

Mainstreaming the Environment: Global Ecology, International Institutions and the Crisis of Environmental Governance¹

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable development is now considered a guiding principle of national and international action. Yet the widespread acceptance of this concept stands in contrast with the inability so far to alter effectively the development model responsible for environmental degradation. The lack of many positive and concrete results produced by massive efforts in the field of international cooperation for the environment indicate the contradictory character of this new “global” environmentalism. The purpose of this article is to explore how environmental considerations were reframed so as to become compatible with global development. Adopting an international political economy perspective and based on interviews with the main categories of actors involved, it provides evidence that environmental concerns were remodeled by the joint action of technocratic environmentalists, the international UN-related development establishment and business and industry sectors. Analyzing the results of international cooperation and in particular the review of UNCED’s implementation five years after the Summit, the article questions the nature of the “sustainable development” consensus. The inability of the international community to deal with most global environmental issues reveals the limits of international cooperation in the name of the environment.

Keywords: *global development, international institution, business, environmental management*

Introduction: From Rio 92 to New York 1997

A significant feature of international politics since the end of the 1980s has been the growing concern with environmental protection and the multiplication of the number of international conferences and agreements in this area. Environmental protection is presently recognized as a major political issue, and has acquired a well-defined position on

the international political agenda. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992, was a unique moment in diplomatic history. The conference heralded the most elaborate attempt ever to develop institutional solutions to major environmental problems.

Based on the idea that “environment” and “development” had to be linked in a comprehensive framework that would allow for the generalization of economic growth and prosperity while including environmental concerns, UNCED came out with a global solution to the ecological crisis, the concept of “sustainable development.” A global bargain was struck, according to which developed nations would provide some financial resources and transfer appropriate and “clean” technology to developing countries to help them protect their environments. An international mechanism — the Global Environment Facility (GEF) — was settled on to undertake the funding of international projects. At the same time, global conventions on Climate Change and Biological Diversity were negotiated in an attempt to control the most devastating effects of economic activities, such as CO₂ emissions from industry and consumers, and to protect the earth’s living capacity. A program of action, “Agenda 21,” was carefully worked out, covering all areas from health to institutions, from the role of women to the responsibilities of business, all in order to serve as a guide for action to attain sustainability in every country. To facilitate the transition towards “sustainable development,” developed countries promised large sums of money in the form of aid, investment and pollution control projects. The Conference generated a high degree of optimism as to the international community’s ability to deal with global environmental problems. Development could continue, now on a truly global base, without the risk of the complete exhaustion of natural resources or of other major environmental catastrophes. The Cold War was over, and rational planning, technology and economic instruments would ensure the extension of the capitalist model of accumulation worldwide.

Five years later, at the June 1997 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly dedicated to the review of UNCED's implementation, the climate was rather different. Optimism had given way to disappointment and, in some cases, there was real concern about the viability of the "sustainable development" model, which relies on a framework of action that does not fully address the causes of environmental destruction. Developed countries have been unable or unwilling to stick to their promise of increasing the aid to development to 0.7% of GDP, as agreed in Rio. Countries like the United States, the largest contributor to global warming, have not shown the will to take effective action that would show a real commitment to reduce their industrial emissions. On the other hand, developing countries refused to take any further steps without the guarantee that substantive financial resources would back them or that at least the commitments taken in Rio would be respected. The New York 1997 Declaration even recognized that the situation of the environment had deteriorated over the intervening five years, hoping modestly that more progress would be achieved by the next summit in 2002.

The meager positive results produced by the massive efforts in the field of international cooperation for the environment seem to indicate the contradictory character of this new, global "environmentalism." The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that, while originally being the potential source of a radical and transformative project, environmental concerns were ultimately reframed by the joint action of technocratic environmentalists, the international UN-related establishment and business and industry sectors to become compatible with global development. Adopting an international political economy perspective, the article explores the interaction between state and markets in the construction of global environmental politics. It provides evidence that although there is a new consensus on the diagnosis of the problem — worldwide environmental degradation — very few commitments have been taken to alter the accumulation model and the patterns of production and consumption that contribute to this situation. It suggests that the failure of the international system in ensuring a move towards sustainability, exemplified in New York, is linked to the very nature of the global bargain struck in Rio. By aiming to make "development" — in its more recent global phase, with its focus on globalized and ever expanding production, trade and consumption — become "sustainable," the concept of sustainability has been stripped of most of its meaning. The inability of the international community to deal with most global environmental issues reveals the contradictory nature of the "sustainable development" consensus and demonstrates the limits of international cooperation in the name of the environment.

Origins and Dimensions of the Ecological Project

In order to understand the meaning of the transformation of environmental concerns into a widely accepted concept, it is useful to recall the original purpose of the ecological project. The ecological movement finds its origins in a protest aimed at defending the right of individuals to regain influence over their ways of living, of producing, and of consuming. As stressed by Gorz (1992), it started as a radical cultural movement, as an attempt by individuals to control and understand the consequences of their actions. With the ecological critique, activists hoped to refocus attention on local knowledge and practices and to bridge the separation of humans from nature, a division that had been at the heart of the Enlightenment project.

In the 1970s, the ecological movement became a political movement, and there was an awareness that the demands of ecology were not only sectorial and local aspirations but rather represented a value shared across national divides (Smith 1996; Gorz 1992).² The publication of the report "Limits to Growth" by the Club of Rome in 1972 gave a scientific backing to these cultural demands and showed the risks posed by the model of industrial growth on the future of life on earth. The report provided a holistic view of the interrelationship between population growth, food production and consumption, the industrialization process, depletion of non-renewable resources and waste and pollution at the global level, recognizing that waste and pollution are not only a problem for the living conditions and consumption patterns of the population, but affect the very basis of the productive sphere's reproduction (Meadows, Meadows, Rander and Behrens 1972). For the first time, environmental degradation provoked by economic growth was considered from a global perspective, going beyond the occasional questioning of pollution problems during the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, the report launched a real debate on the morality of growth and of the differences in consumption and living standards between developed and developing countries.

The 1970s also represented an inflection in the history of social mobilization and collective action with the emergence of the "new social movements," which identify themselves as value movements carrying universal interests going beyond class, nation, sex and race borders. The new social movements such as the environmental movement appear as "modern" in the sense that they are based upon the belief that history's course can be changed by social actors and are not determined by what Touraine calls a "metasocial principle" (Offe 1988, 219). Environmentalists believe that, although representing a real challenge to our present lifestyles and habits, it is possible to move towards a sustainable society

that respects nature and privileges well-being over accumulation.

Speaking about the existence of a unique and unified “green movement” is clearly incorrect. Environmental concerns mean different things to different people, take many forms and are expressed through different channels. In addition, environmentalism takes very different forms in developed or in developing countries. It can mean fighting for an even better quality of life in advanced countries, and fighting for subsistence or even survival in poor countries. Despite this diversity, for the purpose of academic inquiry, three main components of the “green movement,” albeit sometimes overlapping, can be distinguished. These three categories should be viewed as “ideal-typical” and not necessarily mutually exclusive.³

The first tendency of the ecological movement, deep ecology, is typically a postmodern movement.⁴ In philosophical terms, deep ecology challenges the separation between humans and nature that was at the heart of modern humanism. Deep ecology is not “anthropocentric,” it is “ecocentric.” As observed by Merchant (1992), it seeks a total transformation in science and in worldviews that will lead to the replacement of the mechanistic paradigm (which has dominated the past three hundred years) by an ecological framework of interconnectedness and reciprocity. The ideas of deep ecology have influenced (among others) Greenpeace, the largest green NGO, which claims that humanist value systems must be replaced by supra-humanist values that place any vegetal or animal life in the sphere of legal and moral consideration (Ferry 1992). Greenpeace is therefore an example of an environmental organization which, based on scientific reports and examinations, acts to change worldviews and consciousness in order to promote a shift to “ecocentrism” rather than trying to act to transform the production systems which lie at the root of environmental problems.⁵ Yet, while having influenced the most well-known environmental NGO, deep ecology remains a fairly marginal wing of the green movement. Deep ecologists have been criticized for their lack of a political critique, failing to recognize that the idea itself of “ecocentrism” is “anthropocentric.” As stressed by Merchant, deep ecologists take the character of capitalist democracy for granted rather than submitting it to a critique. Their tendency to refuse to consider economic policy and to assume a purely conservationist standpoint relegates them to a secondary position.

The second component of the “green movement” is what can be called the “social ecology” movement, which is to a large extent composed of people from the “New Left,” dissatisfied with Marxism. Contrary to the deep ecologists, social ecologists maintain an anthropocentric perspective: the concern for nature is understood as a concern for the envi-

ronment of human beings. Social ecologists seek transformations in production and reproduction systems, that is, a transformation of political economy, as the way to achieve sustainability, social equity and well being. Social ecologists see a contradiction between the logic of capitalism and the logic of environmental protection. For them, environmental protection cannot be made dependent upon economic development, because development, in its liberal sense, has meant the subordination of every aspect of social life to the market economy, and can therefore no longer be considered as a desirable goal. The hegemonic view on “sustainable development,” which rehabilitates development as the global goal of humans, is thus unsatisfactory. Social ecologists call for a rethinking of the theoretical basis of development that should include not only economic but also political and epistemological dimensions, such as the questions of participation, of empowerment and local knowledge systems. For them, what makes development “unsustainable” at the global level is the pattern of consumption in rich countries. Thinking about sustainability thus implies considering the contradictions imposed by the structural inequalities of the global system (Sachs 1992; Lipietz 1993; Redclift 1992). Finally, social ecologists vary to a certain extent in the North and in the South: generally speaking, organizations in the North sometimes carry their rejection of development as far as to strike postmodern stances, while organizations in the South focus more on equity and on the need to redistribute the benefits of development.

Finally, there is a more technocratic tendency to the green movement, a tendency that tries to make economic growth and environmental protection appear as compatible goals, which need not require a profound change in values, motivations and economic interests of social actors, nor new models of economic accumulation. For them, it is because capitalist production methods and life standards are not developed enough that environmental problems emerge. The evidence is that environmental standards are higher in richer countries. Technocratic environmentalists seek to preserve the environment through the establishment of international institutions, the use of economic and market instruments and the development of clean and “green” technology. The result is a rather apolitical approach and activists who, though still interested in environmental protection, are not primarily committed to ideas of equity and social justice, or at least not as committed as social ecologists (Gudynas 1993). The technocratic tendency is thus essentially a rich country tendency, although it is also present in some elite circles in the South. These environmentalists tend to focus on issues of population for example, arguing that the biggest threat to the environment comes from high population growth in the Third World and the pressure it will bring to bear on the stock of natural

resources. Technocratic environmentalists usually tend to belong to organizations which have little or no membership, and rely on their technical and legal expertise and on their research and publishing programs to influence decision-making. Through their close relationship with government and other influential actors and their easy access to international organizations, these organizations tend to have a greater impact than activist membership organizations (Porter and Brown 1996).⁶

Today, it can be said that this technocratic approach appears to be prevailing over both the biocentric (deep ecology) and the social ecology perspectives and has become what is today mainstream environmentalism, which finds its major expression in the concept of “sustainable development.” Despite the challenging and radical nature of ecological concerns, the fact that they might present a potential for change in the present economic model, they were ultimately reframed so as to constitute what appears as an apolitical, techno-managerial approach.

The Formation of a Consensus on “Sustainable Development”

It is interesting to examine how the apparent consensus around the concept of “sustainable development” was built and how the project of global environmental “management” became hegemonic. Two main actors have contributed to the hegemony of the liberal environmental management project. One is the scientific and policy-making environmental community, or, in the words of Peter Haas, the environmental “epistemic community” (Haas 1990); the other actor is business and industry.

The Brundtland Report, the United Nations Conference and the Global North-South “Bargain”

International environmental politics did not emerge in the 1990s. As early as 1972, a United Nations Conference on the Human Environment took place in Stockholm, launching the era of international environmental negotiations. Stockholm did produce some significant outcomes, leading to the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), based in Nairobi, which coordinates environmental action within the United Nations. The context of the Stockholm Conference was not very favorable to the adoption of strong environmental commitments. Developing countries were unsatisfied with the UN system and preparing the movement for a New International Economic Order. They were not willing to yield part of their sovereignty over natural resources in the name of environmental protection,

and denounced the emergence of “eco-imperialism.” The oil crisis of the 1970s relegated environmental protection to a marginal position in international relations.

In the 1980s, the international climate started to change as the debt crisis was seriously affecting developing countries and their role and participation in international fora. In this context, “international commissions” were established to try to elaborate global proposals to promote peace and development, such as the Brandt Commission. Efforts were also undertaken to replace environmental protection on the international political agenda. The World Commission on Environment and Development was established in 1983 under the presidency of Gro Harlem Brundtland, and asked to produce a comprehensive report on the situation of the environment at the global level.

The work of the Commission represented a landmark in international initiatives to promote environmental protection as it produced the concept of *sustainable development*, a concept that would become the basis of environmental politics worldwide. Sustainable development is defined by the Brundtland Report as a development that is “consistent with future as well as present needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). The concept of sustainable development was built as a political expression of the recognition of the “finiteness” of natural resources and of its potential impact on economic activities. Indeed, the report argues that, while we have in the past been concerned about the impacts of economic growth upon the environment, we are now forced to concern ourselves with the impacts of ecological stress — degradation of soils, water regimes, atmosphere and forests — upon our economic prospects.

The report offered a holistic, global vision of today’s situation by arguing that the environmental crisis, the developmental crisis and the energetic crisis are all part of the same, global crisis. It offers solutions to this global crisis, which are mainly of two kinds. On the one hand there are solutions based on international cooperation, with the aim of achieving an international economic system committed to growth and the elimination of poverty in the world, able to manage common goods and to provide peace, security, development and environmental protection. On the other hand, come recommendations aiming at institutional and legal change, including measures not only at the domestic level but also at the level of international institutions. The report emphasizes the expansion and improvement of the growth-oriented industrial model of development as the way to solve the global crisis.

The Brundtland Report also promoted the view that global environmental degradation can be seen as a source of economic disruption and political tension, therefore entering the sphere of strategic considerations. For the Brundtland Commission, the traditional forms of national sovereignty are

increasingly challenged by the realities of ecological and economic interdependence, especially in the case of shared ecosystems and of “global commons,” those parts of the planet that fall outside national jurisdictions. Here, sustainable development can be secured only through international cooperation and agreed regimes for surveillance, development, and management on the common interest.

For example, the consequences of climate change such as rising sea levels and the effects of temperature variations on agricultural production would require deep changes in the economy and impose high costs on all countries, thus leading to very unstable situations. The issue of forest preservation can also fit into this context, since forests contribute to the stability of climate by acting as carbon sinks, and assure the regeneration of ecosystems by providing reservoirs of biological diversity. Preserving forests then becomes more than an ecological concern: it is also a security imperative. So the “environmental security” discourse was also a cause for the need to find a “consensual solution” to issues of environmental protection.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, marked the official institutionalization of environmental issues in the international political agenda.⁷ Twenty years after the 1972 Stockholm Conference, which was on the “Human Environment,” Rio meant a real shift in the vision that had dominated environmental politics so far. After Rio, environmental considerations became incorporated into development, and a “global bargain” was struck between North and South on the basis of the acceptance from both sides of the desirability of achieving a truly global economy which would guarantee growth and better environmental records to all. UNCED recognized the “global finiteness” of the world, i.e., the scarcity of natural resources available for development, but adopted the view that, if the planet is to be saved, it will be through more and better development, through environmental management and “eco-efficiency.”

The UNCED process involved over a hundred and fifty hours of official negotiations spread over two and a half years, including two planning meetings, four Preparatory Committees (Prepcoms), and the final negotiation session at the Rio Summit in June 1992.⁸ The major result of UNCED is called “Agenda 21,” a 700-page global plan of action which should guide countries towards sustainability through the 21st century, encompassing virtually every sector affecting environment and development. Besides Agenda 21, UNCED produced two non-binding documents, the “Rio Declaration” and the Forest Principles. In addition, the climate change and the biodiversity conventions, which were negotiated independently of the UNCED process in different fora, were opened for signature during the Rio Summit and are considered as

UNCED-related agreements. The “Rio Declaration,” which was the subject of much dispute between the Group of 77 (the coalition of developing countries) and industrialized countries, mainly the United States, illustrates well the kind of bargain reached in Rio.⁹ It recognizes the “right of all nations to development” and their sovereignty over their national resources, identifies “common but differentiated responsibility” for the global environment, and emphasizes the need to eradicate poverty, all demands put forward by the Group of 77. In return, the suggestions by the G77 to include consumption patterns in developed countries as the “main cause” of environmental degradation and the call for “new and additional resources and technology transfer on preferential and concessional terms” were rejected by OECD countries.¹⁰ In the end, on the issue of finance, an institution called the “Global Environment Facility” (GEF) was set, under the joint administration of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), as the only funding mechanism on global environmental issues, and OECD countries committed themselves to achieving a target of 0.7 percent of GNP going to ODA (Overseas Development Assistance) by the year 2000, to help developing countries implement UNCED’s decisions.

Despite the failure of the G77 to win significant concessions on financial resources, if one considers the differences in priorities between developed and developing countries and the conflictual character of the negotiation process, UNCED’s outcomes were still seen by the international establishment as quite impressive, marking “an important new stage in the longer-term development of national and international norms and institutions needed to meet the challenge of environmentally sustainable development” (Porter and Brown 1996, 129). A Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established to monitor and report on progress towards implementing UNCED’s decisions. In particular, the CSD’s stated aims are to enhance international cooperation by rationalizing the intergovernmental decision-making capacity, and to examine progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and international levels.

After UNCED, environmental considerations were “integrated” at all levels of action. The “sustainable development paradigm,” as some authors recognize, is already replacing the “exclusionist paradigm” (i.e., the idea of an infinite supply of natural resources) in some multilateral financial institutions, as well as in some state bureaucracies and in some parliamentary committees. Most economists now acknowledge that natural resources are scarce and have a value that should be internalized in costs and prices. Organizations such as the European Union made the “inte-

gration” of environmental concerns one of their leading policy principles.¹¹ Many countries carried out environmental policy reform to implement UNCED’s decisions and the Agenda 21. The boundaries of environmental politics were broadened and its links with all other major issues on the international arena, such as trade, investments, debt, transports, for example, were examined.

Efforts were also undertaken to improve environmental records of multilateral finance and development institutions. The World Bank, which has a long history of contributing to environmental degradation by financing destructive projects, went through a “greening” process, and now has a “Department of the Environment” which conducts “environmental impact assessments” and imposes “environmental conditionalities” before granting loans. The World Trade Organization has a “Committee on Trade and Environment” (CTE) which is in charge of ensuring that open trade and environmental protection are mutually supportive. All these efforts can be seen, according to Porter and Brown (1996), as part of a longer-term process of evolution toward environmentally sound norms governing trade, finance, management of global commons, and even domestic development patterns.

Environmental considerations were then to be introduced in all major international bureaucracies as a dimension to take into consideration in decision-making processes, and as a challenge for global management. To a certain extent, the “technocratic” approach became hegemonic because it best suited the interests of the international development elite as it magnified its managerial responsibilities. In a time when the legitimacy and utility of the United Nations system was being seriously questioned by its idealizer and major financial supporter — the United States — the goal of making environment and development compatible was seized by some UN agencies as an unexpected opportunity to regain credibility, as well as to be granted funds and to hire new staff for recently created units on “trade and environment” or “finance and environment.” UNCED provided a new legitimacy to international organizations such as the World Bank or the World Trade Organization and to their bureaucracies, which now try to assume a leading role in “managing the earth.” With the promotion of economic growth to a planetary imperative and the rehabilitation of technological progress, both development institutions and organizations and states appeared as legitimate agents to solve global environmental problems (Chatterjee and Finger 1994; McMichael 1996).

If international organizations have benefited from the global perspective that emerged from Rio, they have also contributed to mold it. There is an active “epistemic community,” which includes both the international organization establishment and large environmental NGOs, promoting the

“global environmental management” approach.¹² These groups tend to believe that their moral views are cosmopolitan and universal, and emphasize the existence of an international society of human beings sharing common moral bonds. In this kind of “same boat” ideology, environmental concerns tend to be presented as moral imperatives, related neither to political nor to economic advantages. It would be a consensual concern, a sort of universal principle accepted over borders and political boundaries. An example of an institution promoting these ideas is given by the Commission on Global Governance. In the words of the Commission, “we believe that a global civic ethic to guide action within the global neighborhood and leadership infused with that ethic are vital to the quality of global governance. We call for a common commitment to core values that all humanity could uphold. We further believe humanity as a whole will be best served by recognition of a set of common rights and responsibilities” (The Commission on Global Governance 1995, 9).

Part of the Green movement came to support this “same boat ideology” and was incorporated into the epistemic community. Actually, mainstream conservationist environmentalists were fully admitted into the global environmental management establishment, conferring legitimacy to the UNCED process.¹³ NGOs contributed to UNCED to a degree unprecedented in the history of UN negotiations. NGOs lobbied at the official process, participated in Prepcoms and were even admitted in some countries’ delegations, a novelty which was rendered possible by resolution 44/228 calling for “relevant non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council to contribute to the Conference, as appropriate.”¹⁴

In addition, during UNCED, NGOs organized in Rio a meeting which ran parallel to the official governmental conference. The “Global Forum,” which gathered about 30,000 people, represented 760 associations, among participants and visitors, in a sort of “NGO city.” During one week, the Global Forum became home to environmentalists and social activists, to Indians and ethnic minorities, and to feminists and homosexual groups, all united to “save the earth.” NGOs organized many demonstrations protesting against the modest results of the official summit and elaborated their own agenda for improving environmental protection worldwide. Yet, in the eyes of some observers, NGO efforts tended to become coopted by larger and richer groups from advanced countries, which had more means, not only financially but also in terms of organizational, scientific and research capacity, to promote their own views (Chatterjee and Finger 1994).

In the end, NGOs decided that they would sign, in Rio, NGOs “treaties” on all the issues being discussed at the UNCED official meeting. The main activity at the Global Forum was then the “treaty negotiation” process, just like at

the official forum, a process which proved to be very disappointing, as the same North-South conflicts that were blocking UNCED tended to separate northern and southern NGOs. Ultimately, the NGO treaty process was little more than a pantomime of real diplomacy, and ultimately, the treaties agreed upon, negotiated among a couple of dozen NGOs, had a very modest impact on the future of NGO activities.¹⁵ The representation at the Global Forum was also very unequal, illustrating differences in means between northern NGOs, very present, and southern NGOs. Asian, and above all, African NGOs, were severely under-represented. Differences in associative traditions and language barriers also explain the hegemony of Anglo-Saxon organizations at the Global Forum. In the end, influential NGOs decided to concentrate their efforts on lobbying the official conference.

The Earth Summit in 1992 thus represented a real moment of acceleration for NGO activities, as it allowed some of them to have a better idea of what their counterparts were doing in other parts of the world, and was the base for establishing cooperation projects and partnerships among organizations. Yet while NGO efforts illustrated by the Global Forum aimed at uniting NGOs worldwide, the green movement came out of Rio appearing even weaker and more fragmented, with the polarization between “realist,” co-operative NGOs on the one side and “radical,” transformative NGOs on the other.

Finally, the “sustainable development” approach also suited the interests of some governments in the Third World which are primarily committed to economic development and sought through UNCED to obtain concessions in financial and technological terms in exchange of their support for environmental management. Some Third World countries are still marked by a “developmentalist” ideology in which economic development comes before all else. In addition, resource rich countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, or Brazil, have traditionally had a vision of unending and expanding frontiers, in which land and natural resources are unlimited and no constraints are seen to exist on the use of resources. As a result, they were unwilling to accept the elaboration of international regimes aiming at limiting their sovereignty over the exploitation of natural resources.

The issue of sovereignty had long been a major source of tension during international environmental negotiations. As long ago as the Stockholm Conference in 1972 developing countries had pressed for the inclusion of a specific principle on the topic. Principle 21 of the Stockholm Declaration stated that “States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do

not cause damage to the environment of other States or areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.” The same debate arose when UNCED was convened, and in the end the sovereignty principle as in stood in the Stockholm Declaration’s Principle 21 was included in the Rio Declaration.¹⁶

In addition, a guarantee that economic development would continue to be the priority on the international agenda was an essential element for developing countries. The reaffirmation of the right to development, and of the sovereignty principle, ensured in Rio, were then the two elements that made agreement at UNCED possible for the Group of 77. The alliance between environment and development could then become official. As described by the vice-president of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), “it has not been too difficult to push the environment lobby of the North and the development lobby of the South together. And there is now in fact a blurring of the distinction between the two, so they are coming to have a common consensus around the theme of Sustainable Development” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 64). Yet to fully understand the nature of this consensus around sustainable development, one last actor needs to be introduced. The actor whose vision shaped most fundamentally the content of this consensus and the real winner of Rio, the business and industry sector, and in particular transnational corporations.

The Influence of Business and Industry

Throughout this process of consensus formation, business and industry exerted a structuring influence. They succeeded in making their view hegemonic, and ended up being considered post-Rio as a major social actor providing solutions to the global ecological crisis. As influential economic agents, transnational corporations (TNCs) have activities that directly impact on the situation of the environment. TNCs have been a constant target of NGOs, which point out their preponderant role in environmental degradation. Several public campaigns and boycotts have been organized to draw the public’s attention on the issue and force TNCs to comply with legislation, adopt higher environmental standards or change production processes.

On the issue of tropical deforestation for example, NGOs have pointed out that corporations such as British Petroleum, Shell or Mitsubishi bear a large responsibility for forest devastation worldwide. Already in 1989, *The Sunday Times* directly accused British Petroleum and Shell of contributing to the depletion of the Amazonian rainforest in Brazil.¹⁷ More recently, the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) accused Mitsubishi, together with its subsidiary Meiwa, of being “the greatest corporate threat to the world’s tropical, temperate and boreal forests.” RAN accuses

Mitsubishi of illegal logging, transfer pricing, tax evasion, violations of pollution standards, anti-trust activity, violation of native land claims, and employment of illegal aliens.¹⁸ Yet despite evidence of the role of corporations in environmental degradation, the issue was scarcely discussed and questioned during the UNCED process. There is, it is true, a chapter in Agenda 21 dedicated to the role of business and industry. Yet the document does not in any way blame business for its major contribution to the ecological crisis. Agenda 21 contents itself with providing guidelines to firms in order to help them improve their environmental records.

But this is not to say that business and industry were absent or uninterested in the negotiation. On the contrary, large corporations were very active in the UNCED process, and even before it. As early as 1984 a World Industry Conference on Environmental Management (WICEM I) had been organized in France to recommend actions to include environmental concerns in industry planning. WICEM II, which took place in 1991, adopted sustainable development as its main axiom. The corporations agreed that there should be convergence, and not conflict, between economic development and environmental protection, and launched the Business Charter for Sustainable Development. In 1990, the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD) was created under the chair of the Swiss industrialist Stephan Schmidheiny, personal friend of Maurice Strong (UNCED's Secretary General) and his special adviser for business and industry during the UNCED process. The BCSD was created as a group of 48 chief executive officers of corporations from all regions of the world, some of them with a rather negative environmental record, including Chevron, Volkswagen, Nissan, Nippon, Mitsubishi, Dow, Shell, CVRD, Aracruz, and Axel Johnson. The BCSD was closely involved in the preparation of the Conference, and, through Strong, had special access to UNCED's Secretariat. As a result, after Rio, corporations became "partners in dialogue," and their vision of sustainability became the dominant vision. According to Chatterjee and Finger (1994), corporations shaped the very way environment and development are being looked at: business and industry's worldview came out of Rio as the solution to the global environmental crisis and no longer as its cause.

In the words of the BCSD, "the cornerstone of sustainable development is a system of open, competitive markets in which prices are made to reflect costs of environmental as well as other resources. When viewed within the context of sustainable development, environmental concerns become not just a cost of doing business, but a potent source of competitive advantage. Enterprises that embrace the concept can effectively realize the advantages in more efficient processes, improvements in productivity, lower compliance costs, and new market opportunities." Thus, by creating competitive

advantages, environmental concerns can provide corporations with new market opportunities and be the source of new profit. Finally, business sees the new era of global development as the era of market efficiency. "It is time for business to take the lead," says Schmidheiny; "change by business is less painful, more efficient, and cheaper for consumers, for governments, and for business themselves. By living up to its responsibilities, business will be able to shape a reasonable and appropriate path toward sustainable development" (Schmidheiny 1992, 28-30; Chatterjee and Finger 1994, 122-8). The ecological crisis perceived in fact by business not as a real crisis but rather as a set of adverse and controllable side-effects of development. Hence it is to be solved via increased efficiency which is to be achieved not through government regulation, but through open markets with a new concern for internalizing externalities.

Today, the BCSD has become the WBCSD (World Business Council for Sustainable Development), under the chair of Börn Stigsen. It now has 125 members representing companies such as British Petroleum, Ciba Geigy, Nestle, Monsanto and the Western Mining Corporation. The WBCSD is said to have led industry input into the UN Commission for Sustainable Development and UNCED's 1997 review, revealing the emergence of corporate environmentalism as a driving force of global environmental management.¹⁹

As stressed by Karliner (1997), after Rio, global corporate environmentalism has helped build a public image of transnational corporations as the world's responsible global citizens, setting the terms of the debate along lines favorable to their interests. In the process, corporate environmentalism has partially neutralized efforts — ranging from popular environmental movements to intergovernmental treaties and conventions — that pose a threat to their activities. While before Rio the environmental movement used the system to advance its goals, now the system has appropriated the environmental discourse and is using the environmental movement.

This new strategy has meant increased efforts by corporations to increase cooperation with other environmental actors, in particular with the environmental movement. As noted by Bryant and Bailey (1997, 120), TNCs have sought to cultivate links with moderate NGOs in order to neutralize the threat posed to business from environmentalists. Actually, some NGOs today depend on TNCs for financial support. Stauber and Rampton (1995) observe that this process of funding NGOs and cooperating with them is part of a larger attempt to divide-and-conquer the NGO sector by winning support among moderate NGOs while attacking radical NGOs which campaign against TNCs' activities. Moderate NGOs and TNCs became partners in the international environmental establishment and now work together in the system of global environmental governance.

From Rio 92 To New York 97: The Rise And Fall Of “Global Environmental Management”

UNCED’s Review Five Years after Rio

Five years after Rio, as foreseen at UNCED, the review of UNCED’s implementation culminated with the June 1997 New York Summit, often referred to as “Earth Summit II.” Earth Summit II’s official name is UNGASS, United Nations General Assembly Special Session. During UNGASS, five years of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) were presented, including a report by the Secretary-General assessing the progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 and recommendations for future action and priorities.²⁰ UNGASS was carried out at the highest level of political representation — Heads of State and Governments — and, as UNGASS itself said, aimed to “re-energize our commitment to further action on goals and objectives set out by the Rio Earth Summit.”²¹

A new energy was indeed necessary: the main outcome of the meeting was the public recognition of the failure of international efforts to promote long-term sustainability. Yet it only adopted a document, the “Program for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21,” and did not produce a political statement or binding commitments needed to reverse unsustainable trends.²² The text acknowledges that, five years after UNCED, the state of the global environment has continued to deteriorate, and reviews the situation in all areas of action.

It notes progress in institutional development, international consensus-building, public participation and private sector actions, which have allowed some countries to curb pollution and slow the rate of resource degradation. Yet, overall, trends are worsening, polluting emissions have increased, and marginal progress has been made in addressing unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Inadequate and unsafe water supplies are still aggravating health problems, the situation of fragile ecosystems is still deteriorating, and non-renewable resources are used at an unsustainable rate. Despite progress in material and energy efficiency, the report concludes that overall trends remain unsustainable.²³ The document then reviews progress in all sectors and issues, *inter alia*, fresh water, oceans and seas, forests, energy, transport and atmosphere. Finally, it recommends means of implementation and adopts a program of work of the CSD for the next five years, with a commitment to ensure that the next comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in 2002 demonstrates greater measurable progress in achieving sustainable development.

Interestingly enough, all these trends are examined within the framework of economic globalization. The very assessment of progress made since UNCED starts by highlighting that the five years elapsed since then have been characterized by the accelerated globalization of interactions among countries in the areas of world trade, foreign direct investment and capital markets. The document recognizes the unevenness of the globalization process, stressing that marginalization and income inequality is increasing in some countries as well as within countries and that unemployment has worsened in many countries.

Yet it is believed that globalization presents new opportunities and challenges. The report notes that a limited number of developing countries have been able to take advantage of those trends, attracting large inflows of external private capital and experiencing significant export-led growth and acceleration of growth in per capita gross domestic product. The view is thus that all countries could take advantage of the globalization trend. It is not perceived that only a few countries, due to specific conjunctural conditions, including interest rates and the monetary situation for example, can attract the volume of FDI necessary to feed the high growth rates praised in the document. The conceptual link with economic globalization appears as somehow flawed. It is not mentioned that significant export-led growth and the acceleration of growth in per capita GDP, if not controlled by an effective system of environmental protection, might be responsible for the worsening of overall trends for sustainable development.²⁴

In addition, though the text perceives unsustainable patterns of production and consumption as the major cause of continued deterioration of the global environment and observes that unsustainable patterns in the industrialized countries continue to aggravate the threats to the environment, only very vague actions and guidelines are adopted to change them, such as recommending the internalization of environmental costs, developing indicators, promoting efficiency, information, technology, and the role of business in shaping more sustainable patterns of consumption.²⁵ No binding commitment to deal effectively with consumption patterns or to establish sustainable production and consumption strategies has been adopted, and the role of actors who tend to promote unsustainable production and consumption patterns, such as business, is actually strengthened.

As well as consumption and production patterns, another distorted linkage to structural economic conditions is made with the recognition that as a result of globalization, external factors have become critical in determining the success or failure of developing countries in their national efforts. It is rightly observed that environmental protection can only be

promoted through a shift in the international economy and the establishment of a genuine partnership in order to achieve a more equitable global economy. Yet the idea is that the way to make all countries, in particular developing countries, benefit from globalization is through a combination of trade liberalization, economic development and environmental protection. It is believed that the international trading system should have the capacity to further integrate environmental considerations and enhance its contribution to sustainable development, without undermining its open, equitable and non-discriminatory character.²⁶ The text limits itself to recommendations to implement the Uruguay Round and promote trade liberalization.

The reality of the present international trading system, a system which promotes discrimination against developing countries, consolidates global disparities and supports unsustainable practices not only in terms of consumption and production but also encouraging transport and pollution and shift from traditional cultures, is not seen as contradictory with the goal of long-term sustainability. With respect to transport, the text notes that the transport sector and mobility in general have an essential and positive role to play in economic and social development, and transportation needs will undoubtedly increase. It also observes that, in the future, transportation is expected to be the major driving force behind a growing world demand for energy. The document accepts that present trends are unsustainable, and adopted recommendations to make transport become more sustainable and mitigate its negative impacts. Yet the document fails to recognize the major cause of transport's expansion, namely, trade liberalization, which encourages production to relocate on the base of a traditional government subsidy to transports or allows for products originating at the other end of the world to be cheaper than products produced a few miles from the consumer. The fact that the whole globalization project is based on the continuity of cheap transport is not discussed.²⁷

Generally speaking, UNCED's review was critically received at all levels, being criticized both by diplomats, NGOs and by the press. Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia noted that the compact achieved at Rio had eroded along with much of the high-profile attention to sustainable development generated by UNCED. And the Earth Negotiations Bulletin, a publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, noted that "in 1992 one could scarcely escape the news of UNCED and/or the environment in the media. This is not the case today... In international relations, perceptions are everything, and if UNGASS is ultimately billed as a non-event it will not bode well for the future of sustainable development or the UN in general during this critical time of its reform."²⁸ Most of the world's press was unanimous in condemning the failure of

the New York Summit. The French newspaper *Libération*, for example, noted in its article "The Earth Summit goes round in circles" that the New York summit closed on an acknowledgment of impotence.²⁹

Not only did the conference show the little progress accomplished in five years, it also failed to commit governments to significant concrete action and to provide means for implementing Agenda 21. No commitment was taken to achieve the goal of 0.7 % of GDP going to ODA, considered necessary to move towards sustainability. Development assistance today does not exceed 0.3% of GDP, on average, and, in the case of the United States, it was only 0.1 % in 1995.

The US was also the target of much criticism for failing to commit to effectively fighting global warming and to accept concrete reductions in levels of greenhouse gas emissions. At the end of the climate negotiations, no legally binding commitments to target and timetables emerged, and the conference only produced a watery compromise to seek satisfactory results at the then forthcoming Kyoto Conference on Climate Change, which took place in December 1997.³⁰

In short, on most major issues at stake, New York 1997 represented a backwards step in relation to UNCED's outcomes. NGOs speak of a scandalous betrayal of the Rio promises and of an utterly shameful outcome from Earth Summit II.³¹ The reality is that the world has changed since Rio, and this change has a name: globalization. The Rio 1992 bargain was based on the commitment by developed countries to provide increased financial resources through ODA and technology transfer to help developing countries move towards sustainability. The implementation of UNCED's agreement was in a sense made dependent upon this aid. However, since Rio, ODA levels have been declining and the private sector has become the major agent of change. Government spending is being cut and state reforms are being carried out worldwide, often reducing not only ODA but also domestic environmental budgets. At UNGASS 1997, developing countries through the G77 tried to obtain a recommitment from the North to UNCED's bargain, including an increase in financial flows, technology transfer and an international economic system more favorable to developing countries. Yet today, as foreign investment replaces overseas development assistance in amount and frequency, UNCED's bargain seems politically outdated, and, as a result, its implementation appears highly jeopardized.³²

Finally, at the level of NGOs, the fracture among environmentalists is today stronger than five years ago. True, NGOs did lobby the CSD and try to influence the official negotiation process. Indeed, NGOs achieved unprecedented access to the intergovernmental process, with Greenpeace and the Third World Network being allowed to make

speeches before the General Assembly. However, most of them had given up the idea of having a unified position on all environmental matters, and no "Global Forum II" was organized in New York, only an inappropriately named "Global Gathering" took place.

The Limits of Global Environmental Management

Although steps have been taken between Rio 1992 and New York 1997 in the direction of the globalization of environmental protection, the world seems to be further away from sustainability today than it was then. With environmental globalization and the consensual concept of sustainable development, the perception of an ecological crisis, or at least of ecological limits to development, appears to have vanished: acting for environmental protection increasingly tends to be seen as a technical problem, the task of increasing efficiency and of better using resources such as science, technology, information, capital, and institutions. The cause of environmental problems is no longer perceived as linked to industrial development and ever-increasing material accumulation, but it has become the very existence of human beings. Environmental problems are understood as unavoidable, as side effects of human activities, and efforts are then directed at solving these problems.

Indeed, global environmental management and sustainable development can be seen as "problem solving" concepts, in Robert Cox's terminology, as they only represent a strategy to allow the pursuit of present lifestyles and standards.³³ Following Strange's call for a critical International Political Economy and the need to address the question of "who gets what, how and why," the analysis of the evolution of the system of global environmental management has revealed that it tends to strengthen the mechanisms of exclusion and inequality (Strange 1988). Global environmental management and sustainable development tend to be uneven concepts, as they do not aim at promoting the correction of global disparities. They attempt to offer a universal framework in which the global society is the unit of analysis and a large share of the blame for environmental degradation rests on the Third World. Instead of stressing affluence, over-production and over-consumption in advanced countries as the main causes of environmental degradation, it tends to suggest that problems arise from poverty. Environmental degradation is transformed from a problem of affluence into a problem of poverty. The responsibility is shifted from major polluters and industrialized countries' abuses to all inhabitants of the planet. For Chatterjee and Finger (1994), the only different element in this approach is that development is now looked at from a global perspective, making the development discourse universal.

And the New York Summit represented a step further in that direction, asserting the desirability of the globalization process and underlining its beneficial aspects. It also consolidated the role of business and industry as privileged partners of the United Nations, establishing permanent contact and consultation on environmental issues. The regulatory situation relating to TNCs and business in general has worsened greatly in the past five years (Khor 1997). Already in 1992, the US government successfully pressured for downsizing the UN Center on Transnational Corporations (UNCTC), which had been set up to monitor the social, economic and environmental impacts of corporate investment in developing countries. Today, the UN is considering cutting a sub-group of the UN Human Rights Commission which addresses the impacts of corporations on a broad spectrum on rights issues. The main international initiatives and institution for establishing guidelines for the behavior of corporations, which could together lay down a code of obligations and rights of TNCs and states, have disappeared.

In their place has come a strong and growing opposite trend to reduce and remove regulations that governments have over corporations, to grant them increased rights and powers, and to reduce the authority of states to control their behavior and operations. The Uruguay Round for example has already granted far higher standards of intellectual property rights protection to corporations, thus facilitating further their global monopolization of technology and ability to make profit through higher prices. There are also strong pressures from Northern governments at the World Trade Organization to grant foreign companies the right of entry, establishment and national treatment in all WTO member states (Khor 1997).

In addition, the partnership between the UN and global corporations seems to have been further strengthened in the past two years. In part due to the difficult financial and political situation in which the UN finds itself as a result of the US government's refusal to pay the US \$1.6 billion it owes, the UN is now openly seeking political and economic support from corporations. At the last Davos Economic Forum in Switzerland, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called for a human face to the global market and challenged business leaders to adhere to universal values defined by the UN and contribute to global environmental protection, indicating a broader trend of growing UN collaboration with transnational corporations.

Recently, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has solicited funds from global corporations with poor records on human rights, labor and the environment, such as Dow Chemical, Citibank and Rio Tinto Plc, in exchange of special UNDP sanctioned logos for use by

corporate sponsors. Called the "Global Sustainable Development Facility (GSDF)," the plan calls for corporate sponsors to funnel donations to a separate entity which they will manage. In the words of the UNDP, the GSDF "brings together leading global corporations and the UNDP, to jointly define and implement a new facility to eradicate poverty, create sustainable economic growth and allow the private sector to prosper through the inclusion of two billion new people in the global market economy."³⁴

According to the internal memo, sponsors will benefit from the advice and support of UNDP through a special relationship, allowing corporations unprecedented access to UNDP's network of offices, high level governmental contacts and the knock-on effects of its reputation. The plan, revealed through a leaked internal UNDP memo, has been heavily criticized by observers and NGOs, who warn that the interests of global corporations are often at odds with the basic economic and social needs of the world's poor and the values of human rights and environmental protection the UN is meant to protect. According to Ward Morehouse, President of the US Council on International and Public Affairs, the UN should be monitoring the human rights and environmental impacts of corporations in developing and industrialized nations, not granting special favors... Increasing collaboration will lead to a reluctance to criticize corporations which are central players in the human rights, environmental and developmental dramas unfolding every day across the globe.³⁵

To conclude, the UN and international organizations in general seem to be moving towards the adoption of a market-oriented global model of environmental governance, which sees economic globalization as a positive and integrative process. The key actors of economic globalization, transnational corporations, are taking the leading role and consolidating their influence on the system of international environmental governance. With the adoption of this project of global environmental management, one particular understanding of the world, the one promoted by business and large corporations in Western affluent societies, becomes hegemonic and appears to be universal (Shiva 1993). Environmental concerns have been incorporated as a mere dimension of the "globalization project," understood in McMichael's definition as "an emerging vision of the world and its resources as a globally organized and managed free trade/free enterprise economy pursued by a largely unaccountable political and economic elite" (McMichael 1996, 300). This project advocates a universalized model of production, of consumption, and thus of dealing with problems of environmental protection resulting from these activities. By assuming its universality, it tends to marginalize other knowledge and other solutions to problems of environmental protection. Interestingly

enough, it was unanimously recognized that the most positive result and follow-up of UNCED was without doubt realized at the micro-level, within the Local Agenda 21 framework. In an effort to implement Agenda 21 locally, social groups have worked together with local authorities to make sustainable development a reality at the local level, often on a truly participatory basis and reflecting grassroots concern and involvement.

From a critical point of view, global management's failure, exemplified at the New York Summit, was not entirely unexpected. Indeed, the global management approach inspired by business perspectives and propagated by the international development establishment tends to strengthen the globalization process at work today, failing to counter its effects in terms of social exclusion and environmental destruction. It tends to weaken social protection and environmental protection in the name of economic efficiency (McMichael 1996). It stands at odds with the commitment to social change and to equity that lies at the root of a critical, political economy view of global environmental politics as inserted within the dynamics of economic accumulation and social structures. The question of the ownership of natural resources, for example, is not addressed. However, environmental problems in the South are often linked to problems of resource ownership and equity.³⁶ Sustainable Development as defined in Rio and reasserted in New York has been practically translated into technocratic responses to what are in reality political problems.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to analyze and evaluate the process of "mainstreaming" of environmental concerns. Recalling the radical and transformative origins of the ecological project, it has provided evidence that environmental concerns have been remodeled by the joint action of technocratic environmentalists, the international UN-related development establishment and business and industry sectors. Examining the results of international cooperation, the article has questioned the nature of the sustainable development consensus, a consensus deeply marked by the growing access and influence of global corporations on UN activities. Today, market-oriented perspectives to environmental problems seem to be prevailing over more transformative views, especially at the international level, within the framework of international organizations and institutional agreements.

The article has suggested that the mainstream approach to sustainable development tends to reduce ecology to a set of managerial practices aiming at resource efficiency and risk management. In doing so, it tends to address a civilizational impasse as a mere technical problem (Sachs 1993). The

mainstream approach proposes that environmentalists should operate using the language and the worldview of Western economics in approaching ecological concerns. Instead of designing cultural and political limits to development, the project of “global environmental management” tends to become part of a technocratic effort to sustain industrial development in the age of economic globalization. Environmental protection, together with democracy, human rights and free market economics, becomes a universal consensus, a universal consensus which, as Baudrillard remarks, arouses suspicion, since it is about values that have become devalued, values becoming emptied at the very moment of their hegemony (Huysmans 1995). Environmental concerns become just another element in a process leading to global uniformity, a uniformity of cultures, lifestyles, mentalities, but also of relationships with nature (Sachs 1993; Latouche 1996).

This market-oriented agenda may provide a starting point for dealing with global environmental problems. The documents, which emerged from international environmental negotiations from Rio to New York, replete with inconsistencies, represent a complex mix of disagreements, hopes and compromises. One may concede that conventions and obligations reflect the need for government negotiators to find the minimum agreeable grounds to initiate a large open-ended process on major environmental issues. In this sense, they only produced a general framework for negotiations, steps on the way to building international regimes. They do not form a series of real commitments representing an effective consensus on how to deal with global environmental issues. Yet considering the amount of time, energy and resources invested in this process of international environmental regime building, one might have hoped for more concrete, positive results. The failure of the present framework to effectively promote sustainability, which became evident in the 1997 New York summit, is recognized even by one of the major promoters of this path, Maurice Strong, ex-secretary general of UNCED, today President of the Earth Council. For Strong, unfortunately, the economic, social and demographical forces that lead to unsustainable development still prevail. Strong sees the lack of political will from governments as the main cause of this failure.³⁷

The present framework appears to contain many contradictions that limit the ability of the international and national communities to solve satisfactorily environmental problems. Adopting an international political economy perspective, this article has argued that the main problem that international efforts to protect the environment have to address is the issue of the impact of economic globalization. Economic globalization has in a sense helped to create conditions for the

development of policy mechanisms and institutions that will universalize and promote the concept of “sustainable development.” Global change is exerting a structuring influence on the redefinition of environmental politics.

However, the kind of sustainable development being promoted seems to represent more the consolidation of a global project of “environmental management” than a real shift away from destructive practices. Globalization is consolidating a market-friendly view of sustainable development, a view that gives priority to the sustainability of “global growth” and to the correction of environmental damage. This tends to be carried out at the expense of the competing alternatives and participative view of sustainable development as stressing not only development but also social equity and decentralized participation. The “globalization project” has shaped and redefined both the content of environmentalism and environmental policies and structured the international political economy in a way that makes sustainability more difficult to achieve.

Endnotes

- 1 “Mainstreaming the Environment” is the title of the 1995 Report prepared by the World Bank’s Environment Department. 1995. *Mainstreaming the Environment. The World Bank Group and the Environment since the Rio Earth Summit*. Washington: The World Bank.
- 2 As Richard Smith observes, this is the content of the emancipatory critique embedded in Weber and developed in Beck and Giddens. See Richard J. Smith (1996, 29,44).
- 3 Another well-known typology of green movements is Andrew Dobson’s who differentiates between “environmentalism” which does not call for fundamental transformations in patterns of production and consumption, and “ecologism” which calls for radical changes in social and political life. See Andrew Dobson (1990, 13). I personally find it useful to stress the differences between “deep ecology,” in which the focus is on the ecosystem, and “social ecology” which remains humanist.
- 4 This section will only introduce deep ecology. For more on the deep ecology movement and its philosophical foundations, see for example, Jonas, H. 1990. *Le Principe Responsabilité*. Paris: Editions du Cerf; Naess A. 1986. *The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects. Philosophical Enquiry*, vol. VII; *The Deep Ecology Movement: A Review*, In *Environmental Review*, n°9. For a critical appraisal of deep ecology, see Luc Ferry (1992-20, 114-5, and 240), and Carolyn Merchant (1992), chapter 4.
- 5 It should be noted that Greenpeace, although influenced by these ideas, is not a pure “deep ecology” group, its domain of action does cover all topics relevant to environmental protection, all aspects of economic policy such as trade and environment or multilateral funding institutions, and is based on comprehensive scientific and policy analysis of current issues. Yet Greenpeace remains a very particular type of NGO, focusing on catching images and shocking actions.

- 6 An organization like the World Resources Institute (WRI) is a good example of a mainstream, 'reformist' rather than 'transformative' NGO. Jessica Tuchman Mathews, WRI's vice-president, believes that there is an enormous horizon of potential that comes from reinventing technology on nature's example that can allow us to grow — and the world must grow. For her, our policies are so bad now that one can see a lot of room for improvement. Jessica Tuchman Mathews, interviewed by Steve Lerner (1991, 37-8).
- 7 It is not my aim to cover the whole UNCED process nor describe outcomes in detail, but rather to provide enough elements to give an idea of the nature of the "global bargain" reached in Rio and its implications for the way environmental protection was to be pursued after UNCED.
- 8 The decision to launch UNCED was made official in December 1989. See United Nations General Assembly (1989) "United Nations Conference on Environment and Development." Resolution 44/228, New York, December 22.
- 9 The Group of 77, which today has over a hundred and twenty members, was formed during the first UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) in 1964.
- 10 The analysis of the negotiation process is based on interviews made with diplomats and observers during the Rio Summit in June 1992, and at UNCED's secretariat in Geneva in July 1992, and participation in the Project on International Negotiations at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (Laxenburg, Austria) between June and September 1992. Finally, details are taken from UNCED-related publications and from the *Earth Summit Bulletin*, the *Earth Summit Times* and *Crosscurrents*, several issues.
- 11 As stressed by the European Commission in its Report for UNCED, "integration is a crucial objective in Community [now Union] environment policy, not just because it is the embodiment of a Treaty obligation or a tool for environmental protection per se, but also because it is the linch-pin in the process of establishing sustainable social and economic development patterns. Environmental considerations are therefore becoming an integral part of many — and, ultimately, all — Community policy areas." European Commission (1992).
- 12 In the words of Peter Haas(1990, 384), epistemic communities refer to a "specific community of experts sharing a belief in a common set of cause-and-effect relationships as well as common values to which policies governing these relationships will be applied."
- 13 The analysis that follows draws from my personal participation in the Rio 1992 "Global Forum," during which extensive interviews with activists and NGO campaigners were carried out.
- 14 See United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 44/228, part 2 paragraph 12. According to article 71 of the United Nations Charter, NGOs can be granted a 'consultative status' with Ecosoc.
- 15 For example, the negotiations of the NGO "debt treaty," which I attended, were polarized between North and South, southern NGOs rejecting all proposals of debt swaps on the ground that the Third World's debt was not legitimate, while northern NGOs pressed for "realist solutions" and privileged environmental considerations over social justice. See Global Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992, Treaty n°13.
- 16 See UNCED, Doc. A/CONF.151/6/Rev.1, Rio de Janeiro, 13 June 1992.
- 17 See *The Sunday Times* June 20th 1989.
- 18 M. Marx. 1994. Mitsubishi: Giant of the Timber Trade. *SEED links* 14 I, July 1994, 20-1.
- 19 For an activist view on the WBCSD (and more generally on the role of corporations in promoting social exclusion and environmental degradation), see Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO). 1997. *Europe, Inc. Dangerous Liaisons Between EU Institutions and Industry*. Amsterdam, CEO, 38-9.
- 20 CSD held five sessions in preparation of UNGASS: during the first session (June 1993) a program of work was adopted, during the second (May 1994) a first cluster of cross-sectorial chapters of Agenda 21 were examined: trade, consumption patterns, major groups, health, settlements, fresh water and wastes. During the third session (April 1995) the second cluster of issues according to the program of work was examined: land resources, deforestation, desertification, mountains, agriculture, biodiversity and biotechnology. The fourth session (May 1996) examined financial resources, consumption, technology, education, inter alia. The last session (March 1997) concentrated on the format and content of the document to be considered at UNGASS. Source: *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* vol. 5 n°82, 1-2.
- 21 UNGASS was attended by 53 Heads of State and Government, along with ministers and other high-level officials. It aims are stated in: United Nations Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD). 1997. "Program for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 Adopted by the Special Session of the General Assembly," New York, 23-27 June 1997, "A: Statement of Commitment," paragraph 1.
- 22 The attempt to produce a true Political Statement encompassing concerns about the progress needed in the future failed, and in the end General Assembly President Razali Ismael had to resign himself with including six paragraphs called "Statement of Commitment" at the beginning of the "Program for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21."
- 23 The aim here is not to present a full account of UNCED's review but rather to sketch out the main trends emanating from the review process and to critically assess it. For more information refer to the UN document.
- 24 DPCSD (1997), "B: Assessment of Progress Made since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development," paragraph 7.
- 25 DPCSD (1997) "C: Implementation in Areas Requiring Urgent Action," paragraph 28.
- 26 DPCSD (1997), paragraphs 25, 26 and 29.
- 27 UNCSO (1997), C.2, 'sectors and issues' paragraph 47.
- 28 See *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* vol. 5 n°82, 13.
- 29 *Libération* 28-29 June 1997.
- 30 The Kyoto Protocol of December 1997 represented some progress, as OECD agreed to reduce their CO₂ emissions by 5.2% by 2010, taking 1990 as a basis. Yet the 1998 Buenos Aires Conference, where countries were supposed to define the flexibility mechanisms necessary to achieve the commitments assumed in Kyoto, watered down hopes for a significant curb down in world CO₂ emissions. The Buenos Aires Conference failed to define the above-mentioned mechanisms, due to a great extent to the position of the United States of

- demanding that developing countries adopt “voluntary commitments” to reduce their own emissions before taking any further action.
- 31 A Friends of the Earth activist describes the climate during the Earth Summit II in the following way: “by the end of the week, the UN Secretariat resembled a funeral parlor, with down-in-the-mouth delegates and NGOs mourning the demise of the global partnership and the spirit of Rio. There was talk of *Rio plus 0* and *Rio minus 5*.” See Malini Mehra (FoE) ‘Earth Summit II’. *Link* 79, July/August 1997, 17-8.
- 32 Analysis based on the account of UNGASS negotiation process provided by IISD’s *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* vol. 5 n 88, 30 June 1997.
- 33 Robert Cox differentiates between “problem-solving theory,” which “takes the world as it finds it, with its prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized,” and critical theory, which “stands apart from the prevailing order and asks how that order came about” (1986, 208).
- 34 See UNDP, 1999, “The Global Sustainable Development Facility: 2B2M 2 Billion People to the Market by 2020. The Private Sector in Cooperation with the United Nations Development Program.”
- 35 Quoted in Transnational Resource Action Center (TRAC)/Corporate Watch, “A Perilous Partnership: The United Nations Development Program’s Flirtation with Corporate Collaboration.” 12 March 1999.
- 36 For a view on how the issue of the access to natural resources is a critical determinant in the dynamics of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, see V. de Campos Mello, 1997, especially chapters 6 and 8.
- 37 Strong is quoted in the Brazilian Newspaper *Gazeta Mercantil*, 13th March 1996.

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