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# The Process of Sustainable Development: Change in Emphasis from Egocentric Values to Envirocentric Values<sup>1</sup>

John Frederick Maskell

*Executive Summary of a thesis presented to the University of Waterloo in fulfilment of the thesis requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography, Waterloo, Ontario Canada, 1998*

*Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable; to ensure it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (p. 8). ...It is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change (p. 9). ...No single blueprint of sustainability will be found. Each nation will have to work out its own concrete policy implications (p. 40). ...Without reorientation of attitudes and emphasis little can be achieved. We have no illusions about quick fix solutions (p. 309). ...The transition to sustainable development will require a range of public policy choices that are inherently complex and politically difficult. Reversing unsustainable policies will require immense efforts to inform the public and secure its support (p. 326). ...To achieve the goals of sustainable development involves very large changes in attitude (p. 335). "Our Common Future": Gro Harlem Brundtland; Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987).*

"Our Common Future": The Report to the United Nations of the Brundtland Commission and the many discussions, articles and books it has provoked since it was published in 1987, have popularized the idea of sustainable development. The Brundtland Report, and much of the literary discussion and debate which it has prompted, concentrates on correcting conditions resulting from economic activity that threatens environmental integrity, and on human behaviour that must change in the process. It identifies **THAT** there must be changes in values, attitudes, emphasis and behaviour, and it is eloquent as to why such changes are important. However, the problem which the Brundtland Report (and its derivative literature) leaves with the reader is that it does not explore the value and attitude systems which underlie societies' decision-making processes; nor does it elaborate on what the changes in values and atti-

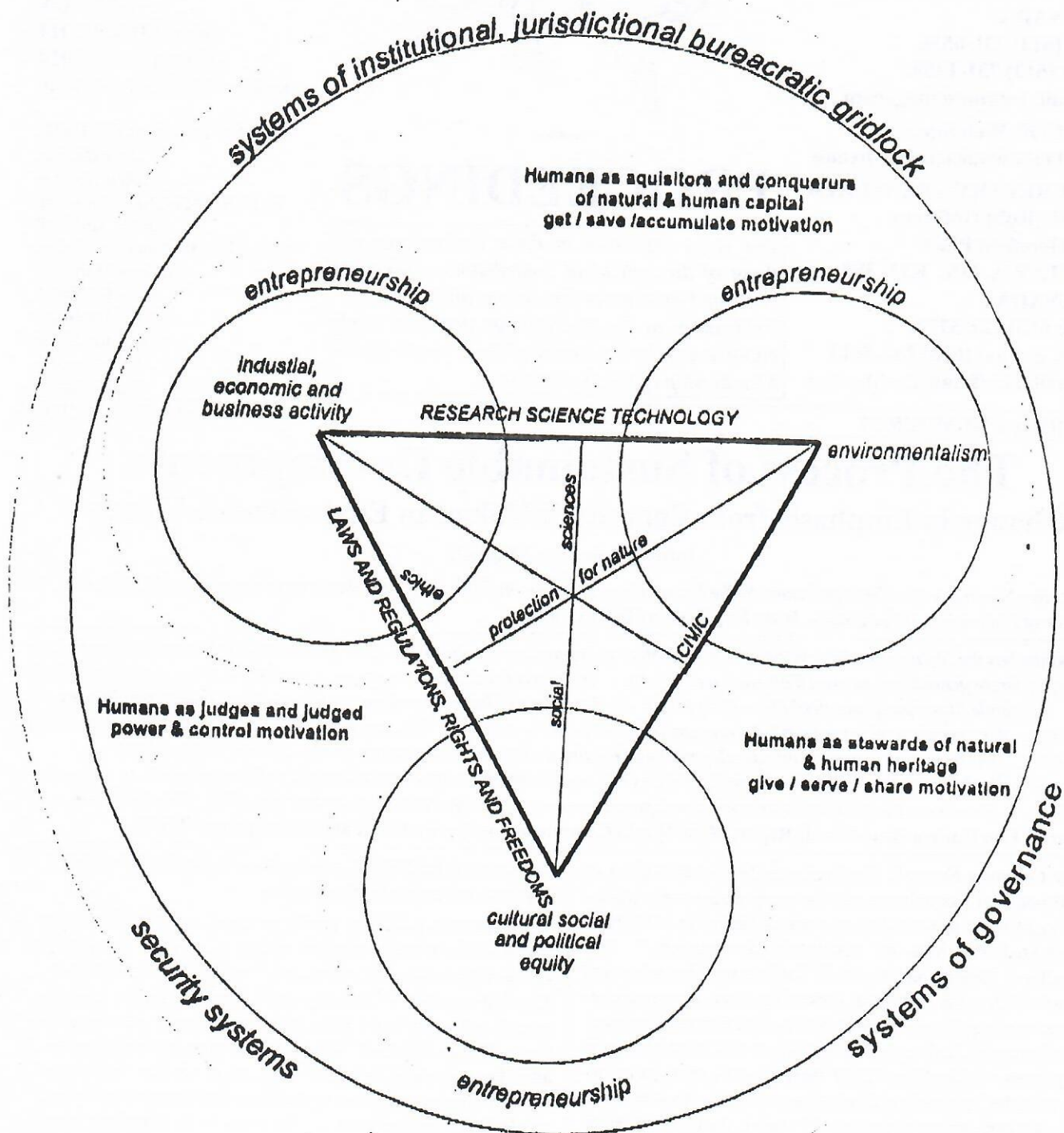
tudes should be **FROM** or what they should be **TOWARD**. This research addresses that problem.

The research is guided by three assertions, which indicate why, in the author's view, research on the problem of changes in values with respect to sustainable development is important. The first assertion is that the world faces economic, environmental and social equity difficulties, which are of crisis proportions. The second assertion is that the current pattern of values, attitudes and related behaviour that shape the First World voting and consuming urban marketplace are interconnected and interlocked. Furthermore, in the absence of conscious intervention, they predispose the "invisible hand" of the marketplace to reinforce the same pattern of values, attitudes and related behaviour.

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Figure 2: INSTITUTIONAL GRIDLOCK





Therefore, conscious intervention is required to change the pattern. The third assertion is that global economic, political and social systems are driven and constrained primarily by the demands and expectations of the First World voting and consuming marketplace. Therefore, if sustainable development is to become operational, First World cities are requisite fora for the practice of sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development has its roots in three separate themes of development: economic development, environmentalism and the quest for social equity. A form of entrepreneurship motivates each of these development themes. Traditionally, entrepreneurship has been thought of as applying primarily in business and for the purpose of monetary profit; however, the entrepreneurial process also takes place with respect to many other human pursuits including environmental and social issues and it responds to many different motivations. Figure 1 (opposite) is a graphical representation of the relationship among the three primary development approaches of economics, environment and social equity.

Each may be represented by pairs of concentric circles showing an area of accepted reality, or prevailing practice, in the closed inner circle and a larger area of influence representing the progress of entrepreneurship in the larger dotted circle. The first pair of circles represents economics. The dotted circle continually expands the area of activity represented by the solid circle. The solid circle tends to resist change (i.e., to rely on the *status quo*). However, both the accepted reality (solid circle) and the emerging reality of new entrepreneurship (dotted circle) expand over time. Two prime motivations that cause economic activities to grow are financial profit and power. A second pair of circles represents various activities of environmentalism. They represent prevailing environmental practice and the ongoing progress in the application of new processes, insights, innovations and inventions with respect to the environment (i.e., environmental entrepreneurship). The prime entrepreneurial motivations are stewardship for the natural environment and survival of biodiversity. A third pair of circles represents a growing concern in our society for social, cultural and political equity i.e., for a fair sharing of the benefits and responsibilities in society and for wider participation in the decision-making processes that regulate them. The motivations of this aspect are justice and the challenge of inter/intra-generational equity (i.e., social entrepreneurship). The three approaches to development are both linked and held apart by opposing interactions. Figure 1 shows opposing arrows representing both entrepreneurial forces reaching out and societal, or *status quo* forces, constraining development. Recognizing that the scale of

human activity in economic development, environmentalism and social equity are all rapidly expanding, one might expect that the three areas of entrepreneurship would meet and overlap forming opportunities for combined entrepreneurship and conditions of superimposed conflict. Tension and friction among these activities have been more normal than co-operation, indicating a condition of non-merging and potential for chaotic effects.

These interactions among economics, environment and equity develop both attractions and tensions creating an institutional gridlock, which, in general, espouses all values (see Figure 2 overleaf.).

The connections/tensions among economic, environmental and social issues represent humans as acquirers of natural and human capital on the one hand and, on the other hand, humans as stewards of nature and each other.

The opposing motivations are the desire to understand, acquire and own, and the desire to understand, preserve and protect.

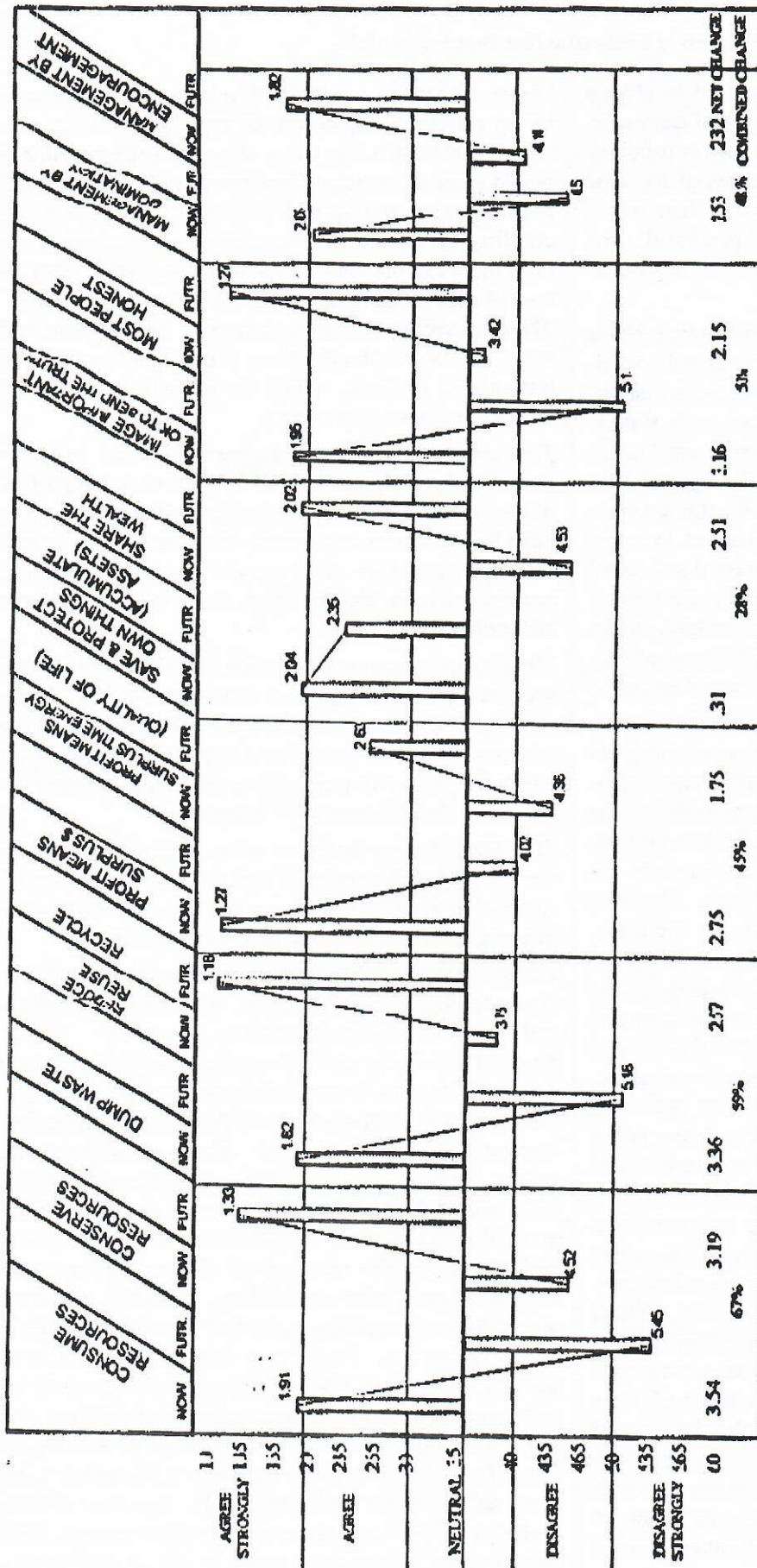
The interaction among economics, environmentalism and social equity issues produces conditions for both entrepreneurial opportunities and great conflict. Which of the two conditions will prevail in a society is dependent on where people in that society place the overall emphasis in relation to their inherent set of values.

This research considers the matter of changes in values with respect to the evolution and underlying meaning of sustainable development as a radical concept in the sense of going to the root of opportunities and problems.

Going to the root of opportunities and problems involves changing the values and attitudes, which inform people's and institutions' decision-making processes. Unless people individually and collectively change their values and attitudes, their related behaviour remains essentially the same. It is not important which begins to change first – values, attitudes or behaviour. Each contributes to the others. Furthermore the desire for change, and resistance to it, will be different in different times, different places and different situations. What does matter is that values and attitudes evolve as situations change. When some changes happen, others will follow. However, if values and attitudes do not change, then neither will behaviour – in any lasting way. People may change behaviour, temporarily, by force of will in response to perceived threat or opportunity, such as a threat to health of smoking, the threat to physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of alcohol consumption, or the opportunity for the obese to 'look and feel good' by losing weight. However, if their underlying values and attitudes do not also change, their behaviour will, over time, revert to the normal consequence of their deeply held values and attitudes.



Figure #3 Chart of Propensities for Values Change





Consideration is given to sustainable development as a holistic concept that involves a shift in the way people perceive and think about the ideal of development. Beyond the Brundtland description, sustainable development involves and implies several components:

1. recognition of the severity of the environmental, economic and equity problems which human civilization faces;
2. an approach to human affairs which is primarily holistic rather than reductionist;
3. changing from a set of values which underlie the Current Dominant Social Paradigm to a different set of values which underlie a New Sustainable Development Paradigm;
4. inherent changes in ways of perceiving, thinking and being in accordance with change in values;
5. the application of entrepreneurship to the competing priorities of economic, environment and equity issues, primarily in cities of the First World;
6. recognition that this change in values will not only influence the results of, but will also direct the evolution of, sustainable development; and
7. turning human ingenuity to dispensing with old systems and approaches that are sources of problems and developing new systems and approaches which are solutions to problems.

It is only when the "sustainable" part of sustainable development applies to human relationships with the biophysical environment and the "development" part applies to the intellectual, cultural, psychological, spiritual relationships of people among people that the term can be perceived and accepted as anything but an oxymoron.

For sustainable development to become reality ideals for change must become widely espoused values and established attitudes in the marketplace which will themselves have a reforming influence upon expected behaviour. The research presents this transition, which is inherent in the concept of sustainable development, in a simple table (Table 1, p.6, overleaf) showing a change in emphasis from a set of egocentric values to a set of envirocentric

values, recognizing that 'envirocentric' includes not just the biophysical natural and built environments but also the social, cultural, intellectual, psychological and spiritual environments.

The research recognizes the local nature of sustainable development and finds that it is similarly based on a change in emphasis from egocentric values toward envirocentric values. Achievement at an international level can only be the manifestation of widespread achievement at the local level, especially in First World cities. Having established 'From What' and 'Toward What', the research developed a model procedure for discerning a profile of the existing values and future values in a community (example attached), and evaluating the propensity, the barriers, and the willingness to change these values. In addition the procedure provides a rich variety of detailed information for custom designing a development program based on the potential for changes in values expressed by the community itself. The model procedure was used as a case study in Kitchener/Waterloo and is replicable for any community regardless of whether it is a geographic community such as a region, city or neighbourhood, or whether it is a community of interest such as a government department, a professional group, a business or a union. Data from the case study community demonstrate a healthy awareness of the need for change in values, an even stronger willingness to undertake such change and an appreciation of the barriers that stand in the way. The research suggests that other communities and international organizations could benefit by engaging in similar values-based research. It concludes that sustainable development is fundamentally a process of changing emphasis from egocentric values to envirocentric values at all levels of society and as such, it is deeply challenging to all levels of society. Furthermore, it has the capacity to influence both bottom-up and top-down change, and thereby transcend their divisions.

Sustainable development is like a forest of trees which can be encouraged to grow by nurturing their roots rather than grafting on new leaves and branches. Nurturing the roots of sustainable development means enhancing the values of individual people, and the families, organizations and groupings in which they live, work, play and relax.

**Note: Table 1 appears on p.6 overleaf.**



**Table 1: Changes In Emphasis Of Values Inherent In Sustainable Development**

<b>From EGOCENTRIC</b>	<b>toward ENVIROCENTRIC</b>
<b>A: Self Interest vs. Common Interest</b>	
1. From competition, self interest	to co-operation, common interest
2 From accumulate material assets	to share the wealth.
<b>B: Relationship with Nature</b>	
3 From dominance over nature	to harmony with nature
4 From consume resources	to conserve resources.
5 From dump waste into environment	to reduce, re-use, recycle waste
<b>C: Relationship with Each Other</b>	
6 From elitism: some people more important than others	to egalitarianism: equal opportunity for all people
7 From urgency, busy-ness and a degree of intolerance	to patience and compassion
8 From image is important; OK to bend the truth	to honesty is important.
9 From management by control	to management by encouragement
<b>D: Rights vs. Responsibilities</b>	
10. From individual rights more important than collective rights	to collective rights more important than individual rights
11. From individual rights more important than individual responsibilities	to individual responsibilities more important than individual rights
12 From collective rights more important than collective responsibilities	to collective responsibilities more important than collective rights.
<b>E: The Notion of Progress</b>	
13 From economic growth	to economic, environmental and social balance
14 From profit means surplus of money	to profit means increased quality of life—e.g. surplus time and energy.