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What has happened? Is “All Quiet on the Western Front”?

When some people first started to talk about sustainability, that was radical. In the peak of “Les Trentes Glorieuses” [“The glorious thirty”, i.e. the time from 1945 to 1975], the world seemed to be at the service of humanity, providing all the resources from “somewhere out there”.

The dream of 19th century was coming true. The West was already there, and it was just a matter of “free markets” and, of course, time for the East to catch up. Everything was getting bigger and shinier; economies could grow forever, technology would fix all the potential obstacles on the road to let's-just-consume utopia.

Why bother with hysterical concerns of some treehuggers, talking about the end of the road?

The oil crisis in the early 1970's, together with the Club of Rome's manifesto “Limits to Growth” were almost perfect in their timing, awake-up call from a dream that seemed to be forever.

The following 25 years showed quite a lot of proof that what sounded radical was actually the most rational approach. But we know now that “modern is rational” is nothing more than a cute tale for kids at primary school.

The Rio Summit of 1992 was the peak of the hopes and intergovernmental interest on “Saving the World”. But neoliberal policies were well prepared for a follow-up to “integrate” sustainability into the old paradigm of developmentalism, turning the concept into an empty indicator that is now well known under the name of “sustainable development”.

The next 20 years, up until today, were interesting times. Heavy and continuous waves of natural resources' exploitation of the quickly “developing” East caused the localization of the struggle for resource equity. These aggressive waves for exploiting nature more and more functioned as a catalyzer for the raise of a holistic and sound base for ecological actions in local communities around the world.

In the same time, a global gathering was happening: people were getting connected, hearing of and getting inspired by each other, and thus, most importantly, realizing that none of them were

actually alone.

We're now in the dusk of what is probably the most interesting era of humanity: Enormous disasters and collapse of ecosystems, even bigger threats and peaks knocking on hell's door. Both resources (soil, water, oil, biomass, metals, etc...) and outputs (greenhouse gases, toxic pollution, waste...) are in great trouble, proving that we're terribly mistaken in the way that we handle natural resources.

And modern times' primary forms of social and political organization, nation-states, are unable and/or unwilling to tackle the situation because of their very nature - because they're born within and embedded within the irrationality that seemed possible and even rational until now thanks to the abundance of a miraculous resource called "oil".

We never had so much solid reasons to be completely pessimistic. And we're pessimistic, as much as human nature's self-defense mechanism permits us. The not-that-bad number of "deny everything!" people are a good proof of this pessimism: They're so desperately pessimistic about both today and tomorrow that the only way out they can ever find is the denial of the whole reality.

1 - Sustainability is The Old New

It's getting more and more obvious that sustainability is now the old new.

We're past that point.

Think about climate change for instance: Scientists unanimously (and with all their scientific coolness of talking of minimums) write reports claiming that above 350 ppm [350 parts per million CO₂] is the beginning of the disaster – reports that are signed by all the governments of the world.

And each day comes with new research showing that was quite optimistic.

And where we are on this now? 400 ppm and rising. No sign of slowing down. Despite all the knowledge we have. Despite all the direct and indirect impacts we see on our daily lives.

That reflects the situation with the "output" of today's picture with resource management. Making a similar analysis with the "input", namely "natural resources" compiles the same results: Peak on old paradigm's each and every backbones: fossil fuels, mining industry getting completely out of control with high prizes of valuable metals - more aggressive than ever, exploiting local populations' habitats, the basic of all the resources, topsoil, eroding in unbelievable speed...

The question thus knocks in: Do we really want to "sustain" this kind of world?

Isn't it time for going beyond sustainability, to regeneration?

2- The Hope for Regeneration, Regenerating the Hope

There is, fortunately, no objection to the claim that today, we need a fundamental paradigm shift

on every single level of social, cultural, economical and political dimensions. This is especially true for the ecological and economical (which are two sides of the same coin) of resource equity. We need it both on perceptual, but also on practical manners. And we need it quickly. And we need it in every corner of the earth, more or less equally.

Opposite to what many would think, that rough picture described above gives many reasons to possess stronger-than-ever hope for a quick and radical change, that necessary and convival paradigm shift to happen.

The fact that we need to go beyond sustainability, to a regenerative paradigm, opens up exciting opportunities of mobilization that we were not completely able to realize in the past 50 years.

These opportunities are born in this specific time of the history where the need for creative action emerge with the possibility of reaching a self-justifying meaning within human-human and human-nature relations.

3 - Mobilizing not to stop, but to speed up

In the famous book and movie "Fight Club", the antagonist at some point gives a little speech. I do believe that the "hole" described in these sentences is the perfect spot where the regenerative paradigm's seed finds its home to flourish:

*"Man, I see in Fight Club the strongest and smartest men who've ever lived. I see all this potential, and I see it squandered. God damn it, an entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables – slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. We're the middle children of history, man. **No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our great war is a spiritual war. Our great depression is our lives.** (bolded for emphasis) We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars, but we won't. We're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off."*

There is a reason that we all have to study very carefully why a simple ecovillage initiative of a dozen people usually creates more attraction than a street protest of a dozen of thousands.

The protest in this case proposes to "stop!" doing something, while the other one is about "going" even further, claiming for a forward move "Back to the Future". To do something to get out of today.

As radical as it is, that call for regenerative action gathers quite strong and positive reactions.

We like to move on, not get stuck, especially not at the point where we are. Not this generation I belong to, at least. Pushing on brakes would mean to stay where we are. And we don't want to stay where we are.¹

¹Saying that, I do not underestimate the huge value of protesting; saying "No!", asking for an immediate "Stop!" to irrational policies, devastating projects, to violence, abuse, and exploitation. I do point out, instead, the enormous capacity of mobilizing people's needs to "get out of here".

This factor is especially important for today's youth – people that are going to get us out of here, hopefully.

That may sound bold but I will dare to say: We're not after super-expensive cars like our dads were, nor the biggest house in the neighborhood.

We're after being cool, free and useful. We seek the meaning, after all.

That's how actions towards true meaning through freedom, solidarity, conviviality and coolness has a surprisingly strong involvement of young people. The May 2013 events in Gezi Park, Taksim, Istanbul were a solid proof of this, making hundreds of previously-categorized-as-completely-apolitic people getting together for saving “a bunch of trees”. There has been lots of analysis to understand the driving force of this previously unseen mobilization. To me, most of these analyses were incomplete – mainly because they missed the main point that the young generation of today, that we want to do something creative and useful, and having fun while doing so.

Can there be a better and bigger potential than this?

4 - Stand by Rural

Today, we're witnessing the local internalization of the need for harmonizing human-nature relations together with bringing justice (or equity, one might say) to human-human relations.

This is happening across the world and especially in rural communities, emerging localization and internalization around the motto of “Think global, act local”.

And there is a reason for that: Rurality as a whole is the single whole matter under the heaviest attack of the old paradigm – both in socio-cultural and economical dimensions.

This is especially true for regions like the Middle East. Turkey, for instance, is going through the process of deliberately destroying its rurality with the aim of faster and stronger accumulation from rural to urban. The resource base of the fast economical growth rates of the country for the last half decade is primarily the heavy and destructive exploitation of rurality.²

This brings a critically important (yet mostly underlined) aspect of resource equity: The relation between urban and rural. The majority of ecologists and rightly concerned folks are urban-grown with a distantly interested relation with rurality. That is reflected on most of the action proposals: Ecological cities, energy sufficiency for industry, better planning of collective areas in the cities while putting the rural in the role of “providing good food with smiling faces”.

²“Defending one's living area” is a very often heard sentence now. In Turkey's case particularly, the delay on industrialization is tried to be caught up by the government through very aggressive policies on natural resources' exploitation: More than 2000 small hydropower plants (SHP) planned and/or constructed in almost each and ever single stream of the country, around 50 new coal-power plants planned and moving ahead, two nuclear power stations planned and moving ahead, thousands of new and absurd residential areas (including kicking roman people and poor away from the city centers under the labelling of “urban transformation”), the third bridge over the Bosphorus and the third airport in Istanbul's last green and water catchements areas, mining licences literally everywhere – including two thirds of the legendary Ida Mountains where European mythology was born, farming lands transforming into industry, countries grazelands used for feed-lot livestock, seed laws almost prohibiting local seeds while replacing them by agrobusiness' hybrids.

That (lack of) approach to rurality is incomplete and mistaken: Rural communities have never solely been food providers – they have been relatively self-sufficient micro-societies with different (and mostly) horizontal institutions, lots of indigenous knowledge that are critical for the realization of a regenerative paradigm. It is changing, it is adapting or perhaps being reborn within the regenerative paradigm; but rurality can't be solely the “provider for urbanity”.

That's not good for rurality, not good for urbanity, impossible for regeneration or even sustainability.

We must gather in the common ground that “big” can't stay as the standard if we're talking about regeneration, or even sustainability. That common ground would mean to go in the opposite direction of today's “empty villages, not more than 5% of population to be in rural” policies in EU and many other places.

That common ground would mean to stop seeing rurality as the resource-base and cities as consumers. Things can stay this way for a while, yes, for the transition period. But the vision should be clear: Rural reborn, not Business As Usual.

The fundamental catch here is that rural landscape and rurality as a whole are not only the places where the new paradigm **should** start, they're also perfectly able to do so. The basic resources of all, namely soil, water and all the biomass (including of course biodiversity) is mainly in rural landscape and depleting in a unprecedented speeds, yet easiest to regenerate if right steps are taken, such as Holistic Management of Savory Institute.

I mean: you can't “create” new reserves of oil, or metals.

But you can rebalance hydro-loops, build up top soil, regenerate biomass and enrich the practical indigenous knowledge with today's theoretical and ethical “news”.

5 – Forward to Rural

In the Resource Equity - Middle East Workshop, it has been very relevant, yet not surprising at all, that almost all the “future scenarios” were based on the collapse of today's society and survivors rebuilding a new one.

One that is based on rural collectives and ecovillages, decentralized, self-sufficient micro-communities. And that came from participants only a few of which lived in rural settings.

This, I believe, is a tremendously important factor that all the concerned-for-the-future folks should try to understand – truly understand. At this point, one would realize that young peoples' voices are getting unconsciously excited (happy actually, I would say) while talking about this kind of scenario.

Can we perhaps link this up even with the extremely high level of interest among youth for Zombie fiction, movies, books and TV series? Aren't they all telling the story of survivors building up a new and mostly self-sufficient world, while having definitively concrete meanings in their lives – surviving the zombies?

Right at this point, things get crystal clear. We see that **1)** sustainability is not enough and **2)** we

need a paradigm based on regenerating ecological and human assets, **3)** that this need for mobilization through creative and convivial action is a perfect match with youth's seek for “meaning”. And **4)** rurality seems to be the perfect starting point for the new world, not only because the size and urgency of the threats it's facing, but also as the homeland of many dreams of great young people to build up the new world of the Regenerative Paradigm.

From Policy to Action – Holistic Management: Building Topsoil while Combatting Climate Change, Feeding the World and Reviving Rurality

We all know that sustainability or regeneration are not technical issues, but “system” dynamics. I personally have had several opportunities to witness how a bunch of people can create amazing things, given the right communication and decision-making processes.

Yet there is one concrete reflection of the new Regenerative Paradigm that certainly deserves to be mentioned here, even if briefly.

Savory Institute, founded by Allan Savory from Zimbabwe puts its mission as “large-scale restoration of world's grasslands”. Its proposal is the application of Holistic Planned Grazing, a wholes-pattern-reading methodology that overturns all the assumptions most of us have about what soil is, and how grasslands functions.

I don't see the need to explain the huge importance of grasslands, world's by far biggest land ecosystem, with their carbon sequestration capacity and role to feed humanity through livestock management.

Ecologists and climate change activists and biodiversity advocates, including me, have long thought that grazing animals are the biggest threat to grassland, causing desertification, speeding up climate change and drying up the streams.

We were wrong. And there is nothing wrong in being wrong. A radical paradigm shift happens only when a good number of people realize and admit they were terribly wrong on some matters.

Savory's explanations and demonstrations over 15 million hectares of land so far show that livestock, if managed properly through a holistic plan that actually reads patterns in ecosystems and mimicks nature, we cannot only sustain what is left, but we can also quickly rebuild what has been lost till today.

We're talking about people who are building up ten centimeters of topsoil on the field per year, sequestering ten tons of carbon per hectare, while feeding the world with perfectly healthy food, enriching rural communities, making long-dry water streams running again, biodiversity and wildlife getting settled back... And doing all that by economically, ecologically and socially ridiculing the terrible feed-lot style livestock management that is among the biggest consumer of base-resources today.

From permaculture in smaller scales to Holistic Management for larger impact, ecovillages to “back to land” movement repeating itself again today, youth's search for meaningful, free, cool and useful lives in rural to regenerate the hope again...

We have all the ingredients ready.

So whom we're waiting for to start?