

# SUSTAINABILITY AND CULTURE: AN EXPANDED VIEW

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**D**uring the past decade research in the field of sustainability has taken more and more attention to the interdependences of sustainable development and cultural issues (in terms of requirements, linkages, connectivity, behavioral and educational content). This offers the chance to differ cultural sustainability from related perspectives (i.e. a regional one!) and the opportunity to look closer to those interdependences in a multidisciplinary “overall view”. Developing this is a timely task that can be done in two ways: (1) “top down” from conceptual and political considerations, (2) “bottom up” by reference to existing discourse results (achievements as to be achieved, proposals such recognized deficits). The discussion on culture and sustainability takes place on a high abstract level so far, it’s about the concept of culture on the one hand and to (culturally) blind spots in the current debate on sustainability on the other hand. The “culture” (“cultivation”) of sustainability is the “Sustainabilization” of the culture lacking sustainability by today. The main and important question that arises concretely is the question of the cultural connectivity of sustainable solutions nowadays.

*Keywords:* cultural connectivity, culture of sustainable development, integrative concept of sustainable development, sustainability science

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During the past decade research in the field of sustainability has taken more and more attention to the interdependences of sustainable development and cultural issues (in terms of requirements, linkages, connectivity, behavioral and educational content). This is connected with a growing debate on conceptual topics. In the following we will discuss some of them.

## **Introduction**

In the 1990th in Germany the so called “Integrative Concept of Sustainable Development” was developed in opposition to a three-dimensions-approach with an economic, an ecologic and a societal dimension (cf. Kopfmüller, 2011; Kopfmüller et al., 2001). The basis was: sustainable development is to be associated with some crucial new (or recalled) perspectives. This includes

- a comprehensive, holistic “view on the whole thing” considering complexities of social, economic, environmental, cultural etc. development dimensions and their interdependencies;
- the crucial role of distribution issues (regarding environmental and financial resources, development risks and opportunities, advantages and burdens from political measures, etc.);
- the global perspective which means setting goals at the global level and taking into account the national, regional and local level for implementation and implications;
- the longer-term orientation, e.g. in distinction from the political practice of parliamentary terms or the practice of company balances;
- the idea of limits, with respect to economic growth, the use of finite resources, etc.

On this basis there are the following two conclusions:

- Sustainable development is not (only) a programme of the protection of environment!
- Ecological, economical, societal, institutional-political (and other!) aspects of sustainable development are integrated and of equal rank!

So the Integrative Concept of Sustainable Development based on three constitutive elements:

- inter- and intragenerational justice, equal in weight;
- the global perspective regarding goals and action strategies;
- an enlightened anthropocentric approach, i.e. the obligation of mankind to protect nature out of a well understood self-interest to preserve the basics for living.

These constitutive elements are operationalised in two steps: first, they were “translated” into three general goals of sustainable development:

- securing human existence;
- maintaining society’s productive potential (comprising natural, man-made, human and knowledge capital);
- preserving society’s options for development and action.

In a second and essential step, these goals are concretised by sustainability rules, which apply to various societal areas or to certain aspects in the relationship between society and nature (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Sustainability Rules of the Integrative Concept*

General Goals of Sustainable Development		
Securing human existence	Maintaining society's productive potentials	Preserving society's options for development and action
Substantial Rules		
Protection of human health	Sustainable use of renewable resources	Equal access for all people to information, education, occupation
Ensuring satisfaction of basic needs	Sustainable use of non-renewable resources	Participation in societal decision-making processes
Autonomous subsistence based on own income	Sustainable use of the environment as a sink	Conservation of cultural heritage and cultural diversity
Just distribution of chances for using natural resources	Avoiding technical risks with potentially catastrophic impacts	Conservation of the cultural function of nature
Reduction of extreme income or wealth inequalities	Sustainable development of man-made, human and knowledge capital	Conservation of social resources (tolerance, solidarity, etc.)
Instrumental Rules		
Internalisation of external social and environmental costs		Society's ability to respond Reflexivity of society
Adequate discounting		Society's steering ability
Public indebtedness		Self-organisation
Fair global economic framework conditions		Balance of power
Promotion of international co-operation		

*Note.* Kopfmüller et al. (2001) pp. 172, 174

Another approach of sustainable development discusses *commitments or obligations* of the present generation in opposite to the future generations with the "creation" of fair bequest package ("What to sustain?"). This package includes (cf. Muraca/Voget-Kleschin, 2011; Ott, 2011):

- real capital (buildings, technology, infrastructure, ...);
- natural capital (resources, services, information);

- cultivated natural capital (farms, herds of animals, plantations, ...);
- social capital (*moral knowledge*, institutions);
- human capital (*education*, literacy, skills);
- knowledge capital.

But: Where are the discussions about “culture”? In these two concepts only some comments in this direction (above in italics) are made:

- the substantial rule “Conservation of cultural heritage and cultural diversity”;
- the substantial rule “Conservation of the cultural function of nature”;
- a part of social and of human capital – moral knowledge, education.

Let us look to other discussions:

- models or examples (“Leitbilder”) of sustainable development;
- sustainability science.

Table 2 shows some models/examples related to sustainable development.

Table 2

*Models / Examples (“Leitbilder”) of Sustainable Development*

Life styles	Political Concepts	Examples of Processes	Examples of Content
Asceticism	Internalisation of External Costs	Sustainable	Development
New Modesty	International Conventions	Technology Assessment	Recycling-friendly Design
New Leisureliness	Proscriptions	Risk Assessment	Recycling
Green (Soft) Tourism	Bids	LCA (Eco Audit)	Integrated Environment Protection
New Lifestyle	Incentive Systems		Rational Use of Energy Safety/Security Technologies
		Corporate	Culture

*Note.* Based on Detzer (1993) p. 58.

In this table you can find only some relationships to culture (in italics): life style and corporate culture – that’s not very much...

In the article by Robert W. Kates et al. on “*Sustainability Science*” the authors discuss the interactions between nature and society and give arguments for the development of a sustainability science (cf. Kates et al., 2001). One of the core questions of this sustainability science is the following: “What systems of incentive structures – including markets, *rules*, *norms*, and scientific information – can most effectively improve social capacity to guide interactions between nature and society toward more sustainable trajectories?” (Kates et al., 2001, p.

642 – italics by us; G.B./O.P.). Even here you can find only one remark related to culture, but: no systematic view on culture!

### **The Cultural “Dimension”**

During the last years cultural aspects have been a focus in some research areas of ITAS:

- “technology and culture” in general – concepts and representations in history and in the present (cf. f.i. Banse & Grunwald, 2010; Banse & Hauser, 2009; Parodi, 2010);
- culture of innovation (cf. f.i. Banse, 2012; Banse & Belyová, 2011);
- culture of security (cf. f.i. Banse, 2009a, 2011; Banse & Belyová, 2012; Banse & Hauser, 2008);
- culture in or of technology and its assessment (cf. Parodi, 2008);
- culture in education for sustainable development (cf. Parodi, 2011).

And – last but not least – the relationships between sustainable development and culture are a topic of ITAS. So far this research includes two small workshops with participants from Germany and Austria (cf. Hartard, 2009), the international workshop “Sustainability 2010: The Cultural Dimension” as the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Sustainability Forum (cf. Muraca & Holz, 2019) and some book publications (cf. Banse, 2009b; Banse et al., 2011; Parodi et al., 2010, 2011).

The starting point for this research topic was the insight, that there is a “cultural lack” or “cultural gap” in all concepts of sustainable development (cf. Kopfmüller, 2010)! So the idea of the cultural dimension of sustainability was born by some colleagues of ITAS. This idea includes two directions: (1) culture as a condition for sustainability and (2) culture as an aim of sustainability.

It was shown that in most of the political and scientific documents on sustainable development only declarations (about the role of culture) are given, but a lack of reflections in these two directions. This depends on the understanding of “culture” (as a “fuzzy” term): norms, values, rules, hopes a.s.o., but manners (and ways!) to life and to work too.

There are two lacks:

- a lack of cultural topics in discussions around sustainability (mostly environmental, societal, political, ...topics);
- a lack of sustainability in the discussions around culture (unilateral understanding of culture: art, literature, ...).

That led to two conclusions:

- There is a necessity of a “culture of sustainability”.
- There is a necessity of a cultural change in the direction of sustainability.

Before we start with the research in the field “sustainable development and culture” in a more systematic way, there were only few relevant publications in Germany and abroad (cf. Duxbury & Gilette, 2007; Hawkes, 2001; Janikowski & Krzystofek, 2009; Krainer & Trattnigg, 2007; Kurt & Wagner, 2002; UNESCO, 1995)<sup>1</sup> and only few conceptual approaches. Here are two examples:

1. After *Ute Stoltenberg* (Lüneburg, Germany) the cultural dimension of sustainability includes the following components (cf. Stoltenberg, 2010, p. 297):
  - ethical assurance;
  - sustainability-oriented lifestyles;
  - holistic perception of nature;
  - aesthetic perception of sustainable development
  - cultural diversity as a component and potential for sustainable development;
  - traditional knowledge;
  - use of time;
  - culture of dealing with things;
  - consumer awareness;
  - international exchanges;
  - global responsibility.
2. The approach of *Kien To* (Singapore) is shown in Figure 1. There are some different topics in sustainability research related to cultural aspects (cf. To, 2011, pp. 349ff.).

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<sup>1</sup> The Cultura21 Network (Berlin, Germany) published since some years an e-Book Series on Culture and Sustainability; cf. f.i. Grabe 2010; Hahn 2010.

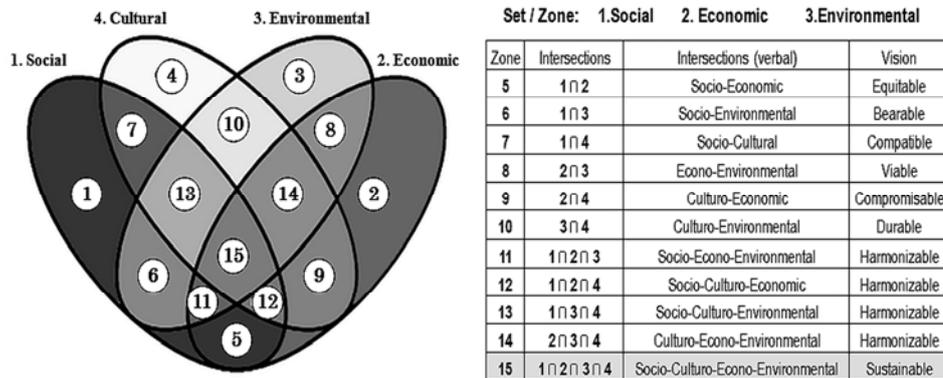


Figure 1. The Four Pillar Scheme of Kien To. Obtained from To (2011) p. 351<sup>2</sup>

Basics of the ITAS approach are:

- Cultural theory and cultural studies research are linked to sustainability theories, concepts and relevant sustainability research.
- It is important to consider the cultural dimension of sustainable development no more as a “sustainable development accessory”, but to perceive it as effectually and ‘real’.
- Common concern is about the importance and difficulty of cultural change to reflect in terms of a demand by the world community sustainable development – without the diverse meanings of “culture” and “cultural issues” to reduce premature judgements.

It is our goal, that step by step the cultural perspective is becoming an aspect in the debates on sustainable development. Contributions can be given from different sources: the range is from such related to cultural sciences up to conceptual contributions from the field of sustainability research.

Results in this research field *at first* depend on the understanding of “sustainable development” and “culture”, *at second* they are influenced by the given scientific discipline, and *at third* they depend on the research question(s), the level of analysis (more local/regional, more national/global) and the methodological approach (case study, conceptual, ...).

<sup>2</sup> There is a mistake in this figure: at the right side on “Set / Zone” was forgotten “4. Cultural”!

### Concluding Remarks

As a summary and as concluding remarks we can diagnose to the state-of-the-art:

- there are some different directions of research: cultural heritage, everyday life, contradictions between ..., patterns of behavior, “cultural ability for connection” a.o.;
- there are different discussed topics: importance of culture, role of values, implicit norms a.o.;
- there are different meanings of “culture” and “sustainability” and their relationships;
- implications of the understanding of sustainability were shown;
- there are ideas for the expansion of the current concept(s) of sustainability (f.i. “District Future – City Lab”, Parodi, 2012).

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<sup>3</sup> This book is available for free download at <http://digbib.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/volltexte/1000021734>

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