

WORKSHOP, ROSA LUXEMBURG FOUNDATION
BERLIN, GERMANY, OCTOBER 28-30, 2011

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is one to the largest political education institutions in Germany today and sees itself as part of the intellectual current of democratic socialism . The Foundation is a discussion forum for critical thought alternatives as well as a research facility for progressive social analysis.

Forming the Foundation are:

--- The general and sustaining members of the association and the executive board members.

--- Academic scholars and scientists in advisory boards and as authors of our publications, scholarship recipients, liaison professors and hundreds of volunteers.

The Economic and Policy section of the Foundation organized a workshop from October 28 -30, 2011, with the title:

“ Understanding Sustainability Economics. Towards Puralism in Economics –Economics for Sustainable Development”

This was the 5th international workshop in the series “another economy is possible”.

The basis for discussion is the book by Swedish economist, Peter Soderbaum, with whom we jointly prepared the workshop. In addition were invited a number of international participants, including Judy Brown, Malgorzata Dereniowska, Ali Douai, Josephine Fischer, Eva Kras, Begum Ozkaynak, Irina Shmeleva, Stanislav Shmelev, Leo Seserko, Leif Bratt and John Readon, all from various countries including New Zealand, Sweden, Russia, Poland, Slovenia, France, Turkey, USA and Canada.

In preparation for the workshop four questions and discussion areas were proposed:

- Reasons for the appeal and strength of neoclassical economics
- Challenges and role limitations of Economics to help achieve Sustainability
- Pluralism: opportunities and obstacles for Pluralism in economics research and teaching; strategies for attainment.
- Implications for alternative economic policy.

Participants were asked to provide brief discussions to answer some of these questions. These were posted on the Foundation blog website.

The blog submission for Eva Kras following outlines some main points in the area of Sustainability related to her main area of research.

[Eva Kras: Understanding Sustainability Economics: Discussion](#)

Sep 19th, 2011

In this brief discussion I would firstly like to thank Peter Söderbaum for his thoughtful contributions in providing valuable material in this discussion on the complex concept of Sustainability Economics. I especially would like to note the well developed Powerpoint outline we received, as it develops clearly the challenging steps in this process.

In my comments I will try to stay as close as possible to the outline points that Peter Söderbaum has made, and especially of course the complex road towards Sustainability Economics.

1. Initial step: It appears, based on Peter's work as well as the interesting blogs received, that most participants appear to agree that conventional neoliberal economics no longer works, and we will have to find an alternative path.

2. What is the next step? Based on Peter's analysis, it appears that:

a) Conventional economics is no longer viable for a sustainable future.

b) Somehow we will need to convince the broader community (especially the business community) that an alternative approach needs to be considered, and a logical place to begin is the educational world, as educators have a deep responsibility for developing the leaders of the future. As Peter pointed out, at the beginning this may mean teaching both conventional neoliberal economics and sustainable economics, as different approaches to economics for the future. This alternative (sustainable economics), as Peter proposes involves in its essence the concept of "plurality" and how this could work.

3. Next steps? Here I would like to propose a few key considerations, which initially appear needed to be taken into account in relation to making pluralism workable.

a) Pluralism as an alternative in general – I think – is an excellent idea. This approach will take into account the variations related to different cultures, countries, disciplines etc. This means a broad sweep (or layer of society) in which each area will have different ideas about most aspects of what sustainability economics really means and how it applies to their particular circumstances.

b) The result of this approach means we could have participants who have very different "ideological orientations", using Peter's wording. In addition to different needs for different cultures and disciplines for example, we also will find different beliefs about deeper personal values or non-monetary orientations, ranging from conventional economic values, all the way to highly evolved sustainable non-monetary values.

c) Challenge: Somehow we need to find some deeply felt COMMONLY held factors (values, or ideological orientation) that we agree on and that can form a common, solid base, or deep foundation on which to seat pluralism. Then, at that deep values level, we are all "drinking from the same well", so to speak. This "non-monetary" level (Reference Earth Charter and others), and based on the work of researchers in the field such as McGilchrist, Laszlo, and Harman, provides a common foundation of universally held

values. Then on top of that level we have the broad societal “pluralism” level that Peter so well describes. In this way, we would have commonality of thinking and belief at a deep level (non-monetary values), but also viable plurality possibilities in our everyday institutions, businesses, governments and teaching— as we have a common deep values foundation.

Based on the work of researchers (some mentioned above), these deep “universal” values are the ones that basically control how we interpret everything we think and do every day—our basic lens through which we interpret the world.

4. Universal values: These values are usually divided into 4 interrelated groups:

(i) Relationship with the Self, (ii) Relationship with family, community, work, (iii) Relationship with Nature, (iv) Relationship with the Cosmos (outer space).

5. Sustainable Economics and Values: The whole sustainability question is of course closely associated with Peter’s concept of “monetary” and “non-monetary” aspects of Sustainable Economics. The monetary aspects refer to our present left brain thinking, and how this thinking has penetrated almost every aspect of human economies. The non-monetary aspects refer to mainly right brain thinking, and how this thinking today has no place in conventional economic thinking.

As a result of this realization, regarding left/right brain thinking (or monetary versus non-monetary) could form a way of understanding more clearly the challenges we have today. These concepts also affect the whole challenge related to “externalities” and “internalities”.

6. Summary: In general, it seems to me that Peter’s idea of plurality is an excellent one. This is the layer we are working in every day. But as a common foundation it appears that a deeper layer of our own values (ideological orientation) needs to be considered as essential to make pluralism work.

I can only say that through many years of working in transcultural management with large international companies (US and Mexican management), the one aspect that helped me to have success in this work has been the realization that somehow, at some deeper level (non-monetary level) we needed to find commonality. This was a way we could respect both sides in terms of culture and ideas and disciplines, and still make management changes that respected “sustainable economic thinking”, as well as being acceptable to both sides, and successful overall results.

Hopefully these reflections on the roots of Sustainable Economics can form a basis for discussion of the essence of sustainable thinking and values (non-monetary)that we need to consider in relation to putting into practice the concept of plurality.

I look forward very much to the opportunity of meeting all of you, and learning from your different perspective.

