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Building the Ethical Basis for Global Climate Change Action: An Issue for Science, Religion and/or Negotiation?

Introduction

The organizers of the Club of Rome conference "*Learning from the Futures*"¹ held in Olomouc/Czech Republic September 7 and 8 2010 have introduced the conference subject with some very interesting questions:

- How can we learn from the future - not knowing how it will look like?
- What are possible futures and how can we outline scenarios and pathways which might lead to desirable or undesirable futures?
- How can we derive from possible futures lessons for the present?
- What are the risks and opportunities the world is facing today and how could possible measures look like which go beyond present cosmetics?

It is this broad, future oriented and systemic approach - characteristic for Club of Rome – combined with the fact that there have been some outstanding future studies and global change studies experts gathered in Olomouc that made the Olomouc conference such a perfect venue for a preparatory meeting for the workshop "*Worst case Climate Change Scenarios and their Ethical Implications*" which is going to be organized by Austrian Science and Research Liaison Office (ASO) Ljubljana – Centre for Social Innovation Vienna www.zsi.at in cooperation with Slovenian Association, Croatian Association and European Support Centre of the Club of Rome www.clubofrome.at, UNESCO Ethics in Science and Technology division <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/ethics-of-science-and-technology/science-and-technology/climate-change/>, Millennium project <http://www.millennium-project.org/>, Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts www.sazu.si, Academic Council on the United Nations System www.acuns.org, and other partners March 2 and 3 2011 in Bled/Slovenia.

The Planned Workshop “Worst case Climate Change Scenarios and their Ethical Implications” in Bled/Slovenia March 2011

The key issue of the planned workshop is the question of what the systemic/functional role of ethics in mitigation and adaptation related to climate change in the context of global socio-economic systems is and how to find the best ways of engaging science, religion and policy making in a coherent way and how to develop very concrete conceptual frameworks, tools and principles to deal with ethical issues related to climate change.

Following exploratory questions have been formulated during the early preparatory process of the workshop and discussed at the meeting in Olomouc:

- Systems approach: Ethics as a key element of the failure of the global socio-economic system(s) with regard to Climate Change?
- critical reflection of the role of ethics or religions (social teaching, moral values, etc.) respectively as some kind of „operating system“ of global society/societies (in analogy to operating systems (i.e. system software) of computers) and the need for an update of the ethics operating system of global society in light of climate change
- what is the role of ethics/religion in climate change mitigation and adaptation of each individual “global citizen” (e.g. promotion of “low carbon life styles”) and as guidance for the behaviour of negotiators of

¹ <http://www.clubofrome.at/2010/futures/>

the global climate change framework of action in United Nations fora like e.g. UNFCCC (e.g. the “climate justice” and “global citizenship ethics” approach as articulated by Earth Charter)?

- What kind of new dimensions of societal responsibility in light of uncertainty emerge from worst case climate change deliberations?
- can there be developed in an innovative, consensual and negotiation based way a global common ethical basis for coherent and effective global climate change action based on scientific findings regarding socio-ecological necessities which would be compatible with various mainstream religious values and norms?
- What role for civil society, religious communities, business sector? How can they participate in a coordinated and coherent way in global climate change action (e.g. in campaigning for “climate justice” or for standard setting on “human duties in the context of global challenges”)?
- Has Article 29, paragraph 1 of Universal Declaration on Human Rights “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.” the potential to serve as a consensual point of departure and orientation for innovative approaches of global community to building the ethical basis of global climate change action?
- What is the role of intercultural dialogue (e.g. UN Alliance of Civilizations)?
- What role can science play in building the ethical basis for global climate change action? How do science and religion interact on these issues? What is the state of the art in (comparative) sociological studies and humanities with regard to ethics/religion and climate change? How can be developed scientific capacities in this field (e.g. in South East Europe, European Union etc.)?

As a very relevant previous event addressing the topic of catastrophic climate change scenarios on which the Bled workshop should build upon is the workshop “*Anthropogenic Climate Destabilization: A Worst-case Scenario*” organized by Foundation for the Future September 2008 in Washington.²

The colleagues of UNESCO Ethics in Science and Technology division – which is co-organizer of the Bled workshop - have provided additional input for the preparatory meeting in the format of a background paper “*New Adventures in Foresight: The Ethics of Extreme Scenarios*” which has been discussed with the coorganizers of the Bled workshop and some additional participants of the Olomouc conference which expressed interest to contribute to preparation of the Bled workshop. Here are some excerpts from this draft background paper which sheds light on the question why to focus on worst case scenarios and what role foresight processes can play.³

Imagining the “worst”

In addition to the fairly familiar technical challenges summarized in the previous section, the conference will need to explore imagination, its limits and its implications. Climate change confronts us with the challenge of imagining the unimaginable. Having done so, we also need to examine what ethical tools exist or need to be forged in order to act in “the void” or rather develop an “ethics of uncertainty”. In a more general sense, the conference might function as a pataphysical experiment whereby experts will be asked to imagine an anti-scientific realm beyond metaphysics that examines the laws which preside over exceptions - an attempt to elucidate an imaginary cosmos which could potentially become very real through developing a “science of imaginary solutions” that could potentially provide the grounds for practical action.

What foresight?

Hence the urgency of forging a “foresight of uncertainty” and a “strategy of the exception”. Foresight and scenario-building are among the only tools available to us to envisage such uncertainty and exception, but in this context, normative methods of foresight analysis have to be pushed even further in their examination of:

- I. key drivers
- II. societal needs
- III. knowledge formation
- IV. shifting ethical and scientific paradigms
- V. the limits of human and technological response
- VI. societal mega-trends and their influence on extreme scenarios (and conversely mega-trends of climate and their influence on societies)
- VII. geographic and regional shifts
- VIII. criteria of vulnerability

² http://www.futurefoundation.org/documents/HUM_ExecSum_ClimateDestabilization.pdf

³ John Crowley, Romi Sondip Mukherjee, *New Adventures in Foresight: The Ethics of Extreme Scenarios* - Concept paper for an international conference, unpublished draft paper, Paris, September 2010

- IX. security
- X. human, non-human and natural actors
- XI. "disruption"
- XII. globalization

At the same time as the extremes need to be better mapped, their ethical significance needs to be better understood. In particular, the question of their weighting, and of the possibly perverse consequences of the fascination they understandably exert, needs to be explicitly addressed.

UNESCO – The Key Player Regarding Ethics and Climate Change within the United Nations System

Regarding the topic "Ethical Implication of Climate Change" very valuable work has been carried out by World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) which in its report "*The Ethical Implication of Global Climate Change*", presented to UNESCO Executive Committee and UNESCO General Conference in 2009 and published in 2010. IN this report COMEST identifies the challenges related to integration of ethical considerations in global climate change policies as follows:⁴

".. ethical concerns are in fact rarely made explicit in discussions about climate change, and therefore are not adequately scrutinized or debated. Climate change discussions predominantly take place on a factual and technical level, i.e. they focus on the causes, the impacts and the effects of climate change, or on technical policy issues regarding responses to its challenges. ...

.. there seems to be a tendency to move directly from concerns about climate change to climate change action, without self-consciously and critically reflecting on the aims, the nature, the extent and the justification of these actions. Thus, the ethics already embedded in concerns about and responses to global climate change are shifted to the background, and effectively taken off the agenda of matters that need to be seriously considered.

.. Policies that actively take into account such [ethical] implications, at international, regional and national levels, are undoubtedly more likely to succeed in developing a sound understanding of climate change with which to mitigate its threat and adapt to its effects. The first step in this regard is to articulate clearly the ethical implications and moral basis of possible responses to global climate change. This requires grappling with the extreme complexity of global climate change as a concrete phenomenon unfolding in time and moving beyond conventional conceptual frameworks and decision making strategies that marginalize the ethical nexus of the problem."

One of the recommendations of the COMEST report quoted above has been to start a process of consultations regarding the desirability of a "*Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles related to Climate Change*".⁵

"In view of the nature and extent of the scientific, social and human challenges of global climate change, which necessitate adoption of policies at the global level to address the pressing needs of the most vulnerable in the face of major uncertainties and the exigencies of international cooperation, it is urgent to determine universal ethical principles to guide responses to such challenges."

After a series of regional consultations (one of them in May 2010 in Belgrade) COMEST at its Extraordinary Session from 28 to 30 June 2010 concluded that there is a significant body of internationally recognized ethical principles that bear directly on climate change or could be adapted to apply to it but, many of these principles require further elaboration on the basis of extensive consultation. Therefore, preparation of a draft declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change has been regarded not to be feasible for submission to the 36th General Conference. In order to achieve a broad consensus, COMEST will continue to conduct a systematic review, including consultation with Member States, of ethical principles identified as requiring further elaboration in relation to climate change and UNESCO Executive Board shall reassess at its 189th session the desirability of preparing a declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change.

An area in which the Bled workshop could perhaps follow-up on the work of COMEST report on Ethical Implications of Global Climate Change in a very specific way would be the issue of "*Foreknowledge and*

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *The Ethical Implications of Global Climate Change - Report by the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)*, Paris 2010, page 7 and 8

⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology, *Recommendation on the desirability of preparing a declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change*, Meeting in Paris in Extraordinary Session from 28 to 30 June 2010

the Duty to Act on it" as discussed by COMEST in Chapter V. A (see some quotations below) and the issue of conceptualizing the role of individual global citizens, civil society organizations (including religious communities) as "agents" in climate change governance and the necessity of action to overcome "Institutional Inadequacy that make it difficult to respond to Global Climate Change" as highlighted in chapter II.C of COMEST report.⁶

Chapter V.A: The link between foreknowledge and the duty to act on it

Broadly speaking, three principal duties are readily recognized in various forms:

- *the duty to actively pursue knowledge of the impact of human action on the global climate system, as well as the impact of climate change on human activities, in particular those of people most vulnerable to climate change;*
- *the duty to share that knowledge when it is available;*
- *the duty to act appropriately and in a timely fashion when that knowledge is available.*

However, the identification of these duties immediately raises the question who should ultimately take responsibility for generating knowledge, what kind of experts and which institutions should be involved, and through what processes.

Moreover, even if such knowledge is adequately generated, the issue of its mass dissemination remains problematic. A standard method for engaging these questions is to take a critical view of the current organization of science in the world, and to ask whether the typical research activities taking place, and the structures through which research is promoted, funded, published, and further disseminated, are optimally geared to enable humankind to understand, prevent, mitigate or adapt to climate change.

Chapter II.C Ethical challenges related to the main characteristics of global climate change

- *the fragmentation of agency that makes it difficult to respond to global climate change;*
- *institutional inadequacy that makes it difficult to respond to global climate change;*

Integrating Ethics in Global Climate Change Governance and Research

The work of COMEST quoted above and the fact that climate change negotiations locked in an market economy conceptual framework without ethics as a systems variable have failed in Copenhagen and Cancun show that "Building the Ethical Basis for Global Climate Action" is an indispensable prerequisite for effective global climate change action.

Therefore building the knowledge base for a systemic understanding of human behavior (and its ethical determinants) as key driver of climate change and education, religion, mass media etc. as levers to influence it is needed.

Preparatory talks for the Bled workshop held with representatives of Global Humanitarian Forum⁷ in Geneva in November 2009 showed that some very concrete and high level initiatives of discussing with politicians, religious leaders and business sector the demand for innovative approaches to ethics in global climate change action (see for instance the publication "Key Points on Climate Justice"⁸ which has been presented and discussed at global inter-religious gathering "Parliament of the World's Religions" December 3-9 2009 in Melbourne/Australia www.parliamentofreligions.org/) are already in an advanced stage of implementation.

At talks with representatives of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC in Geneva we learned also about the Windsor 2009 conference "Many Heavens, One Earth; Faith Commitments for a Living Planet" www.windsor2009.org/ where UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon with his presence and his speech supported the idea of regarding religious communities as important partners for global climate change action. Another relevant initiative is the ethics/religion and climate change initiative of Bahai International Community which has been launched in September 2009 in the presence of IPCC chair Mr. Pachauri <http://news.bahai.org/story/729> in New York.

⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, The Ethical Implications of Global Climate Change - Report by the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST), Paris 2010, page 27 & 15

⁷ Global Humanitarian Forum has ceased existence due to financial problems in spring 2010,

⁸ Downloadable at http://www.globethics.net/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=14538&folderId=1083692&name=DLFE-1351.pdf

As a consequence of these mainstreaming trends, the need to assess ethical dimensions of climate change and policy incl. human rights as key issues to be considered in all Working Group reports has been highlighted by several stakeholders (governments and organizations) in the consultation process for 5th Assessment Report of IPCC.⁹

Socio-economic aspects (including "ethical dimension") of climate change are thus going to be addressed in IPCC 5th Assessment Report in a much more prominent way than in previous assessment reports:¹⁰

Other key challenges include the humanitarian aspects of climate change, wherein the relationship between climate change and its effects on human society in various parts of the world present a crucially important subject for assessment, and ethical dimensions of climate change, which emanate from the disparities between responsibility for climate change and the diverse nature and magnitude of impacts. For these and other issues, new scientific knowledge will be critical for advancing the assessment beyond the level that was possible in previous IPCC reports.

An important global research program in the field of global social sciences and climate change is the "International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change" www.ihdp.unu.edu/. IHDP has great potentials to be among the most competent global networks of researchers, scientific institutes and research programs for addressing the ethical dimension of climate change from a systems analysis social science research perspective.¹¹

.. it has become clear that addressing largescale environmental issues, and fostering sustainable development will require a concerted effort on the part of researchers who focus on human behavior. The International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change was developed to this end.

Although IHDP in its Strategic Plan www.ihdp.unu.edu/file/public/WebStratPlan?menu=84 and the outline of IHDP Open meeting 2009 in general acknowledges the importance of ethical dimensions of global environmental change like values, beliefs, etc. (see quotation below)¹², there couldn't be found a specific IHDP research initiative or program on ethics and climate change on internet.¹³

The role of perceptions and values

All societal dynamics relating to the environment involve the relationship between the observed and the perceived. These two do not always match very closely. Psychological, cultural and social factors influence perception and decision making individually as well as in groups. Such factors may also be a basis for mapping the environmental ethics of groups, as well as for a better understanding of how a group will react to different kinds of social or environmental changes. Other, related issues have to do with how socioenvironmental issues are communicated, and how people learn to perceive them. These are of central importance in improving the worldwide understanding of global change, its implications and its consequences.

In terms of "status-quo analysis" or "gap-analysis" for the planning of the Bled workshop we can say that there is a growing public awareness among religious communities, policy makers and scientific community that innovative approaches regarding cooperation of science, religion and policy making towards "Building the Ethical Basis for Global Climate Action" are needed.

But on the side of research there is a huge gap existing and there is an urgent need for more and better coordinated research worldwide on the role of ethics in the context of climate change governance challenges on local, communitarian, regional, national, and global level!

⁹ POLICY RELEVANT SCIENTIFIC TECHNICAL TOPICS TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE IPCC AR5 - Summary of comments from Governments and Organizations, IPCC AR5 Scoping Meeting Venice, Italy, 13-17 July 2009, page 2, www.ipcc.ch/scoping_meeting_ar5/documents/doc03.pdf

¹⁰ CHAIRMAN'S VISION PAPER, IPCC AR5 Scoping Meeting Venice, Italy, 13-17 July 2009, page 4, www.ipcc.ch/scoping_meeting_ar5/documents/doc02.pdf

¹¹ www.ihdp.unu.edu/article/IHDP_Profile?menu=1

¹² Conference book of IHDP Open meeting 2009, page 15, www.openmeeting2009.org/pdf_files/Conf%20Book_WEB.pdf

¹³ Note: the inquiry has been carried out January 2010

In this context also the concept of social innovation seems to me very important, because the whole idea of approaching ethics with a global perspective, a systems approach and a creative/engineering approach is a social innovation:¹⁴

To meet the complex challenges of the world today, responses will need to be equally complex. Urgent calls for innovative solutions have become increasingly frequent as people begin to recognize both the need to change fundamental patterns of human relationships with each other and their environment, and the catastrophic ramifications of inaction and ill - informed decisions. Yet, progressing from the stage of identifying that need to a stage of action is often stalled, largely due to the incapacity to move innovations and knowledge between disciplines, 'thought worlds' and contexts, and an inability to mobilize action across the boundaries and scales that define a social system.

Earth Charter as a Leading Global Civil Society Initiative

In the context of preparation of the Bled workshop, the author of the present paper has participated in the conference “*Ethical Framework for a Sustainable World Earth Charter + 10*”, Ahmedabad/India, November 2010, where he presented the paper Global Citizenship Ethics for Effective Global Governance – From Ideas to Action in the Workshop “Global Challenges and Global Governance”.

The Earth Charter is a global civil society document on ethical principles related to sustainable development which has its origins in the work of “The World Commission on Environment and Development” (known as “the Brundtland Commission”) which launched in 1987 the “Our Common Future” Report with a call for a “new charter” to set “new norms” to guide the transition to sustainable development. In 1994, Maurice Strong (Secretary-General of the Rio Summit) and Mikhail Gorbachev, working through organizations they each founded (Earth Council and Green Cross International respectively), launched an initiative (with the support from the Dutch Government) to develop an Earth Charter as a civil society initiative (although it has to be noted that it had started as a United Nations initiative).¹⁵

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life, and future generations. It is a vision of hope and a call to action.

The Earth Charter is centrally concerned with the transition to sustainable ways of living and sustainable human development. Ecological integrity is one major theme. However, the Earth Charter recognizes that the goals of ecological protection, the eradication of poverty, equitable economic development, respect for human rights, democracy, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. It provides, therefore, a new, inclusive, integrated ethical framework to guide the transition to a sustainable future.

The drafting of the Earth Charter involved the most inclusive and participatory process ever associated with the creation of an international declaration. This process is the primary source of its legitimacy as a guiding ethical framework. The legitimacy of the document has been further enhanced by its endorsement by over 4,500 organizations, including many governments and international organizations.

In the light of this legitimacy, an increasing number of international lawyers recognize that the Earth Charter is acquiring the status of a soft law document. Soft law documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are considered to be morally, but not legally, binding on state governments that agree to endorse and adopt them, and they often form the basis for the development of hard law.¹⁶

One of the goals of EC+10 Ahmedabad conference and especially the workshop “Global Challenges and Global Governance” has been to find ways for Earth Charter (and thus a set of ethical principles which global civil society (including religious communities) has agreed upon) to be systematically included in global governance:¹⁷

¹⁴ Michele Lee Moore & Frances Westley, Surmountable Chasms: The Role of Cross Scale Interactions in Social Innovation, Working Paper No. 001, March 2009, page 6 , http://www.sig.uwaterloo.ca/documents/Michele-LeeMoore_VOOct2809.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/History.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/What-is-the-Earth-Charter%3F.html>

¹⁷ http://www.earthcharterplus10.org/workshopthemes_Global_Challenges.html

“One of the main goals of the Earth Charter Initiative is to achieve recognition of the Earth Charter by the United Nations General Assembly and to demonstrate the relevance of the Earth Charter’s values and principles to global governance. The next best opportunity to achieve this recognition appears to be during RIO+20, which will occur in 2012. “

Suggestion of concrete steps towards this aim have been proposed by the author of the present article:

- Thematic Debate on Ethics and Global Governance in UN General Assembly¹⁸
- Linking Earth Charter with UN normative framework via standard setting work related to Article 29 of Universal Declaration on Human Rights (towards Global Citizenship Ethics and “Human duties in the context of global challenges”)
- “Global Civil Society Compact” event at Rio +20 conference (in analogy to UN Global Compact for the business sector; possible content: self regulation and verifiability based quality standards of civil society organizations regarding financial transparency; modest, merit based remuneration; operationalisation of ethical principles of global civil society activism – establishing civil society activism quality labels)
- “Global Citizenship Philanthropy Initiative” with Indian billionaires as first phase promoters
- Setting up a “Global Forum on Philanthropy and Research/Education Funding”
- “Global Challenges Song World Cup” initiative for the promotion of “Global Citizenship and future orientation” in cooperation with UNESCO Associated Schools project network, using music as a means for global community building and global empathy/solidarity generation in the context of Education for Sustainable Development.

Some of these suggestions have been taken up very positively at the above mentioned Earth Charter conference but also later on at the WINGS Forum 2010 (Worldwide Initiatives for Grantmaker Support” http://www.wingsweb.org/programmes/wingsforum_main.cfm) and the Annual conference of Global University Network for Innovation in Barcelona <http://www.guni-rmies.net/conference2010/>.

Especially the initiative to establish a “Global Forum on Philanthropy and Research/Education Funding” has seen a very strong dynamic towards implementation with the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 being the milestone event at towards which most of the momentum is directed in order to achieve there a real cultural shift towards a new global ethics of global social responsibility of each global citizen which appears to be the missing link for the time being for effective global governance in addressing climate change.

Biographical note:

Miroslav Polzer is head of Austrian Science and Research Liaison office (ASO) Ljubljana www.aso.zsi.at which is a department of Centre for Social Innovation in Vienna www.zsi.at and works on behalf of Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research in the field of promotion of international scientific cooperation with Southeast European non-EU member countries (so called “Western Balkan countries”); in addition to this main job Miroslav Polzer is on a honorary basis secretary general of “International Association for the Advancement of Innovative Approaches to Global Challenges (IAAI)” www.glocha.info/iaai a not-for-profit association of scientists, policy makers, future studies experts and educational experts who aim at developing innovative approaches (“Global Challenges World Cup”) to mobilize in an unprecedented dimension resources (both intellectual as well as financial) of global civil society towards support of effective global governance and effective climate change mitigation and adaptation and in support of the work and goals of United Nations system.

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¹⁸ similar to UN GA Thematic debate on Climate Change of February 2008
<http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/themclimatechange.shtml>