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# Framing the alternative: socio-political dynamics toward sustainability

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## INTRODUCTION

With the arrival of the XXI century the relationship between humans and nature is reaching a critical stage. At stake are the planetary liveability patterns of both human and most non-human life forms. Despite the sometimes conflicting data on the urgency of the need to rethink this relationship, there is a growing consensus that we face an unsustainable *status quo* (Capra 2004; Ehrlich and Ehrlich 2013). As a result of this socio-ecological crisis and overall public inability to address it globally, there has been a substantial increase, over the past decades, in the number and variety of social movements favouring sustainability, commonly self-referred to as *alternatives* (Barry and Quilley 2009; Alexander and Rutherford 2014). In this chapter we propose a framework of inquiry into these emergent *alternatives*.

We first contextualize the socio-political *alternatives* toward sustainability debate by briefly examining why these emerge in the “Root of the Alternative” section. In the “Frameworks, dynamics and dimensions of change” section, we inquire into what *ethos* underpins them, and what their potential role in the wider transition to sustainability debate is. From a conceptual standpoint, we advance an interpretation matrix (Figure 3.3) to help the reader navigate the different and often overlapping dynamics of change that socio-political movements toward sustainability embody. Third, in the section “Socio-political mobilization” we explore the theoretical origins of the *Deep Green Alternatives*, the highly committed green ethics-based set of social movements that sits at the forefront of the implementation of transition toward sustainability practices. We systematize (Table 3.1) the main constituent trends within the *Deep Green Alternatives*, their proposals, and desired futures. Thus, the main contribution of this chapter is to serve as a “one-stop shop” for both students and scholars who are interested in navigating the troubled waters of *alternatives* debates within the context of transitions to sustainability.

### ROOT OF THE ALTERNATIVE: CRISES AND THE PERCEPTION OF FUTURES

There is a growing consensus that we face an unsustainable socio-ecological *status quo* (Capra 2004; Ehrlich and Ehrlich 2013). This scenario underpins the conceptual birth of the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2002; Barry and Maslin 2016;

Steffen et al. 2007), Earth's newest epoch, in which humankind has turned into a (to different extents, cf. Biermann et al. 2015) collective geological force able to irreversibly influence the Planet's future. The Anthropocene sets a new context for social innovation and transformations to sustainability (Rickards 2015; Olsson et al. 2017) in the sense that social and political perceptions surrounding the aforementioned ecological crisis fuel the emergence of multiple catastrophist discourses of a potential global collapse that directly challenge our modern vision of progress and economic development (Diamond 2006; Servigne and Cochet 2015). As a result, there is a growing call for *alternatives* aiming at radically changing our present actions in order to attain different, more sustainable, futures (Barry and Quilley 2009; Alexander and Rutherford 2014).

The redefinition of a collective idea of future is at the centre of the Anthropocenic sustainability debate. As Gaston Berger (1957) once outlined: "the future is the *raison d'être* of the present", in the sense that our actions today are explained and justified by the images of the future we wish to achieve. This begs the question: what ends (Futures) are steering our present actions? This is a crucial query with deep rooted implications. François Hartog explores it through the concept of society's "regimes of historicity" (2014), the way we relate to the Past, Present, and Future. He argues that we tend to experience a heterogenous *presentist* present depending on our societal role. This *presentism* reflects the planetary globalization and its accelerated flows, in which we struggle to relate to the past, radically different, and the future, strongly uncertain and out of reach. According to Hartog (2014), "The present is therefore experienced as emancipation or enclosure, and the perspective of the future is no longer reassuring, since it is perceived not as a promise, but as a threat". This notion of threat, of an eschatological foresight, a possible end, an undesirable future, is the epicentre of the *alternatives* debate and the booming revival of a future's literacy (ISSC and UNESCO 2013), in which people are prompted to directly define their desired future while breaking away from their *presentist* present.

#### CHANGE AS A SUPER WICKED PROBLEM

In the face of the aforementioned future framing challenges, the promotion of socio-ecological sustainability is an issue of extreme complexity that tests contemporary decision-making and policy design processes. Given the specific challenges of a large-scale transition toward sustainability, and climate change management in particular, many authors have come to christen it as

a *super wicked* problem (Lazarus 2008). A super wicked problem has four key defining features (Levin et al. 2012): time is running out; those who cause the problem also seek to provide a solution (i. e. governments perpetuate a dual behaviour promoting to some extent policy pathways toward sustainability while allowing its very causes to persist, for example, by encouraging fossil fuels exploitation); the central authority needed to address it is weak or non-existent (i. e. there are no global executive authorities); and, partly as a result, policy responses discount the future incautiously (i. e. impossibility to secure a relevant degree of policy coherence over time). These four problems combined crystalize the transitional policy processes in the sense that existing decision-making and governance solutions, available data, and institutional capacity all fall short of providing the brick walls for game-changing solutions. To make matters worse, the prevailing policy design focuses primarily on short-term objective achievement, which is insufficient to leverage long-term structural changes toward sustainability.

In the face of this dynamic, Levin et al. (2012) argue that the way forward is to rethink the idea of path-dependency. Traditionally, this concept is used from a retrospective standpoint to expand on the negative impacts of policy and institutional performance and interpret limitations to policy delivery (Berkhout 2002; Mahoney 2000). Thus, the authors propose to look into path-dependency in a prospective way. In other words, they advocate for “the generation of path-dependent policy interventions that can constrain our future collective selves” (Levin et al. 2012, 123). By this they mean that today’s policy interventions should trigger incremental transition trajectories toward desired future policy outcomes that, ideally, would gather support and be reached over time. As Levin et al. (2012, 124) put it:

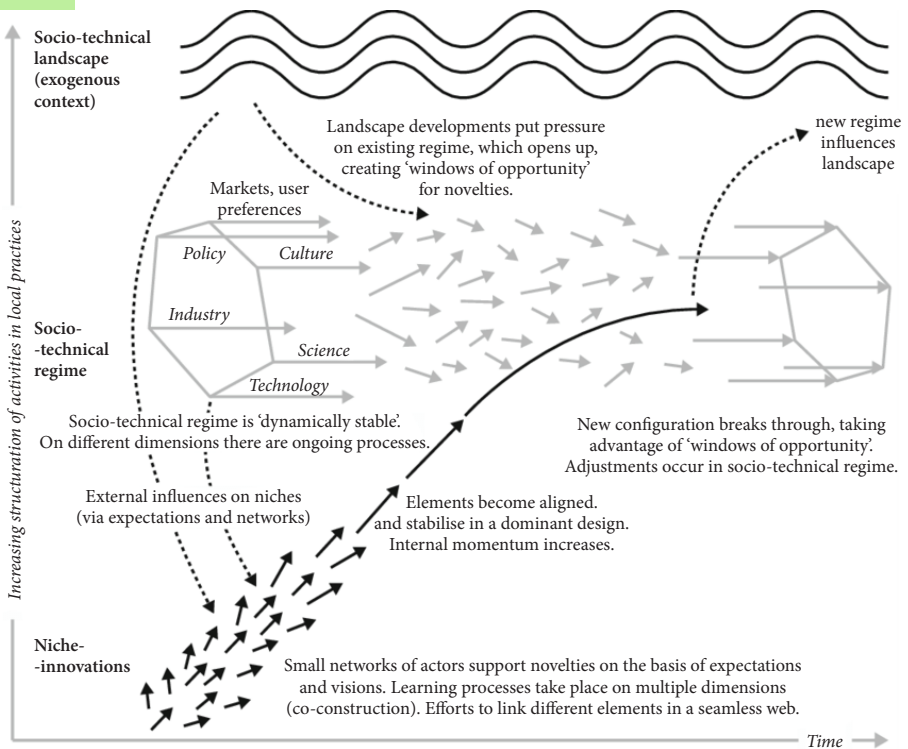
[...] Interventions might not only focus on achieving immediate ‘stickiness’ but also how they gain durability, expand the populations they cover, and change behaviors through largely unexplored progressive incremental forces whereby a number of small policy changes can have significant transformative effects if they trigger path-dependent processes.

The abovementioned rationale refers to policy initiatives, although similar reasoning can be applied to infer the future of environmental social movements. How do these movements gain durability over time, how do they scale-up their impact and to what degree, and how does a social movements-led path-dependency toward sustainability materialize?

FRAMEWORKS, DYNAMICS, AND DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

The idea of triggering a prospective path-dependency toward sustainability has had multiple echos in the literature, such as *socio-ecological technical transitions* (Geels and Schot 2007), *transition management* (Kemp et al. 2007; Rotmans and Loorbach 2009), *sustainability transitions* (Markard et al. 2012; Smith et al. 2005) and *transformative social innovation theory* (Haxeltine et al., 2017). These are considerably overlapping intertwined bodies of literature that dissect how the creation of a path-dependency toward sustainability may be put into place. An iconic depiction of the necessary systemic multilevel interplay between different societal subsystems across space and time is Geels’ (2011) *Multilevel Perspective (MLP)* (Figure 3.1). This aspatial and apolitical framework seeks to illustrate the multiple upward and downward causalities of influence behind large system change processes (Geels 2011).

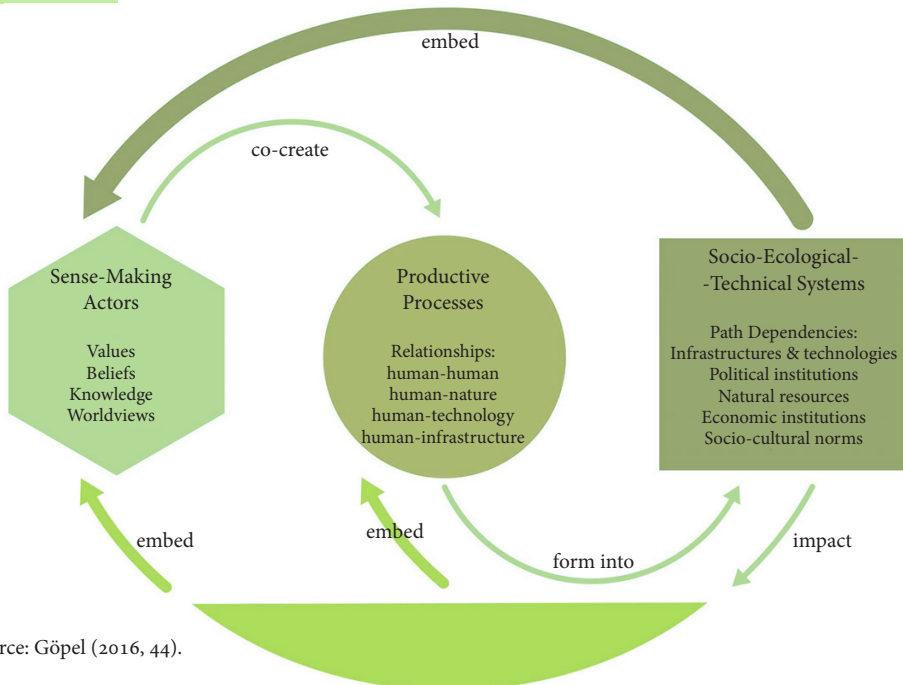
**Figure 3.1** The MLP on Social System Transformation



Source: Geels (2011, 28).

In detail, and at first sight, Geels’ MLP diagram provides a useful systematization of the dynamics underpinning social transformation toward sustainability. However, there is a *quasi* linear assumption of decision-making processes and ideas streamlining, with a remarkable absence of the words *politics* and *conflict*. These are, however, symbolic indicators of the complexity that characterizes any scale-up dynamic in a process of social transformation. As for the catalyst level steering transitions, there is no consensus. Göpel (2016, 22), for one, argues that societal change originates mostly on the “niche or micro level where small units or ‘situated groups’ experiment easily with alternative solutions, as long as the degree of interdependencies with overarching or neighbouring systems is not too strong”. She goes on to propose her own interpretation of how path-dependencies form and inform possible futures (Figure 3.2), by emphasizing the role of ideas and how these materialize through social relations and networks. Göpel claims that one must look beyond the role of crises in structural changes, and explore in detail the origin of the ideas humans resort to when searching for strategies to deal with those very crises. In Göpel’s words (2016, 44): “humans are both subject and object

**Figure 3.2** *Materiality of ideas*



of making history, how reality today shapes the imaginary of how reality could be in the future”.

Prevailing paradigms condition humans via processes and systems that shape their individual mindsets and limit their scope of individual and collective action, insinuating a *tragic determinism* standpoint questioning the possibility of structural change. In reality, however, civilizational development occurred on the shoulders of a large-enough number of humans thinking differently from the *status quo* at some point in time, often starting as alternative and radical socio-political movements that over time manage to gain momentum, win popular support, and convince a critical mass.<sup>1</sup> As Göpel (2016, 45) summarizes, “history becomes an open-ended process—the status quo determined not by any human or social laws but created by sense-making and purposefully acting humans”.

#### VALUES AND CHANGE

Crisscrossing Geels’ (2011) *Multi Level Perspective* with her materiality of ideas’ framework, Göpel (2016) illustrates the interconnectedness between *actors* and *structures*, at multiple levels, that underpins the circulation of ideas and ultimately leads to a structural paradigm shift. This plays directly into one of the objectives of this chapter: the exploration of how social movements toward sustainability form, evolve, and interact with mainstream systems, and how they position themselves as *alternatives*.

Following Göpel’s argument, we bring additional systematization to the way in which *values* and *ideas* sit at the core of the transitions toward sustainability debates. Building on multiple interpretations of the dimensions and processes of social and institutional change (Retolaza Eguren 2011), we aim to illustrate how these influence, and are influenced by predominant development models, governance solutions, politics, and social movements. The former two (development models, governance solutions) are explored elsewhere (Mourato et al. *forthcoming*). The latter (politics and social movements) are addressed in the following section.

1 Let us think, for instance, of the African-American civil rights movement in the us, the suffragettes and abortion rights movement in Western Europe, the indigenous movement in Bolivia, or the anti-nuclear-power movement in Germany.

We must begin by clarifying that in our understanding there is no overall sequential, linear process of change. Catalysts for value change often emerge in unplanned contexts and have unexpected rhythms and mechanisms of propagation. As a proposal to help tackle, research-wise, its complexity, Figure 3.3 portrays an interpretation matrix to help the reader navigate the different and often overlapping dynamics of change that socio-political movements toward sustainability embody.

On the one hand, we must ponder the subjective process of individual change in terms of mind-set, self-awareness, and identity that substantiates a wider objective transformation of relational interactions, habits, and practices. These are not clear-cut sequential dynamics. They may be self-reinforcing or divergent when in the face of external *stimuli* for change. The cornerstone of change in this context derives from the structural interconnectedness between the dialogic interaction of the individual with its surrounding political and social environment and how this interaction emulates the individual’s current pattern of self-development whilst influencing its very change. On the

**Figure 3.3** Framing the alternative



Source: Adapted from Retolaza Eguren (2011, 7).



other hand, change that either leads to, or is triggered by, collective action is influenced by an interplay of intersubjective and interobjective dynamics. The latter embodies, to a large extent, what we can refer to as the institutionalization of change, when this influences state action via both its constitutional and legal frameworks and subsequent policies and polity. The intersubjective dimension concerns *inter alia* the value change brewed within social movements, and how it influences the definition of a collective identity and subsequent patterns of action. In this chapter, we focus on social movements as sense-making actors (Göpel 2016) that may play a pivotal role in the redefinition of the current unsustainability path-dependency (Levin et al. 2012) toward more desirable and *alternative* futures (Alexander and Rutherford 2014).

## SOCIO-POLITICAL MOBILIZATION TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

But it is our conviction that the first wave of sustainability activity, in progress since the Earth Summit of 1992, is insufficient to alter alarming global developments. A new wave must begin to transcend the palliatives and reforms that until now may have muted the symptoms of unsustainability, but cannot cure the disease (Raskin et al. 2002, x).

This statement is as accurate today as it was more than 15 years ago. In light of the loss of meaning that the term *sustainability* has suffered over the last decades, more and more international activists, academics, and thinkers are calling for “a *new sustainability paradigm*” to “challenge both the viability and desirability of conventional values, economic structures and social arrangements” (Raskin et al. 2002, x). The underlying assumption here is that the present socio-economic paradigm, with its inherent values, structure, and logic, is the root-cause – the *disease* – of current unsustainability. This section seeks to shed some light on the socio-political movements that have emerged, directly and indirectly, out of this (un)sustainability debate. Here, we unpack the *Deep Green Alternatives*, systematizing (Table 3.1) its theoretical underpinnings, main constituent trends, proposals, and desired futures.

## POLITICS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The shift toward a real (deep) green way of living on our planet without destroying the intertwined, interdependent living systems that represent the

life support for both humans and non-humans, but rather finding our “place” in the ecosystem, is certainly not going to be a self-starting process. Elsewhere (Mourato et al. 2018), we already engaged in describing how multiple barriers can hinder transformative processes and how these could be overcome in theory (Moore et al. 2014; Fazey et al. 2016). It has been repeatedly argued that politics and policies play an important role in determining whether a shift toward sustainability will ultimately be triggered and to what extent the latter will happen (Prugh et al. 2000).

Yet, according to Swyngedouw (2010; 2011), we are able to observe that sustainability has turned into a global de-politicized “environmental consensus” impossible to disagree with. This loss of meaning of the concept of sustainability in international politics goes hand in hand with a denial of the plurality, complexity, and unpredictability of Nature, artificially creating an urge to go for a set of *status quo* (market-based, technocratic) policy solutions that side-step fundamental political debates (Swyngedouw 2010; 2011).

Disagreement is allowed, but only with respect to the choice of technologies, the mix of organisational fixes, the details of the managerial adjustments, and the urgency of the timing and implementation, *not with respect to the socio-political framing of present and future natures* (Swyngedouw 2011, 6; italics added).

In fact, as recently acknowledged by the Secretary General of the Club of Rome, Graeme Maxton, one of the reasons behind the latter is that there are simply no immediate political gains from taking the first transformative actions toward more sustainability, since climate change and its repercussions will continue to worsen throughout the coming decades (IPCC 2007), even if we ceased emitting GHG<sup>2</sup> emissions from today on (Maxton 2018).<sup>3</sup> This sense of political apathy translates into rather short-sighted electoral agendas with a continuation of mainstream political responses. The latter avoids engaging in much-needed actions to prevent further environmental degradation from happening and setting the foundations for a sustainable relationship between humans and the planet.

2 GHG refers to as greenhouse-gases.

3 For a discussion on this subject see <https://theconversation.com/what-would-happen-to-the-climate-if-we-stopped-emitting-greenhouse-gases-today-35011> (accessed on February 17th 2018).

Nevertheless, the increasing number of international conferences and agreements, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and COP23, suggests a growing international awareness for the urge to take the first steps now, even if this will not generate any immediate profits or seeming improvements, although they certainly will in the long run. Here we mention the need to set up a global unified agenda in order to implement sustainability via government action, such as regulations, restrictions, taxation, or incentives. Yet, with our current socio-economic systems remaining trapped in a capitalist, neoliberal, free-market and growth-oriented paradigm, policy interventions have often proven to be too vague, too hesitant, and minimal, thus resulting in ineffective “symbolic eco-politics” (Blühdorn 2007). To give an example, policy tools such as emission trading fail to send the right message, since they allow pollution to continue, but only up to certain levels; yet, the real urge is to drastically *reduce or even end* emissions (Rogelj et al. 2016). The imagined outcome of such policy instruments is highly influenced by the ethos of politics and politicians in power. According to Maxton (2018), the transition toward sustainability, for instance by abandoning fossil fuels and turning to renewable energies, depends ultimately on political willingness and on the determination of legislators to attack the problems at their roots.

On the other hand, the politics of sustainability face an underlying risk: the rising influence of post-truth politics in public discourse (Lubchenco 2017; Lewandowsky et al. 2017). The latter refers to a shift in public opinion that sees the influence of ever-increasing scientific knowledge and evidence concerning CC losing weight in the information of public debate and overall community perceptions. The most extreme example can be found in the United States of America, where an extreme politicization of CC and subsequent polarization of public opinion (McCright et al. 2011) are currently diverting precious resources and attention, not only from urgent adaptation actions, but also from engaging in a deeper discussion about possible socio-ecological futures. As if that were not bad enough, some of the fundamental practices that led to the current socio-ecological crisis are perpetuated as new ways of fossil fuel exploitation are planned or are already under way (Friedman 2017).

#### SOCIO-POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES

Against the backdrop of the seeming inability of governments and international institutions to currently tackle the multiple crises referred to above, a growing

number of critical theorists, thinkers, and activists has been calling for what one could name a *deep green alternative* to the current growth and industrial paradigm (Alexander and Rutherford 2014). The latter can be interpreted as the embodiment of the idea of *sustainability* in the form of social movements with a well-defined agenda on how the future could look and what steps have to be taken in order to reach it. As a starting point, instead of one discourse, we rather have to think of various alternative proposals that can be united under the umbrella of the *deep green alternative*. Some of them have a rather idealistic and utopian approach, others a rather pragmatic and hands-on one. However, all of them have a quite settled, yet diverging, definition of what the future should look like in their eyes.

In the following subsections, we systematize a set of diverse contemporary *alternatives*, by first delving into a more theoretical discussion of the *deep green thinking* tradition and second by analysing the different *alternatives'* strategies to achieve their prescribed necessary change.

#### THEORETICAL ORIGINS

In the field of ecocentric (literally, *Earth-centred*) ethics, one can find many of the path-paving thoughts underlying the ontological tradition of *deep green thinking* that have led to the emergence of more recent advocates of the *deep green alternative*. First of all, ecocentrism must, according to Curry (2011), be understood as a holistic approach in which both animated and non-animated nature are seen as a single, integrated whole, whose rights and values must be recognized and thus defended ethically, while no individual part has to be seen as superior to another. This being given, an ecocentric approach can be named *deep green*. To be more specific, we can find some determinant theoretical foundation in the approaches of the Deep Ecology, Deep Green Theory (DGT), Earth Manifesto, Earth Charter, and radical simplicity<sup>4</sup>.

The moral philosophy approach, **Deep Ecology**, mainly developed by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1973), which significantly inspired social and cultural movements over the last decades, can be seen as the most influential ecological discourse (Curry 2011). Its theoretical foundations lie on eight platform principles for ecological activism, which can be summarized

4 For a much more in-depth theoretical systematization of the “ecological ethics”, see Curry (2011).

with the need to: (a) recognize and defend nature's intrinsic value, such as diversity or richness, (b) diminish humans' interference, impact, and destruction of it, (c) by changing policies, institutions, and paradigms and finally, (d) by not keeping silent but implementing the principles oneself (Nelson 2008). Although Naess has been heavily criticized more recently for the conceptual additions of *self-realization* and *biocentric egalitarianism* (Curry 2011), the Deep Ecology approach could be seen as a cornerstone for the conceptual building of the *deep green alternative*.

Developed by Richard Sylvan (Sylvan and Bennett 1994) throughout the 1970s to 1990s, the **Deep Green Theory (DGT)** is a holistic ecocentric ethics approach that, ecologically speaking, rejects all established traditional ethics for promoting human chauvinism, as well as prevailing technocentric approaches of the industrial society to the environment (Callicott and Frodeman 2009). While condemning "too much use and use of too much" (Sylvan and Bennett 1994, 147), the DGT does not rule out human use of the environment, but proposes that the distinction human/non-human does not entail a justification for special ethical treatment, and further that humans' interests ought not to outweigh others' (eco-impartiality) (Curry 2011). Last but not least, the DGT emphasizes that profound value changes must combine individual with institutional changes, thus making it a "top-down and bottom-up and inside out issue" (Sylvan and Bennett 1994, 180).

Deep green ethics has experienced various conceptual refinements, such as the **Earth Manifesto** (Mosquin and Rowe 2004), reemphasizing the criticism of human chauvinism, the need to restore ecological diversity and live in harmony by, for instance, promoting *ecocentric governance*. Eventually *deep green principles* have managed to gain a foothold on an international level with the publication of the **Earth Charter**<sup>5</sup> in 2001, a result of the Rio 92 Earth Summit formally recognized by thousands of international organizations including the UNESCO and the IUCN/World Conservation Union. The insistence on engaging in fundamental changes of institutions, values, and ways of living through global partnerships is the backbone of the Earth Charter. Its principles converge around four core areas: (1) Respect and Care for the Community of Life, (2) Ecological Integrity, (3) Social and Economic Justice, and (4) Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace.

5 The full text of The Earth Charter can be retrieved on the website [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org) (accessed on February 16th 2018).

We can find further theoretical grounds of the *deep green alternative* in the evolution of the concept of *sufficiency*, which is inspired by the concept of **radical simplicity** advanced by Henry Thoreau (Thoreau [1854] 1965). Banking on the romantic idealism of a life in close contact with nature, liberated from all excessive consumption and material needs, the *deep green alternative* seems to propose that a sustainable way of living on a finite planet must be found in material sufficiency, more precisely, frugality, instead of affluence (Alexander 2013). Here it might also be worthwhile referring to futures and utopian approaches that attempt to influence concrete decision making toward a future sustainable society by leveraging the process of establishing visions of diverse futures (Garforth 2005; De Geus 2002; or Barry 2007).

#### MAKING SENSE OF THE *DEEP GREEN ALTERNATIVE*

In order to be able to classify and discuss the proposals that can be pooled together as the *deep green alternative*, we first need to delve deeper into the underlying concept of this notion. Although constituting a highly heterogeneous tradition, one can easily notice that the *deep green alternative's* diverse currents all seem to build upon the common perception that the systems we currently live in are highly unsustainable, significantly coinciding with the features of the “end-state” envisaged in the *alternative* (Alexander and Rutherford 2014). To this effect, the concept *deep green alternative* comprises first and foremost the recognition of arguments about the finiteness of planet, resources, and growth, while simultaneously advocating for an active process of deliberative change (Geels and Schot 2007; Moore et al. 2014) toward a radically alternative way of living on the planet (Alexander and Rutherford 2014).

Following Alexander and Rutherford's (2014) attempt to systematize the *deep green alternative*, the common agenda<sup>6</sup> underlying this tradition can be outlined as follows:

- Overcome the “(green) growth trap” and consumption paradigm and move toward “material sufficiency” as a consequence of sheer physical necessity: first de-growth of resources- and energy-consumption, then

6 Some of the following points are shared by all proponents that fall into the categorization of “deep green” alternatives, and some are exclusive to one or more proponents. For a detailed review see Alexander and Rutherford (2014).

stabilize in a zero-growth economic system (Lawn 2011; Turner 2012; Trainer 2012)

- The problem of worldwide poverty has not yet been alleviated substantially and cannot be solved with ever more (even sustainable) growth (Daly 1996)
- Reimagine the notion of a “good life” overcoming consumerism by redefining the underlying values and aims of the notions of “progress” and “prosperity”.
- Make a rapid shift to exclusive reliance on renewable energies implying a downscaling in energy availability, and thus, consumption and production (Trainer 2012), implying the abandonment of fossil fuel dependency, a reduction in “redundant” industrial production, and an increase in the “useful” ones, such as renewables (Bailey et al. 2010; Alexander and Rutherford 2014).
- Shift back to local production, especially local organic agriculture (also urban), in order to increase resilience and self-reliance (Hopkins 2008).
- The transition to the *deep green alternative* state can only be attained on the basis of a renewal of institutions, systems, and structures:
  - The neo-liberal capitalist system banking on the market-forces is seemingly not able to solve the various overlapping problems faced by humanity today (Lawn and Clarke 2010)
  - Move toward decentralized local and democratic planning with a major involvement of grassroots, activism, and higher levels of direct democratic participation (Trainer 2012; Sarkar 1999).

#### THE DEEP GREEN ALTERNATIVE: STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Up until this point, much has been theorized about why and how socio-ecological change occurs. This has been done in academia and elsewhere under strong influence of different ideological backgrounds and with different visions of the future. The field of transition studies has focused mainly on transitions from a systemic perspective shedding light upon the complexity of the socio-technical processes of change. Nevertheless, we argue (Mourato et al. 2018) that this focus has been over-proportionally technical and abstract, failing to bring the actual outcomes after transition, problems arising throughout the way, and possible negative spin-offs into discussion. Here, we



will try to bring clarification to the missing part of the puzzle, by engaging in a functional classification of the different existing social movements and their proposals about how a deliberative change toward a greener, more sustainable, way of living can ultimately occur in practice (see Table 3.1).

In the vast amount of literature and discourses about the *deep green alternative*, we can identify four main strands of thought that overlap and diverge to certain extents in their proposals. Here we are looking into the currents of *Radical Reformism*, *Eco-Socialism*, *Eco-Anarchism*, and *Deep Green Resistance (DGR)*. For the sake of clarity, Table 3.1 systematizes them on the basis of six categories: Idea, strategy (short- and long-term), end-state, agency, criticism, and manifestations.

First of all, it is clearly noticeable that the four *deep green alternatives* diverge concerning the details of the desired end-state, with a strong opposition between the Radical Reformists seeing updated capitalism and polity as able to provide deep green sustainability and the Eco-anarchists, which imagine a self-governing participatory governance system without markets and nation states. With respect to the idea, or rationale, underlying the different movements, one can observe a rather great diversity, from believing in the market forces (Radical Reformism), to the socialist revolution beyond capitalism (Eco-Socialism), to radical militant activism in light of the time-pressure to save our planet (DGR).

What they have in common is a significant overlap in the short-term strategies, including returning to small-scale local economies, simplicity, and grassroots, with the exception of the DGR activists, who somehow can be situated in a more marginal and ultra-radical position. Concerning the long-term strategies, we can still find a certain degree of overlap in the perception of a need for value change (except DGR), as well as in the proposed government interventions by Eco-Socialism and Radical Reformism. With respect to agency, we can see a common belief in the force of grassroots and bottom-up activism, while Eco-Anarchists deny the importance of the state and Radical Reformists build on the latter in order to reach the *alternative*.

In the last row we classify a selection of the present-day most familiar on-the-ground practices of the *deep green alternative*, into four different categories (Eco-Socialism, Radical Reformism, DGR, Eco-Anarchism). Although diverging in size, shape, and reach, these practices are winning ground in alternative ways of production, consumption, and social organization, such as food (e. g. short food supply chains, local and organic foods, food sharing,



**Table 3.1** Classification scheme: *Deep Green Alternatives*.

	<b>RADICAL REFORMISM</b>	<b>ECO-SOCIALISM</b>	<b>ECO-ANARCHISM</b>	<b>DEEP GREEN RESISTANCE STRATEGY</b>
<b>IDEA</b>	Deep green change can happen from inside the institutions in place (Fotopoulos 1997); absence of violent overthrow but fundamental ‘cultural revolution’ (Latouche 2009)	Capitalism and sustainability are irreconcilable; re-conceived socialism integrating the deep green vision (Smith 2010; Sarkar 1999)	Beyond market capitalism and nation-state: they cannot cope with sustainability; prefigure new society (satellites) on the old one instead of waiting for the revolution (Fotopoulos 1997)	Socio-ecological militant activism; confront the established ‘system of power’; overthrow capitalism and consumer; radicalism instead of liberalism society (Jensen et al. 2011)
<b>SHORT TERM STRATEGY:</b>	create and spread small-scale local initiatives, transition to simpler lifestyle, informal economy (e.g. sharing circles, community gardens, co-housing etc.) (Jackson 2009)	create readiness in society to accept and embrace simpler lifestyles (Sarkar 1999)	engage sufficient number of people in learning new skills (cooperation, self-governance, sharing, simple live...); decentralized local economies; gain on-the-ground support to enforce change in laws and regulations	above ground: support local alternative initiatives underground: ‘decisive ecological warfare’ (Jensen et al. 2011); illegal industrial sabotage; usage of internet as platform, open information, recruitment and campaigning
<b>LONG TERM STRATEGY:</b>	Value change (community, altruism, frugality) triggers cultural and political shift (Latouche 2009), i.e. de-growth, government intervention (regulation, investments, taxation) (Daly 2013; Alcott 2008)	Radical value shift (simplicity, frugality, local, solidarity etc.); increased state control: prices, ownership, rationing, planning; radical policy shifts (Magdoff and Foster 2010) and socialist revolution	Value change: Create parallel institutions and shift away resources from market economy; gradual replacement of system (Fotopoulos 1997); control over political power only as a consequence of grassroots process	No time and no will for grassroots movements to gain momentum; stop extinctions and pollutions now, forcibly
<b>END-STATE DESIRED</b>	Capitalism, but a different one: zero-growth (steady-state) economy (Jackson 2009) embracing fundamental value change	Markets exist only for trade and exchange, under strict regulation and local planning (Smith 2010; Sarkar 1999)	Radical directly self-governing society; end political hierarchy and representative democracy; inclusive and participatory democracy (Trainer 2012)	See eco-anarchism
<b>AGENCY</b>	All members of society including political elite, industries etc.	No political power until momentum reached; “those who care” will lead, independently from societal level; international movement	Engage outsiders (old, unemployed); engage in and try to take over local political power	Grassroots ecological activists, international movement; strictly bottom-up strategy
<b>CRITICISM</b>	Proposed radical changes touch upon current power and wealth distribution and elite interests → opposition guaranteed (Leahy 2018)	Can a non-market, planned economy exist under a democratic state (Friedman 1982)?	ImpRACTICABILITY and unworkability of direct self-government in complex societies; too much radicalism might scare away people (Davey 2009); underestimation of state’s power in transition	Unforeseeable harms caused by sabotage; questionable: violence as means for a noble end; destruction does not forcibly convert the majority of people but may foster opposition and rejection
<b>MANIFESTATIONS</b>	Transition Town network (Hopkins 2008)		Local currencies, labor-credit schemes	Large-scale worldwide fossil fuel and big-enterprise industry sabotage ( <a href="https://deepgreenresistance.net">https://deepgreenresistance.net</a> )

Cf. Alexander and Rutherford (2014); Lawn (2011); Turner (2012); Barry and Quilley (2009); Göpel (2017).

food waste reduction initiatives, meat curtailment practices), energy (e.g. energy cooperatives), transportation (e.g. car sharing, free public transport), social organization (e.g. Transition Towns), as well as alternative economic concepts and planning for a post-growth economy (e.g. circular Economy, gift Economy, local currencies, labour-credit schemes, “REconomy” projects) (Maschkowski et al. 2017).

## CONCLUSIONS

That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable (Friedman 2002 [1982], xiv).

Sustainability has turned into an overused and often misused term in global politics. Concurrently, it has not mobilized enough social support and commitment to force decisive political action in the face of the current ecological crisis. This being said, there is mounting evidence of an ever growing societal mobilization and change in the values, identity, and practices of a growing number of individuals who strive toward the promotion of a worldwide transition to sustainability. These individuals fuel a set of social movements that evolve in the face of an overwhelming socio-economic totalitarianism as a result of the strengthening of their alternative ideas, beliefs, and practices.

These emergent social movements have arguably a rather unique transversal feature. In hindsight, social movements prior to and throughout the xx and xxi centuries have largely mobilized around issues of inequality. Whether it be in terms of access to power, basic human rights, economic and labour conditions, ethnic background, gender or sexual-orientation prejudice, and so forth, the core of the underlying narrative is the fixing of an existing and persistent inequality. The social movements reviewed in this chapter add a very substantial layer to this mix. They do incorporate some of the abovementioned inequality issues, even adding a further dimension of inequality to the latter. In fact, from an environmental ethics standpoint, these movements question the predominant Human chauvinism and subsequent inequality between nature and humans in terms of the right to inhabit Earth. However, the core driving force behind these social movements resides elsewhere. The movements feed on the imminent end of our collective planetary life and what actions must be taken to prevent that, in order to inform their mobilization dynamic.

In this vein, they are more framed around issues of limits and scarcity, than inequality only, and this may offer a distinctive specificity that hinders political action from being fully implemented. For the generations that have grown in affluence since the Second World War, the belief that resources are illimited is very hard to change.

In this chapter we were also able to show that these social movements are far from being a homogenous, harmonious universe. As we illustrate, the diversity in terms of scope, organization model, and members' make-up varies considerably. We may interpret this wide array of social movements under the *deep green alternative* banner to represent the lack of consensus that exists on what the alternative to the predominant development model should be. The final portrait is a fragmented landscape of intersubjective collective practices that fail to successfully bring about interobjective structural change.

Regardless of their heterogeneity, and despite their numbers being still insufficient to turn the tide, contemporary social movements toward a transition to sustainability allow us to challenge historical determinism narratives that make structural changes seem all but impossible. Alternative ideas play, after all, a fundamental role. According to Friedman (2002) and Göpel (2016; 2017), alternative ideas and policies must be protected and fostered, as they provide the new imaginary and binding narratives necessary to ignite change and galvanize support for it. However, as we explored earlier (Figure 3.3), societal change is a complex adaptive system that evolves in non-linear ways when confronted with a wide range of catalysts, some purposefully induced, others simply random. As Göpel (2017, 140) puts it: "Psychology, sociology, neurosciences show that shifting mind-sets implies not only a change in thinking but a change in being, feeling, engaging, relating, and acting in the world".

The reconfiguration of societal sense-making and the questioning of predominant path-dependencies strikes at the core of a widespread and deeply entrenched system of beliefs. These are lengthy, slow, spatially uneven processes. This helps explain the persistent difficulties of these social movements in the scaling-up of the change they wish to promote. The deficit of incrementality does not nullify the added value that these social movements hold as policy learning laboratories. As Levin et al. (2012, 124) said, "a number of small policy changes can have significant transformative effects if they trigger path-dependent processes". This thus begs the question of why do traditional policy frameworks not make better use of the potential input of these social movements?

The answer may lie in the very gap that emerges from the analysis of existing social movements toward a transition to sustainability. And here we refer to their political voice and impact. As argued above, there is still no worldwide full-on politicization of the socioecological *alternatives*. The politics and governmentality of the *alternatives* are to an overwhelming degree absent from the current development debate. The future ahead for the ethos and objectives of these social movements, whatever it may be, will surely be defined by their capacity to network, mobilize, and become visible players in global, national, and local political arenas. This begs for further research about the socio-political *alternatives* that are currently being put into practice, with preferably cross-country comparative analyses in order to isolate facilitators and inhibitors of their expansion and allow us to develop a better sense of how far the *alternative* has truly gone.

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