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Thoughts and comments about “A Reflection on The Earth Charter Project and its Mission in the Anthropocene” by Brendan Mackey

Having witnessed the evolution of the Earth Charter since the first drafting efforts in Rio+5, the consultation process – one of the largest ever – and the launch and implementation at the start of the century, I can attest the power it has to generate impacts in the three areas mentioned by Brendan: Education, Activism and Governance. Scanning through the over 6700 organizational endorsers of the Charter, we see different groups including cities, foundations, educational organizations, local and central government, companies from tourism sector, communication, banks and other, religious organizations, networks and a few more. Overall, I would conclude that the majority of these are already convinced and active on the need to change our developmental patterns and take better care of Mother Earth.

The Union of International Associations maintains information on over 68,000 international organizations alone. While there are 45,508 companies listed in stock exchanges around the world, it is an impossible task to determine number of formal unlisted companies that exist globally with one reference of approximately 115 million¹. In summary, after 20 years since the Earth Charter process began, current reach is very limited, especially if we want to preach outside the choir.

On the positive side, I don't think there has ever been a better moment to gain momentum. Throughout the world, the lack of ethics and values in corporate and political spheres has become exposed, mostly thanks to social media and activist organizations that have the courage to face the power of the establishment. We are witnessing how government and corporate corruption have severely impacted human well-being. The idea that 1% of the population have more than the 99% remaining has started to question the developmental model. The speed at which negative news travels across borders, at least to 20% of the world population that is somehow connected to the internet and social media, is generating a growing unrest and an urge for change.

The rise of technology and artificial intelligence will rapidly change the way the world works, eliminating many of the current professions and jobs while generating new opportunities, especially for millennials and the following digital generations. We should prepare for a total disruption in many sectors of society. “Professionals” of the future will not sit in classrooms and pay high tuition fees, many traditional universities will go extinct if they don't wake up on time. It is time for the Earth Charter Initiative to engage some thought leaders within this youth and see how we can jump on this fast moving train and use the momentum to promote further change.

Technology will definitely help but it will not solve most of the problems that are now challenging our civilization. As Brendan mentions, the Planetary Boundary concept has gained momentum since the first launch in 2009. After the 2015 publication, it has been used by many sectors to analyze impacts and draft new pathways forward. Kate Raworth has used it in the development

¹ <https://www.quora.com/How-many-companies-exist-in-the-world>

of the Doughnut Economics² and recently Campbell et al³ demonstrated how agriculture has become a major driver of the Earth system exceeding the planetary boundaries. One of the main breakthroughs of the planetary boundary concept is that it brings insight to global change and the interlinkages between the human induced changes and the need to develop more holistic approaches to deal with complexity – something very difficult for a world where the reductionist approach has prevailed in our education and institutions. More importantly, it calls the attention to biodiversity loss, excess use of fertilizers and land use change, that have already impacted the planet in ways that are pushing us out of the “safe operating zone for humanity”, putting climate change into a more realistic perspective without diminishing its relevance.

I would add to the discussion of the sustainable development utopia, which includes the need to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. Personally, I don't think it is possible to achieve sustainable development anymore. The biodiversity losses mentioned by Brendan show a clear decline in the capacity of ecosystems to keep functioning appropriately, and the actual collapse of ecosystems around the world has brought attention to the life threatening potential, including for humans. If we look at newer publications such as the collapse of insect populations, ocean anoxia and warming and the many other alarming facts which are now exposed to “normal” people through social media, I am sure we can pick up a lot more endorsers for the Earth Charter movement.

In recent years, we are seeing a growing movement of regeneration which we have called regenerative development. In order to move forward, we must regenerate our ecosystems, our economic model, our society, our political systems. We must strengthen our living culture and several authors are writing about regeneration of culture and community. For regenerative development to happen, spirituality must be built in at the core and the need for stronger ethical and value based approaches is being increasingly recognized as the only way to truly change human behavior.

The failure of the green economy has opened doors to other initiatives such as circular economics (Blue Economy), regenerative economy (Capital Institute), economy of the common good (Christian Felber) and the already mentioned Doughnut Economics. In all of these approaches, the Earth Charter fits in like a glove to the hand, but we should seriously consider updating it.

² <https://www.kateraworth.com/>

³ <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol22/iss4/art8/>