal and local environmental wellbeing and seek to advocate policies and actions which reduce our ecological footprint (resource use) and increase our sustainability. . (high quality design and space standards , low energy materials and use development, low energy locations, ‘greening’ of towns and cities, etc).

TENP fundamentally believes that a healthy and diverse natural environment and a well designed and low resource use and constructed built environment make a significant contribution to emotional wellbeing, self esteem and health and ????. However, access to these environments are, currently, restricted and TENP will advocate greater inclusion.

CM . 11/11/ 12

First rough draft.