

## Reflexion Paper

Economics of biodiversity, sustainable transitions

*Structural or transformative change is one undermining the other's ability to generate valuable progress? Is there an inherent conflict between the two or is the conceptual diversity a good thing, providing rewarding dynamics in the problem-solving process?*

In the Swedish context, there seems to be some established consensus on what the character of the problem of climate change is. The general public's awareness and knowledge could be argued to be relatively high, and steadily improving. This is much thanks to the topic's firm inclusion in all levels of the educational system, as well as the space the topic occupies in the public debate. The relatively high awareness and knowledge among the Swedish general public could be argued to positively contributing to Sweden's comparably progressive policy framework, and proactive efforts towards sustainable development. Despite this, we today face great challenges for the future and the continued work towards ultimately achieving a sustainable society. My perception is that in Sweden and countries like Sweden, the question now is: what's next? And, what does a sustainable future actually look like? Such questions have gained extra weight as the country, thanks to its leading position, attracts attention from others, and thus carries a certain power, or responsibility to guide the continued global work.

Prior to the conversations with the interviewees, I more firmly carried the conviction that we are doing too little in the fight for a sustainable future, and thus that we must be prepared to sacrifice more of our comforts for it to be realised. The conversation with the interviewees made me question the role of such a conviction in the work for change, and it raised more questions in connection to the ones posed above. Questions like; *What knowledge must the individual possess for us to be able to collectively work towards a change? To what extent do we lack a common understanding of what the future must look like?* And, finally (inspired by the questions listed in the assignment description), *How do we value what has been done to solve climate change as an existential threat?*

Humans and human society, even though we historically have failed to realise it, exist within a greater ecological system. We are fully dependent on this 'earth system,' it supports and enables our existence, but the economic and social structures that we actively interact with in our everyday life can make this fact appear abstract to the general public. Our planet is complex and diverse, consisting of a biosphere encompassing an atmosphere, lithosphere and hydrosphere. All these

'parts' interact in complex cyclical processes and in this creates the environment and climate as a whole. Today it is clear to us, me the interviewees and others, that we as humans are living beyond the limits of what this natural system can support, and that we therefore push the boundaries of our planet. We as humans are extracting more resources than can be reproduced and thus compromises future generations' existence. In addition to this our actions and ways of living are producing large amounts of waste, in terms of materials, chemicals, and greenhouse gas emissions. This all disrupts the functioning of cyclical mechanisms and the balance upon which the ecosystem depends. For us to collectively create a sustainable way of living we need to recognise our violations of these planetary boundaries, and create a society that enables us to live within the limits. In addition to this a sustainable future not only encompasses environmental sustainability but it also means dealing with additional human-made problems preventing social and economic sustainability to be achieved.

When aware of all the problems human behaviours are creating and the magnitude of these, it can feel that there is something inherently wrong with the way we as humans live. Despite the difficulty to imagine a dramatically different society or economy it is tempting to deem our social and economic systems as fundamentally dysfunctional and think that they can't continue to exist in a way even remotely similar to the current.

In the conversation with the interviewees, I came to realize how significant the differences are in the ideas and answers related to the questions; *what's next?* and *What does a sustainable future look like?* given a person's attitude towards the subject; pessimistic or optimistic. The interviewees all in contrast to me, to some extent put emphasis on the progressive actions already made towards sustainable development. They brought up examples of how companies and other actors in society currently work towards a more sustainable mode of operating, how they are structurally changing. This made me reflect and ask question like the ones brought up in paragraph 2. In the conversation with the interviewees, one of the questions I asked them was; *How can we FORCE companies and others to change?* What was interesting here was that in some way they all stated that they believe they see change happening and most importantly see a desire for change. With this in mind, we should perhaps recognize that there is great value in the idea that our ways can be reformed, restructured and that transformative change in all cases and at all levels takes time.

There might not be one solution, because there is no simple problem. Thus, the answer to how the future will look can't ever be given in greater detail, since 'now' always moves the future. When

trying to generate change, the answer might lie in designing an environment that stimulates change and invention of new solutions. How much and how specific knowledge do people need to have in order to positively contribute to the needed change? Considering the discussion above, we can conclude that development towards a sustainable future needs “pushing” for change and incentivising progress, e.g. making it financially unprofitable to do ‘business as usual’.