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Overextension and Collapse of the World System?



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As never before, in every country and forum the talk is about development and growth. It is an obsession that has dogged us for at least three centuries. Now that the economy has collapsed, the idea has returned with renewed vigor, because the logic of the system does not permit, without denying itself, the abandonment of that particular idea-matrix. Woe to the economies that cannot regain their levels of development-growth! They will fail, along with the eventual ecological and humanitarian tragedy.

But we must say it clearly: retaking that idea is a trap into which the majority is falling, including Benedict XVI in his recent encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, devoted to development. This can be verified by the almost unanimous speeches of the representatives of the 192 nations attending the UN gathering in late June. The great exception, that surprised many, was the initial and final speeches of the President of the General Assembly, Miguel d'Escoto, who looked ahead, with the logic of a different Earth-Life-Humanity relationship paradigm, which subordinates development to the service of these central realities. Nothing could he heard from the others: development-growth must be re-established, or the crisis will be perennial.

Why do I say this is a trap? Because to reach the predicted 2% minimum index of annual development-growth, we would soon need two Earths like the one we have.

It was not I who said that: it was former French President Jacques Chirac, on February 2, 2007, when the *IPCC* published the facts on global warming in Paris. Well-known biologist Edgard Wilson, and James Lovelock, who formulated the theory of the Earth as Gaia, among others, repeat it frequently. The Earth is showing unequivocal signs of generalized stress. There are limits that cannot be surpassed.

Ban-Ki-Moon, Secretary of the UN, recently warned the nations that we only have ten years to save human civilization from a planetary ecological catastrophe. In a recent issue of *Nature* magazine, a distinguished group of scientists published a report about «*Planetary Boundaries*» wherein they affirm that in several ecosystems we are reaching the point of no return, *the tipping point*, relating to desertification, the melting of the ice caps of the poles and the Himalayas, and the growing acidity of the oceans. It is worth mentioning what I consider to be the best researched study, done by the authors of the legendary, *The Limits of Growth*, by D. Meadows and J. Randers, of the 1972 Club of Rome. Their 1992 book has a title that is a clarion call: *Beyond the Limits: Total Collapse or a Sustainable Future*.

The thesis of these authors is that the excessive acceleration of recent decades of development/growth, of consumption and waste, has shown us the ecologic limits of the Earth. No technology or economic model can guarantee the sustainability of the present trajectory. Economist Ignacy Sachs, a friend of Brazil -one of the few who proposes an eco-socio-development - comments: «*One cannot exclude the idea that, by the excessive application of partial rationality, we will end up on a path of suicidal global irrationality*» («*Forum*», June 2009 p.19). I have already affirmed in this space that the culture of capital has a suicidal tendency. It would rather die than change; carrying others along with it.

The framers of the systemic vision call this phenomena *over-extension and collapse*. This is to say, we have surpassed the limits and are headed towards collapse.

Am I being pessimistic? I respond by quoting Jose Saramago: «*I am not pessimistic, reality is what is terrible.*» Clearly: either we abandon the unsustainable development and move towards what the Earth Charter calls «*a sustainable form of living*» and the Andean people call, «*living good,*» or we must accept the risk of being eliminated from this planet.

But the universe is comprised of yet untapped potentialities, so let's hope that one appears to save us all.

Source: the author's site - [Extrapolação e colapso do sistema mundial?](#)

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[About the author](#)

[Refugio del Rio Grande](#), a partner of [Tlaxcala](#), the network of translators for linguistic diversity, is a 45 acre refuge located outside Harlingen, Texas, USA. It was opened in 1986, to offer a place of refuge in the United States for political refugees from Central America. Now, refugees from all countries of the world are welcome. REFUGIO is also a refuge for a wide variety of wildlife, who find a safe and friendly environment. At REFUGIO, basic needs of housing, clothing and food are met. Those looking for asylum because of repression or oppression can find peace as they work through the process of their legal case, living with friends who work in solidarity for justice and peace in a small self governing community. A sense of balance is sought between nature and humanity as we live and work together.

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