

THE CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVE A LASTING ENVIRONMENTAL WELLBEING

In Copenhagen 193 heads of state agreed to carry out a strategy to stop the global warming to ensue if the current industrialization rhythm is maintained. Among the “hottest” points of the debate was the agreement to limit the industrial development of 31 nations that are supposed to be responsible for the worldwide climate changes.

The greenhouse effect, indisputable indicator that originated the criticism to the industrialization model of the nations more economically developed, owners of the principal economic capital of the world, is not limited to the last decades. The demographic boom detonated by the industrial revolution (IR) led the human population to reach 6×10^9 in one century, and it is estimated to increase to 9×10^9 by 2050. Additionally, the transformation of society from a rural/urban (85/15%) before the IR to become the urban/rural (85/15%) prevailing today does not facilitate the actions in favor of the environment.

These changes have taken place in all nations, but their magnitude has polarized them. Thus, nations that based their policy to achieve “wellbeing” on a massive industrial growth confront others that also search for their wellbeing and appear to imitate the model. Facing this scenario, the effects of global change make no distinctions. Industrialized nations (IN) that base their social stability on a constant increase of their rate of consumption as an indicator of wellbeing are not exempt of social unrest, migrations, epidemics and other direct effects of the climatic change. The other nations also suffer these effects, but the difference lies in their speed to respond, given that economic and scientific resources to counteract them actually accentuate the polarization among nations. Thus, more disasters, poverty, unhealthiness, mortality and economic dependence are observed in nations in the process of industrialization (NPI).

The model of development based on massive industrialization continues to expand, as emergent economies such as China, India and Brazil have not hesitated to adopt it. The consequences reveal a catastrophic scene. To maintain the rate of consumption of the present population of IN exceeds seven times the current capacity of the planet. If this calculation is close to reality, what will happen when 2.6×10^9 Chinese and Hindus add themselves to this demand?

The roles, in the light of nations with a high climate change mitigation potential, appear to reverse. In this way, NPIs that safeguard the world germplasm expressed in tropical forests turn out to be the hope to counterbalance the effects of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, the three gases principally responsible for the greenhouse effect. Considering these countries as the owners of the natural capital of the world, it suffices to negotiate between IN and NPI a scheme that would distribute economic and natural capitals for the sake of a lasting environmental wellbeing.

This simple deduction does not fit the governance model in which each nation proclaims sovereignty over its decisions, including environmental ones, even though they have implications beyond their frontiers. What nation can be ordered, and with what arguments, not to imitate the development model based on industrialization? How can an IN be obliged to compensate for the environmental consequences of its excessive consumption rate? In depth it seems that in the hands of NPIs (providers) lies the environmental future of mankind, but to imitate the established wellbeing model would lead to the collapse of human society. INs (benefactors) do not deny their responsibility but are far from admitting the consequences, and the decisions that NPIs take escape their reach.

Facing this scenario and reassuming the root of the environmental problem: Will NPIs be able to build a scheme of wellbeing without imitating the defects of the one already established? Economic estimates made on the occasion of Copenhagen indicate that $USD100 \times 10^6$ per year are needed to neutralize the effects of climate change. In a world where economic ogres prevail there seems to be no room for the needed environmental philanthropy to reach the common environmental wellbeing. It is urgent to accept that, in the environmental aspect, the frontier between IN and NPI is a virtual one. There is a possible future, since within each sovereignty there is the possibility of creating a development path that is economically viable, socially just and environmentally laudable. It is urgent for the future generations, our children, who will enjoy or face the consequences of our acts.

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