Thinking and Acting on the Edge of Chaos: Governance, Environment and People

André Francisco Pilon
University of São Paulo / International Academy of Science, Health & Ecology
gaiarine@usp.br

At the end of a year dominated by the coronavirus pandemic, the Paris Agreement completes its 5th birthday (December, 12th 2020); are world leaders taking action to avoid the impending chaos, or they still think that ecocide is an invention of environmentalists or utopian thinkers that abhor the capitalistic system?

Giving up on questionable carbon accounting (Australia) or gesturing at net zero while deforestation surges (Brazil) is not enough to be on the list of responsible governments. Regeneration of natural and built environments, and social, cultural and political regeneration, are complementary aspects and depend on each other.

Although the United States are back and Europe, China, Japan are launching new commitments, they must enshrine in their laws the duties of corporations towards the environment throughout their operations worldwide (international treaties should hold transnational corporations to account for environmental violations).

Scholars and commentators stress that business has a privileged status in public policy debates, in the media coverage, in the technological “solutions” to the problems of difficult settlement in the world, generally endorsed by vested interests, particularly when it comes to the fore environmental versus marketing issues.

Recognizing that this should be a public agenda, how different values (e.g., use vs. preservation) and the framing of these values (e.g., ecosystem services vs. species) motivate policy makers and private owners to assign and implement public resources to conservation programs and policies, that depend not only on information, but of different interpretations of reality?

What are the effects on forests, savannas, watersheds, of habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss and conservation at the landscape scale in view of areas intensively managed for production of commodities (such as food, timber, biofuels), of logging, mining, hunting and wildfires? “Evidence-based policy-making” would deliver its promises?

David Korten (2016) stresses that the convergence of ideological, political, and technological forces have driven an ever-greater concentration of economic and political power in a handful of corporations and financial institutions that rules the world and left the market system blind to all but its own short-term financial gains.

Changing the paradigms of development, growth, power, wealth, work and freedom, embedded into the political, technological, economic and educational institutions, implies institutional capacity, judicial neutrality, informational transparency and social spaces for civic engagement and enlightened political participation.

No policy analysis can define consensual policy goals, or describe a policy situation, or determine policy instruments and assume institutions can achieve policy targets (Chailleux and Wokuri, 2020); what about the polices at stake, the actors in policy making and implementation, the rules governing their behaviour (Lejano and Leong, 2012)?

Positivistic approaches, advocacy, coalition framework, narrative policy, obscure the investigated problems, naturalizing the liberal system as a struggle between coalitions with competing claims,
despite studies showing hidden mechanisms to preserve the power of dominant actors (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962).

Transition towards a circular economy is not only a transition of materials and technologies, it is a transition of values. Science, societal actors should be responsible for the (ethical) acceptability, sustainability and societal effects of the scientific knowledge they produce, including innovation process and marketable products.

Collective action and interventions for an equitable, just and sustainable future, would engage civil society, conservation units, the media, journalists, faith leaders, advocates, experts, decision makers, activists, young people, political leaders, organizations, groups and communities from across regions, sectors and generations.

The greatest shortcoming of the human race is the inability to understand the exponential function, in which the argument occurs as an exponent (Al Bartlett, 2006); exponential growth of human population and natural-resource consumption can’t happen forever; transition policies depend on cultural, political and economic changes.

Bridging connections between social, economic and political sciences and exact sciences, should be intensified, life as we know it is at stake, a large majority of people value "constructs" (e.g. money) over reality (natural resources), remembers Amelia Delgado in her statement about “What is Sustainability” (Researchgate discussions).

“Being-in-the-world” encompasses four modes of existence (Binswanger): man’s relationship with himself (Eigenwelt); man’s relationship with his fellow beings (Mitwelt); man’s relationship with overall society (Menschenwelt); man’s relationship with his environment (Umwelt). These modes complement and should support each other.

An ecological civilization cares for the natural and built environments, the cultural heritage, the collective bonds, including education, health, ethics, aesthetics, equity and justice. Priority is given to a set of values, norms, and policies related to natural and cultural heritage, human well-being institutions transparency, completeness and credibility.

Problems and the contexts in which they occur should be re-interpreted and restructured through an ecosystem lens, thus altering the ways to address them. New socio-cultural learning niches, both in the academia and in the society at large, should prepare the transition to new forms of being in the world (Pilon, 2019).

Besides speeches, concrete actions are expected, verifiable by scientific and environmental protection organizations, at local, regional, national and international levels: a good policy would be to carry out an inventory of the conditions that enable or prevent the achievement of these objectives in different countries of the world.

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