9

Conclusion

An Environmentalism of the Rich?

On June 2, 2022, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson addressed heads of state, ministers, diplomats, and other elites from around the world.[1] They had assembled in Stockholm to celebrate a half-century of global environmental governance (GEG), fifty years after the UN Conference on the Human Environment. The semi-centennial gathering is a large-scale international event, but it spans only two days, compared to almost two weeks in Stockholm in June 1972. Leading up to the 2022 meeting, there had been lingering concern among the world's activists, researchers, engaged companies, and citizens that so little was being heard about Stockholm+50, which, in comparison to the original Stockholm Conference, lacked energetic leadership and an extensive preparation period. By the eve of its opening, many questioned the level of ambition that lay behind an event that should have been a milestone in the half-century struggle to tackle the environment and climate crisis.

Stockholm 1972 had sparked a phenomenal development. The Conference had represented the birth of an entirely new arena of international politics, a set of issues of grave importance for people and planet. However, after fifty years, the Swedish prime minister had to concede that things were still not moving in the right direction. It was time – once again – to turn words into deeds.

[1] Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, opening speech at the Stockholm+50 conference, June 2, 2022, Älvsjö fair, Stockholm, www.government.se/speeches/2022/06/stockholm-50-opening-address/ (retrieved August 2, 2022). All quotes in the following are from that speech.

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Heat waves, water scarcity, droughts, storms, floods, wildfires, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, warming oceans – soon containing more plastic than fish.

We are hurting our planet.

We must start delivering on the declarations we have signed, and the pledges we have made.

We have already talked the talk,
Now it's time to walk the walk.

She speaks in a cavernous auditorium at Stockholmsmässan, a hangar-like facility on the outskirts of the city center typically used for massive marketing events, dog shows, and trade fairs. Andersson cites her predecessor, Olof Palme, who opened the Stockholm Conference fifty years earlier with a speech at the Royal Swedish Opera, a grand nineteenth-century structure located opposite the Swedish Parliament, the Foreign Office, and the Royal Palace right in the heart of Stockholm.

Let our work be guided by the words spoken at the 1972 Conference by the Prime Minister, Olof Palme,

"There is no individual future, neither for human beings, nor for nations.
Our future is common. We must share it together.
We must shape it together."

Before rounding off her remarks, the Swedish prime minister also attempts to ignite a degree of optimism. She does not speak about great achievements on the path toward global sustainability, but rather provides examples of ostensible environmental progress that has been made in Sweden. Specifically, about – cars and steel…

And yesterday, right outside these doors, the very first vehicle built using fossil-free steel was presented. This project is the result of a public-private partnership supported by the Swedish Government.

We see that it's possible to combine reduced emissions with economic development.

One can reflect on whether or not these remarks, and the convention center setting of the event, contributed to lifting the spirit and ambition of GEG and its practitioners. Perhaps what came across was the pragmatic, down to earth voice of a disillusioned politician who spoke in less than lofty terms, compared to the grand visions, and scathing critiques, articulated fifty years earlier.

Palme had spoken about the need to stop "ecocide," a word he is credited for putting into diplomatic and political circulation in

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FIGURE 9.1 The two-day Stockholm+50 Conference was hosted by Sweden on June 2–3, 2022, in association with the government of Kenya, where, in Nairobi, the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme – a main outcome of the 1972 Stockholm Conference – is based. Front row, left to right: Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria and King Carl XVI Gustaf, UN Secretary General António Guterres, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta, and Swedish prime minster Magdalena Andersson. The back row includes senior UN officials and members of the governments of Sweden and Kenya. Photo: Jessica Gow/TT.

June 1972.[2] The prime minister of 2022 talks about a Swedish automobile, in the wake of the demise of Saab and the Chinese acquisition of Volvo. But Andersson's statement should, perhaps, rather be interpreted as a gesture to the everyday character of the sustainability transition that is not only necessary but, she wants to suggest, has already started in Sweden. She adds that it plays out in the north of the country,

[2] A concept Sweden itself does not officially endorse, and passed by with silence at Stockholm+50 in June 2022. Also, the large majority of political parties in Sweden, except the Left Part and the Green Party, are not willing to move on the issue. Lisa Röstlund & Alexandra Urisman Otto, "Allt fler länder stödjer lag mot miljömord – men inte Sverige" [Ever More Countries Support Ecocide Law – But Not Sweden], *Dagens Nyheter*, May 29, 2022. At the same time, a large number of Swedish NGOs, including WWF, SSNC, the Church of Sweden, and the Olof Palme International Center, want this policy to change: "26 Swedish NGOs Demand Ecocide Law at Stockholm+50," *Stop Ecocide International*, May 17, 2022, www.stopecocide.earth/new-breaking-news-summary/26-swedish-ngos-demand-ecocide-law-at-stockholm50 (retrieved December 24, 2022).

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a region with some of the biggest challenges, both environmentally and economically, where salvation may lie in the so-called new green industrial revolution. Most of the international excellences listening would not know the details of this alluring future vision, but those of us who do are acutely aware that there are formidable obstacles to overcome even along this pathway of progress.

Andersson's narrative is reminiscent of the Soterian-Promethean dichotomy (see Chapter 7). She largely adopts the Promethean perspective in making the case for a Big Technology approach to the future. But, as we noted earlier (Chapter 2), Swedish Social Democratic political rhetoric also has a Soterian side, a position we can see in Palme's 1972 opening speech at the Stockholm Conference. On the other hand, Palme was by and large a strong proponent of the standard technology-modernity narrative. He was for instance an advocate of nuclear power, even using climate change as a motivating factor long before such arguments were commonly employed.[3] In the Social Democratic Party, these categories were also always fluid. Hans Palmstierna (Chapters 4 and 5), for example, was first pro-nuclear, but by the early 1970s, had turned against the technology at a time when he also became increasingly critical of industry – an unwelcome development for some members of the Social Democratic government as well as business leaders, who started to see him as a threat to the economic growth that underpinned the Swedish welfare state.

Fifty-plus years after Stockholm, progress on problems of the human environment is not nearly rapid enough, and the GEG endeavor embarked upon in 1972 is still far from complete. Where will Sweden's green transition stand a few decades from now? The truth is that the Swedish prime minister does not know, because it is indeed impossible to know. Had Andersson invoked Sweden's aboriginal people, the prime minister would have had to concede that the Sami typically do not like the mines that she mentions as part of the new green future in their part of the country. There is a vision for industry, perhaps even a sustainable one, but the road to take us there is just as disputed as it has always been.

This is Stockholm in the 2020s. What are we supposed to think? Andersson ends her speech by asking everyone, upon departing Stockholm, to speed up their work to reach all the important goals they have agreed upon; commitments that were in some cases made many years ago. Will they finally follow through this time?

[3] Kristoffer Ekberg & Martin Hultman, "A Question of Utter Importance: The Early History of Climate Change and Energy Policy in Sweden, 1974–1983," *Environment and History*, 29(2023):3, 399–421.

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Only months after Stockholm+50, Sweden held general elections. Environment and climate were largely absent from the election campaign, which revolved around the rising energy crisis in Europe following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The right-wing opposition, of which the ultra-right "national conservative" Sweden Democrats were part, won the election with a tight margin. Soon after, the Conservative government made a radical shift of environmental and climate policies. It dismantled the Ministry of Environment and brought environmental and climate issues into the Ministry of Climate and Enterprise. It withdrew a series of policy measures to reduce the use of fossil fuels in the transport sector, lowered taxes on, and reimbursed households and companies for, rising prices on fossil fuels and electricity. It also cut the environment budget by more than 50 percent over a few years.[4] Signals of weakening steadfastness on the green front had been seen for some time in Swedish politics. With the shift of government in the fall of 2022, the floodgates opened and raised eyebrows in Sweden as well as abroad. Where was the green leadership going?[5]

IS IT PROGRESS?

As historians, we will of course answer that it is too early to tell. Here at the end of this book, it is, however, time to see how both long-term trajectories and more recent changes have worked together to shape the arc of "the *human* environment" – with the italicized *human* – as articulated in the Stockholm approach to GEG since the mid-twentieth century and the Agenda 2020 decade. Might there be more dimensions to "human" than the benign, humane, and social ones that we discussed at the outset? Are there perhaps more anthropocentric and nationalist interests – perhaps also deeply human self-interest – at play in the Swedish position, after all?

We began this book by raising progress as a theme. Much history writing about the environment in general, and GEG in particular, is built upon narratives of gloom and decline. We wanted to reverse the optics and put

[4] *Dagens Nyheter*, April 17, 2023: www.dn.se/sverige/regeringen-storsatsar-pa-kontroversiell-klimatkompensation/.

[5] The official government statement on its policy for the coming four years was presented on October 18, 2022: www.government.se/speeches/2022/10/statement-of-government-policy/. Some reactions to the new politics are here: www.euronews.com/2022/10/18/devastating-consequences-as-new-swedish-government-scraps-environment-ministry, and here: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-19/climate-role-model-sweden-s-new-leader-axes-environment-ministry?leadSource=uverify%20wall.

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the focus on the role of a city, Stockholm, and a country, Sweden, and ask if we could find a progressive story to tell about a small state assuming leadership on a big issue. We opted to hone in on Stockholm and Sweden partly because we have a long experience in that geographic and social context. One of us, Sverker, was born in Sweden and has lived and worked there over the course of a long career as a historian, public intellectual, and policy advisor, but has also spent periods outside of Sweden, long enough to see the country from an outsider's perspective. Eric was born and raised in the United States, came to Sweden well into adulthood, and went to university in both countries. He has spent the better part of the past thirty years as a resident of the Swedish capital, working with foreign policy, sustainability, media, and now as a historian specializing in the history of international governance and geopolitics.

What have we found? Were we correct in assuming that there is a story to tell, and that a small country and its capital city can, under certain circumstances, make a useful, perhaps in particular moments, even decisive contribution to world affairs on issues that literally span the entire planet? The reader will have already formed her or his own opinion by now, but arriving to this concluding chapter, we as investigators have found it reasonable to retain our initial assumption. We do think that the Stockholm story in fact provides added value both to the understanding of GEG and, just as importantly, to the wider community of the science and politics of sustainable development, as well as to historians and policy thinkers like ourselves. At the very least, we hope that we have contributed some insights on how environmental governance actually takes place and plays out in a concrete empirical setting and over a considerable amount of time, in our case the long half-century since the UN Stockholm Conference. In reality, an even far longer timespan, given the attention we have paid to the several years of Conference preparations within the UN system in New York and Geneva. To this may be added the several decades of scientific work at Stockholm University and other Swedish institutions after World War II, and the formation of Sweden's modern democratic political culture earlier in the twentieth century. What Marquis Childs called "the middle way," with a focus on dialogue, democracy, compromise, the embrace of science and technology, and firm belief in international institutions, especially the United Nations.

Our conclusion, however, does not come without a few caveats. The first is that neither a city nor a nation is a fixed entity that passes through time unaffected. We have become much more aware through this project of just how different Stockholm, and Sweden, are today compared to the time of the Swedish initiative at the United Nations in 1967–1968.

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Sweden is no small, inert monolith working to improve the relentlessly changing world outside. The country itself changes just as quickly as any other part of the world, and in no unified and predictable direction. Overall, as a global environmental player, Sweden's significance, while still probably punching a bit above its weight, is today not anywhere near where it was at the beginning of this period in the late 1960s and in the final decades of the 1900s. Some of its early strengths have weakened, while in the most recent years, few new strengths have emerged to offset the loss. On the contrary, a new cynicism has entered the environmental register, a shrugging of shoulders as past green achievements are abandoned, manifested for example when the government decided to reduce the level of mandatory biofuel mixed into gasoline and diesel, ostensibly disregarding goals set in Sweden's climate law of 2017. Reviewing the government's 2023 Climate Plan, the Swedish Climate Policy Council delivered a scathing critique, declaring that under current policy, Sweden will not meet either its own or the European Union (EU)'s 2030 emission targets, nor long-term net zero for 2045 and 2050.[6]

The Stockholm+50 Conference in June 2022, officially a major UN event like the 1972 Stockholm Conference, illustrated the sea change in Sweden's position in the international system and the structural changes in global affairs in general. Stockholm 1972 was a long, intense, well-prepared, and innovative meeting that produced landmark institutions like UNEP and pointed the world in a new direction of hope and collective commitment to a better managed human environment. Stockholm 2022 was a brief event with a short preparation period and few surprises (perhaps except for the new car…) that generated little excitement before, during, or after the two-day gathering. The circumstances were certainly not optimal, given the preceding and still ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and a horrifying new war in Ukraine that deeply disrupted international relations. On the other hand, fifty years down the road, the world should have been infinitely better equipped to organize a major event on the fate of the planet and its soon eight billion inhabitants, and deliver at a critical moment for the international system. Sweden, as the initiator of what has come to be called GEG, would have been expected to provide strong leadership for such a mission. Neither proved to really be the case.

Another caveat has to do with the political commitment of the country itself. There have been major shifts in the circumstances enabling progressive politics in Sweden, just as in Europe at large. Populist politics with

[6] *Swedish Climate Policy Council: Report 2024* (March 2024). www.klimatpolitiskaradet.se/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/klimatpolitiskaradetsrapport2024.pdf.

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a strong nationalist orientation has eaten its way into the very fabric of political life in many countries. Since the financial crisis of 2008–2009, and in particular the tumultuous and ominous past decade – with Brexit, the Trump presidency, the deepened autocracy in China, Moscow's war of aggression against Ukraine, and the worsening wars and crises in the Middle East as some of the most disheartening manifestations – this has inserted mental and material friction into all potential sustainability policies. Sweden is no exception. Even without that friction, the speed of progress has been slower than what most would have expected a half century ago. If participants at the Stockholm Conference had been told in June 1972 that most of the major problems would still be unresolved in 2022, and that some of the biggest, including climate and biodiversity, would only accelerate over the next fifty years, they would hardly have thought it plausible.

Stewart Brand's famous sojourn in Stockholm (Chapter 6) included an entourage of not only Hopi, Mohawk, and Navajo Native Americans that gave talks, organized rituals, and performed music but also a small team of journalists equipped with recording devices. Their tour of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency is available on YouTube. At one point, the camera stops in front of the desk of a young Swedish civil servant wearing a quintessentially bureaucratic outfit, a summery light suit and a tie. He responds to a question by saying, without the slightest hint of irony (or any indication of being under the influence of hypnotic substances …), that he expected industrial pollution to be eradicated in Sweden by 1973! His response reflected the mood of the day. In the same film, a representative of Rotary International tells the same journalist that he is, alas, too old to be reformed. He has committed environmental sins all his life, implying that he simply can't stop now. The new generation will be entirely different, he says. They have the spirit his cohort never learned and will take society in a new direction. Like the young Swedish bureaucrat, the much older Rotary man was also wrong.[7]

Needless to say, the general lack of environmental progress to date cannot be blamed on Stockholm or Sweden in particular. Had there been no Stockholm Conference and had the Swedish capital not been a proactive nexus for green world affairs since 1972 and before, the global environment would in all likelihood not have fared any better, and the same hockey stick curves would have climbed upward anyway.

[7] Youtube URL, www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFBDXm8DaYc. A longer playlist from Soundings Mindful Media is here, "Long Live Life – Feature Documentary on Eco Politics – 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment," www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLECo3BNUfXE8288XStZadEOGqqLDTjVq- (retrieved August 5, 2022).

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But the very fact that these curves are so hard to bend back down and the processes of progress are so painstakingly slow, or even negligible, should give us pause. If we want to be serious about the long-term improvement of the global environment, we should take into consideration the fact that the only progress we can reasonably talk about here is *relative*. Relative, that is, to the even more disastrous earth story that might have played out without the emergence and evolution of GEG. What we may call a counterfactual nihilism, or denialism, scenario, which is clearly not what we have experienced over the past half century (although it may at times have felt that way). The work that we have taken on in writing this book has been to identify the factors in the case of Stockholm and Sweden that have made a difference. Looking at progressive elements in the modern history of the global environment is not the same as arguing that the efforts of an array of individuals and institutions have also resulted in real progress on the ground at various levels of abstraction. An engaged analytical discourse on progress toward a more sustainable human environment at the global or planetary scale must be possible, even if much of that (potential) progress still lies in the future.

IS STOCKHOLM'S ROLE OVERSIZED?

The reader will have noted that we started the chapters with an emblematic vignette as a preamble to the theme and historical period covered. Many of these, like the extract from Magdalena Andersson's speech at Stockholm+50 at the start of this final chapter, were from or about *meetings*. We did this with a purpose: to demonstrate that a primary method of GEG was adopted from diplomacy, where dialogue through face-to-face meetings has always been considered the best working method. Parallels are apparent with the evolution of the in-person scientific conference – still defended by many academics, while heavily critiqued by others as reproducing hierarchies and for being environmentally unsustainable because of the inevitable air travel involved. Progress, the argument goes, starts with agreement, which requires negotiation.[8]

[8] Charlotte Bigg, Jessica Rheinisch, Geert Somsen & Sven Widmalm, "No amount of technology can replicate in-person conferences," *Times Higher Education Supplement*, August 4, 2022. Astrid Eichhorn, Magnus Breitholtz, Valerie Domcke, Jan Hladky, Debbie Hopkins, Agnes Kreil, Sverker Sörlin, & Diarmuid Torney, *Towards Climate Sustainability of the Academic System in Europe and Beyond* (Berlin: Alliance of European Academies, ALLEA, 2022).

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We also wanted to demonstrate that certain evidence of progress can already be gleaned from the progression of topics encompassed within environmental governance. Issues like toxic chemicals and pollutants have actually been, if not solved, at least cast as a set of problems where agreements were made and the rates of dangerous change have slowed down.[9] In the case of population growth, once a fundamental aspect of neo-Malthusian environmental crisis discourse, research on demographic transition and the science communication of the late Swedish physician Hans Rosling – also, like Johan Rockström and Greta Thunberg on the *TIME Magazine* 100 list (in 2012)[10] – have, for instance, alleviated concerns to some extent. Such issues have moved down the list of urgency. Our later chapters focus on the significance of Stockholm in enabling scientific work and fostering international cooperation on the most complex issues, where point sources of pollution and other problems can't be identified. For such intractable problems, it is rather the sum total of human activities that have caused the negative effects, as in the case of climate change, biodiversity loss, and across a wide set of Earth system indicators. An arc of at least some progress is built into our narrative.

Have we been able to demonstrate that Sweden has played an oversized role in the realm of environmental governance? It is hard to measure such a thing, and we have not attempted to do so. We opted not to count the number of conferences and agreements nor to quantify participant statistics. We have instead tried to provide a narrative where a prominent role of Swedes and other Stockholm-associated actors in the sequence of meetings, the establishment of institutions, and the conceptualization of environmental imperatives has been a feature, following in a rich tradition from diplomacy, science, and international environmentalism.[11] We hope that we have been convincing. Sweden's

[9] Again with many exceptions, such as the worrying finding that PFAS pollutants have now been detected in literally every corner of the planet, like the Antarctic ice cap and the Himalayan glaciers, indicating that they will stay with humanity forever. Jack Garnett, Crispin Halsall, Holly Winton, Hanna Joerss, Robert Mulvaney, Ralf Ebinghaus, Markus Frey, Anna Jones, Amber Leeson, & Peter Wynn, "Increasing Accumulation of Perfluorocarboxylate Contaminants Revealed in an Antarctic Firn Core (1958–2017)," *Environmental Science & Technology*, 26 July (2022). https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.2c02592. Epub ahead of print.

[10] https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_100.

[11] The importance of meetings and of networks of expertise, formed and maintained during meetings, often taking place in sequences, is visible, although not always explicitly theorized in the literature on the formation of international environmentalism.

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contribution to this process should also be weighed against the small size of its population and gross domestic product (GDP) relative to world, or Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), totals.

Is there a pattern in Sweden's engagement? We do think there is. The more common and international an issue is, and the less the response centers on the actions of an individual government, the more active Sweden tends to be. In Swedish domestic politics, it has sometimes been said that Sweden has wanted to serve as a "world conscience" (*världssamvete*). The expression in fact became a stereotype for Sweden and is often used by critics of the country's engagement in global issues.[12] A perpetual target of this critique has been Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, which has since the early 1970s been funded at the level of 1 percent of GDP, certainly a growing budget over time and among the highest in the world along with Norway and Luxembourg.[13] For the first time, the 1 percent goal has now been abandoned. Along with it, the Sida-funded program of development research was slashed by the government, all designed to hollow out the position of Sweden as the "progressive small state" with an outsized role in world affairs, and apparently succeeding as far as international publicity can tell.[14]

For an example of an approach that emphasizes the combination of meetings, individuals, networks and institutions, see Matthias Schmelzer, "'Born in the Corridors of the OECD': The Forgotten Origins of the Club of Rome, Transnational Networks, and the 1970s in Global History," *Journal of Global History*, 12(2017):1, 26–48. On the usefulness of the concept "espistemic communities" in this context, see Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination." *International Organization* 46(1992):1, 1–35. www.jstor.org/stable/2706951, on page 3, note 4. Haas cites especially literature from the history of science. In science, just as in diplomacy, meetings have been institutionalized as tools of cohesion building and organized progress.

[12] Here it is used as such in the *New York Times* in 1998: Warren Hoge, www.nytimes.com/1998/08/10/world/sweden-once-the-world-s-conscience-now-drifts.html.

[13] Annual Report 2021 to the European Council on the EU Development Aid Targets – Council conclusions (June 14, 2021). https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9549-2021-INIT/en/pdf (retrieved March 21, 2023). Sunniva Engh, "The Conscience of the World?: Swedish and Norwegian Provision of Development Aid," *Itinerario* 33(2009):2, 65–82. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115300003107.

[14] The 1 percent target was officially abandoned in the budget of the center-right government that was formed following the September 2022 general election. David Nilsson, "Enprocentmålet avskaffas: Sverige måste hitta en ny roll i världen" [One Percent Target Abandoned: Sweden Must Seek a New Role in the World], *Omvärlden*, November 21, 2022, www.omvarlden.se/opinion/debatt/enprocentmalet-avskaffas-sverige-maste-hitta-en-ny-roll-i-varlden (retrieved December 24, 2022). The drastic dismantling of Swedish development research in June 2023 – see: www.vr.se/english/just-now/news/

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Some of that critique has for a long time been adopted by the rising populist right, whose more cynical "Sweden-first" nationalism is consistent with a low profile on the international scene. It has been the hallmark of Swedish foreign policy to engage in conflicts and concerns that are shared by many. This has in part been rooted in national priorities. Robust multilateralism and a strong UN have been deemed to be in Sweden's best interest. It also follows from the concept of *solidarity*, once a word of high prestige, originating in the trade union movement, which has always been strong in Sweden.[15] During the Cold War, the term took on a new meaning associated with supporting the cause of national independence and the struggle against colonialism – what Alfred Sauvy in 1952 called "tiers-mondism," in favor of the Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement that took shape with the 1955 Bandung Conference of newly independent Asian and African states, as well as China.[16]

The solidarity principle, in its Swedish version, was about protecting the weaker countries of the world. In a certain sense, Sweden itself was part of this cohort; it has never been a major power since the demise of its Baltic empire in the eighteenth century. But it was "weak" only because of its size. In most other respects, it was a nation replete with natural as well as societal resources (Chapter 2). In science, medicine, and technology, Sweden was punching far above its weight; a small superpower, which took the position that using its strengths in the interest of global solidarity and cooperation would be both good for the world in general and, especially, for the weak. For Sweden, too. This is the most reasonable way to read the words of Olof Palme from his 1972 speech: "There is no individual future, neither for human beings, nor for nations." There is a future only if there is cooperation. As Magdalena

news-archive/2023-06-27-no-new-grants-in-development-research.html – led to massive protest among scientists and negative international publicity: www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02239-8; www.swedev.dev/the-suspension-of-development-research-grants/#; www.thelocal.se/20230628/academics-in-uproar-after-sweden-cancels-research-funding.

[15] A. Wildt, "Solidarity: Its History and Contemporary Definition," In: K. Bayertz, ed., *Solidarity: Philosophical Studies in Contemporary Culture*, vol. 5 (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-9245-1_11.

[16] Leslie Wolf-Phillips, "Why 'Third World?': Origin, Definition and Usage," *Third World Quarterly* 9(1987):4, 1311–1327. Christoph Kalter, "A Shared Space of Imagination, Communication and Action: Perspectives on the History of the 'Third World'," In: Samantha Christiansen & Zachary A. Scarlett, eds., *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 23–38. Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010).

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Andersson stated in her opening address at Stockholm+50, quoting Palme's 50 years earlier: "our future is common." Hence, the Swedish commitment precisely to cooperation and the types of *con*-activities that we have elaborated throughout this book.

This may be the most fundamental component in explaining the oversized Swedish engagement in environmental politics at the global level. The inbuilt rationale of Swedish foreign policy – in all of its areas – can be distinguished in the rising issue of "the environment." It is in fact a particularly relevant policy object, and perhaps even the quintessential case of Sweden's international relations in the late-1960s. When it became clear in autumn 1967 (see Chapter 4) that transboundary pollution was a real and present danger that threatened countries downwind – such as Sweden in the case of British sulfur emissions that generated acid rain affecting Swedish soil and lakes – it was the decisive piece of evidence, in combination with the emergence of "the environment" as a framing narrative, that ignited what was already an ideology of solidarity rooted in Swedish political culture. The mobilization of the Swedish state and members of its foreign office to go to the UN and propose global action is, in that light, not as sensational as it might otherwise seem – and as it *has* seemed to some commentators on the Swedish initiative in the scholarly literature and, indeed, on Swedish environmental leadership in general.[17] On the contrary, it could be seen as a playbook example of an intervention in international politics for the rational, solidarity-minded small state and its conscientious leadership. It was just that this was the first time that a high-stakes political gambit in the realm of the environment took place at the global level, and it was this that made it historical.

The rise of Sweden as an environmental vanguard nation has sometimes been presented as largely an accomplishment of naturalists, popular movements, media figures, and young radicals as part of a major mind shift in the second half of the 1960s.[18] Just as important, however,

[17] Annika Kronsell, "Sweden: Setting a Good Example," In: Mikael Skou Andersen & Duncan Liefferink, eds. *European Environmental Policy: The Pioneers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Martin Jänicke, "Trend-setters in Environmental Policy: The Character and Role of Pioneer Countries," *European Environment* 15(2005):2, 129–142. https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.375; Steven Sarasini, "Constituting Leadership via Policy: Sweden as a Pioneer of Climate Change Mitigation," *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 14(2009): 635–653. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11027-009-9188-3.

[18] Andrew Jamison, Ron Eyerman, Jacqueline Cramer & Jeppe Læssøe, *The Making of the New Environmental Consciousness: A Comparative Study of Environmental*

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were the strong ties within Swedish society and domestic politics, in which government, industry, and organized labor enjoyed a robust institutional alliance based on a long-standing tradition of close collaboration to promote modernization and growth. Environment became woven into this well-established concept of soft corporatism at around the same time as the Swedish initiative in the UN.[19] This was in part due to the realization among employer organizations, labor union federations, and Sweden's Social Democrat-led government that environmental exploitation and despoilment could negatively affect Sweden's focus on industry as a driver of economic growth, which in turn was a foundation of the welfare state. To industry, taking the environment seriously also meant a safer license to operate. The new area of collaboration was made manifest with the founding in 1966 of the Institute for Air and Water Research (IVL), co-funded by the large, influential forest industry and a Swedish government that was becoming increasingly interested in the environment.

What is more, in a country where innovation, resource exploitation, and high levels of industrial activity have led to large concentrations of capital, the involvement of industrialists and entrepreneurs in institution-building at the intersection of science and environment – following in some respect the tradition established by Alfred Nobel – represents another important aspect of the Stockholm story. One example (Chapter 5) is Kjell Beijer's donation to the Academy of Sciences that led to the creation of the Beijer Institute in 1977. Building on the Beijer Institute, the establishment of the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) in 1989 (Chapter 6) was in turn reminiscent of earlier efforts by the Swedish state to promote progressive global issues, such as the 1966 founding of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

Movements in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990). David Larsson Heidenblad, "Mapping a New History of the Ecological Turn: The Circulation of Environmental Knowledge in Sweden 1967," *Environment and History* 24(2018):2, 265–284. Anna Kaijser & David Larsson Heidenblad, "Young Activists in Muddy Boots: Fältbiologerna and the Ecological Turn, 1959–1974," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 43(2018):3, 301–323.

[19] Lennart J. Lundqvist, *The Hare and the Tortoise: Clean Air Policies in the United States and Sweden* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980). Ann-Kristin Bergquist & Kristina Söderholm, "Green Innovation Systems in Swedish Industry, 1960–1989," *Business History Review* 85(2011): 677–698. Kristina Söderholm & Ann-Kristin Bergquist, "Firm Collaboration and Environmental Adaptation: The Case of the Swedish Pulp- and Paper Industry 1900–1990," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 60(2012):2, 183–211.

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(SIPRI). This was largely on the initiative of Alva Myrdal, who would also be instrumental in the creation of the Secretariat (now Institute) of Futures Studies in 1972.[20]

THE CON-WORDS

Given this background, it is also easier to contextualize the significance of the structuring analytical keywords that we proposed at the outset (Chapter 1). We called them con-words, because they all started with the prefix "con": connecting, convening, contributing, and conceptualizing. Over the chapters that followed, we added more such words as context required. If you are a small player, like a Nordic country with less than 2 percent of Europe's population, and if your ambition is to make the world come together around rational principles of action in order to protect the weak and make sure that solutions are fair and acceptable to all, it seems quite reasonable to think in con-terms. After all, "con" means "with," or "together." It also seems reasonable to be pro-active, because bigger powers may have better chances to protect themselves or take measures that others will have to adjust to. As a small actor, you approach the big powers, and the UN, with a language of collaboration. What you can offer is only valid if it can be carried out by many actors in concert. To not be active and demonstrate your capacity to be a relevant partner means that you would rather seek refuge under the wings of a bigger partner or jump on some bandwagon. To connect, convene, contribute, and conceptualize is to signal that among the weak you are in fact strong, strong enough to maintain an active role, for example, in scientific and environmental diplomacy, or in security policy.

This explains the rationale for *connecting* with others. In the chapters above, we have seen Swedish and Stockholm-based actors establishing relations with other progressive forces in the environmental arena, domestically and internationally. This has been facilitated by the early inception of an official Environmental Protection Agency, set up in 1967 as a government agency, combined with the distribution of various environmental missions to existing agencies responsible for forests, minerals, agriculture, public health, work safety, and other sectors. Such authorities could do connecting work alongside the foreign office.

[20] Jenny Andersson, "Choosing Futures: Alva Myrdal and the Construction of Swedish Futures Studies, 1967–1972," *International Review of Social History* 51(2006):2, 277–295.

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After the early major initiative that shaped the UN meeting in 1972, this has been less of a driver in Swedish environmental engagement, perhaps even less so after the installment of a Minister of Environment (currently environment and climate) in the cabinet in 1985 and a separate government department for environmental matters since 1987 (until its dismantling in 2022).

Throughout this volume, we have witnessed the performance of connecting work, sometimes by government actors, and increasingly by other societal institutions as well as individuals. A number of these were scientific institutions, some of which had close ties to policy and were based in Stockholm. The need of staying connected also explains the effort to build institutions with a mission of providing research of relevance for policy and governance. The background stories to the institutes may vary, as did their management, funding, and mission. Their growing critical mass, their persistence and international orientation, and certainly their close relation to government through a range of intermediating partners, for example, research councils, can be best understood if institutional density is seen as a corollary to the solidarity logic of staying connected and therefore reaching out.

Convening can be seen as a logical continuation of connecting, when you actually both get in touch with others and start building relations and networks, and then move on and take a wider responsibility as host, organizer, facilitator, and sometimes also, importantly, as funder. These are time-consuming activities that require endurance and diplomatic patience. They also require trust from the wider world. Sweden's reputation as a convening actor was catapulted by the 1972 Conference, including the ambitious and skillful preparations in the years leading up to the "twelve days in Stockholm" (Chapter 5). Adding to this were the organizational abilities of Swedish authorities on site in June that year, and the innovative ideas and bold statements by Olof Palme, including the ecocide concept he deployed in the context of the then-controversial Swedish critique of the United States and its war in Vietnam. Although it annoyed some, it impressed many more, not least in the Global South. The credibility of Sweden as a convening power rested also on its excellent research institutions and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, whose convening power as the conferrer of the Nobel Prizes in chemistry and physics was supplemented by the strong shift toward environmental issues in what was a comprehensive makeover of the venerable institution, founded in 1739. Add to this the strong popular commitment to nature and outdoor activities and domestic industries based on efficient

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processing of natural resources (despite including environmentally negative effects), and Sweden could in a fairly short period of time secure its position as one of the world's foremost conveners of meetings, workshops and negotiations with relevance for GEG (Chapter 6).

Of great importance for a connecting and convening power of any kind is that the rest of the world finds it meaningful to be connected to and convened by it. Reliability and a capacity to deliver over the long term are key factors. Since Sweden has not held much hard decision-making authority of its own, but instead stressed global (preferably UN) governance over (big power) government, what the Nordic country has sought to deliver has rather centered on the underlying science and ideas that can move policy work forward, or at least create new openings. Hence the need to be a *contributing* convener and not just a facilitator. From this stems another reason for remaining strong in science and for maintaining, on your own soil and preferably close at hand (in Stockholm!), a set of comprehensive institutions that work with you on behalf of your broader political objectives. In theory, these do not always have to be national institutions. In reality, for a small country, it greatly benefits the policy process if there is easy and natural access between the two spheres.

The UN Stockholm Conference proved to be a somewhat inadvertent strike of genius in that respect. It served as a catalyzing event for the series of science and policy institutions that have been a major part of the Stockholm story – such as MISU, Beijer, the Bolin Centre, SEI, SRC, and most recently the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory, founded in 2012 in the spirit of extending Stockholm's environmentally relevant expertise more decisively to also include the humanities.[21] These are, typically, centers and institutes with distinct profiles, taking positions at the intersection of research, policy, and activism. They have thus become discernably more pro-active and visible than the universities that they are in some cases part of, and are always reliant upon for staff, PhD students, and collaboration. Politics thus helped science, and science helped policy in a positive feedback loop that, as we have shown (Chapter 3), predated 1972 by several decades, and has carried on for the many decades since then.

[21] David S. Emmett & Robert E. Nye, *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017). Sverker Sörlin, "Reconfiguring Environmental Expertise," *Environmental Science and Policy* 28(2013):1, 14–24. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2012.11.006. Sverker Sörlin & Graeme Wynn, "Fire and Ice in the Academy: The Rise of the Integrative Humanities," *Literary Review of Canada* 24(2016):6, 14–15.

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A parallel may be drawn here with the Swedish Cold War security policy. The doctrine was to stay alliance-free in peace in order to remain neutral in the case of war. This doctrine was not completely honest. In reality, Sweden maintained a secret collaboration with NATO throughout the Cold War (Chapter 3). Even a compromised neutrality policy required, it was thought, a strong deterrence capacity to stave off potentially hostile states that might otherwise consider attacking and occupying Sweden. In fact, this capacity needed to be much stronger under a neutrality regime than under the umbrella of an international defense coalition such as NATO. As a result, Sweden had a strongly militarized economy up until the 1980s, with as much as 5 percent of GDP spent on defense. A similar logic applies to a civic, and an environmental, internationalist agenda. Our analysis supports the notion that strong institutions with relevant and innovative contributory expertise are the price that a small nation must pay to maintain its connecting and convening role. Sweden's geopolitical position as a neutral state was in itself a factor that contributed to its connecting and convening power, since it was one of the few developed countries that could be considered nonthreatening and thus acceptable for both Cold War blocs. Also, from a North-South perspective, Sweden's lack of a significant colonial past made it a suitable mediator for developing country concerns. Two of the first UN Secretary Generals were from the Nordics, Dag Hammarskjöld (Sweden) and Trygve Lie (Norway).[22]

Finally, *conceptualizing* work is the result of functional and cutting-edge scientific institutions and think tanks, or in some cases, organizations and civic movements. Ordinary science and scholarship – what Thomas Kuhn called "normal science"[23] – does not typically produce path-breaking ideas. Under normal science, the scientist adheres to the ruling paradigm. To become revolutionary, to break free from

[22] This may also explain why prominent Swedish and Norwegian politicians such as Olof Palme, Ingvar Carlsson, and Gro Harlem Brundtland have been called upon to lead global commissions. Brundtland chaired the Commission on Environment and Development which produced *Our Common Future* (1987), and Olof Palme the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, which resulted in *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). On Palme's vast foreign policy engagement with the Global South, see Andreas Mørkved Hellenes & Carl Marklund, "Sweden Goes Global: Francophonie, Palme, and the North-South Dialogue during the Cold War," *Histoire@Politique*, n° 35, mai-août 2018 [online, www.histoire-politique.fr].

[23] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

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the ordinary, many things are required, one of them being luck. What is needed above all is the capacity to conduct the scientific work: the resources, the equipment, and the people, often from abroad, which needless to say means funding and material support. Concepts linked to Stockholm have made an impact, from Arrhenius's Greenhouse Effect to Rossby's Jet Stream to Crutzen and Stoermer's Anthropocene to Planetary Boundaries and Hothouse Earth, and why not Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future, or "bla-bla-bla"!

MATERIAL REALITIES

In a country like Sweden, where universities and research institutes rely to a very large extent on public funding (direct funding or competitive funding from research councils), such creativity is only possible if there is continuous and reliable support, in reality through political decisions by parliament and government to concentrate and direct funding toward research on environment and climate. In addition, thanks to its particular tax legislation (e.g., allowing deductions for donations to foundations), Sweden has the world's largest concentration of private foundations, as well as an array of internationally oriented nonprofit organizations.[24] While most are typically small and supplementary to public funding schemes, a sizable number of the largest foundations channel their resources toward research in "do-good" areas such as health, technology, or environment, where they make considerable contributions.[25] In this way, private capital also consolidates trust, first because of the prestige that science enjoys – consistently highly ranked in surveys of public trust in Sweden; and second, since some of their fortunes are derived from what might be today considered "bad" environmental behavior. Similar in a sense, in the Swedish context, to the key role of the Rockefeller Foundations in the promotion of international climate initiatives in the 1980s (Chapter 6).

The Nobel Foundation is the obvious forerunner and analogue for Swedish institutions that have emerged to promote science and

[24] Like The Natural Step Foundation, which was founded in 1989 by the Swedish oncologist Karl-Henrik Robèrt and has carried out national awareness raising campaigns.

[25] Filip Wijkström & Stefan Einarsson, "Comparing Swedish Foundations: A Carefully Negotiated Space of Existence," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62(2018):13, 1889–1918. Sverker Sörlin, *Vad kan stiftelser göra?: Den privata stiftelsesektorn som forskningsfinansiär* [What Can Foundations Do?: The Private Foundation Sector as Funder of Research] (Stockholm: Kempestiftelserna, 2005).

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progressive causes, as well as draw attention to good deeds and groundbreaking work, through awarding prestigious prizes. Established in 1980, the Right Livelihood Award is presented at the Swedish Parliament in December each year and is often referred to as the "alternative Nobel prize" (although it has no relationship with the Nobel Foundation). The Volvo Environment Prize is awarded by a foundation that is financed by the Swedish automotive company, with an independent scientific committee that is hosted by the Beijer Institute. Recipients of the Volvo Prize since its founding in 1990 have included many of the scientists and sustainability leaders portrayed in this book. One individual, the American physicist, environmentalist, and energy expert Amory Lovins – who has had a close relationship with Sweden since the 1970s – has received both the Volvo Environment Prize and the Right Livelihood Award. An additional benefit of bestowing generous awards, besides furnishing Sweden's reputation as a place that has the credentials (and the cash) to pass judgment on what counts as excellent and progressive, is the steady flow of experts that pass through Stockholm. Not just those receiving prizes, but, likely, those that want to draw attention and cultivate relationships with those that decide.

We have not in any of the chapters described in full how research funding has developed in Sweden, but hopefully we have offered enough information to demonstrate that this has been a priority. In the 1970s and 1980s, science faculties across the country were funded to conduct environmental research. However, it should be noted that several of the prominent Stockholm institutions that have figured in this volume were initiated through funding initiatives over and above regular faculty funding. As mentioned above, it was the government, expanding on the previously existing Beijer Institute, that started and financed SEI from 1989 as a legacy of the 1972 UN Declaration on the Human Environment.[26] When the state decided to endow a new generation of foundations in the early 1990s, two of these were devoted to environmental purposes. One for strategic environmental research, Mistra, which provided the cornerstone grant to found the Stockholm Resilience Center in 2007, and the other for the training of master students from all over the world. The KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory was founded based on a 2011 donation from industrialist Carl Bennet. A 2016 government bill encompassed a forward-leaning

[26] See SEI strategy 2020–2024, www.sei.org/strategy/2020-24/chapter/who-we-are.php (retrieved August 6, 2022).

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initiative to establish broad, thematic, interdisciplinary, and well-funded research programs for sustainability distributed by the research councils, not as direct allocations to universities. The funding portfolio for environment and climate has over time broadened to include medicine, technology, agriculture, the social sciences, and, increasingly, the humanities and theology.[27]

Hence, not only have we seen a great deal of empirical evidence to support our employment of the con-words to help understand and explain Sweden's policy ambitions for a global approach toward the environmental challenges and the rising climate crisis in the new century, we can also see how it is rooted in a broader foreign and security policy idea, adopted and articulated by a progressive small state in northern Europe, and how it was ideologically, pragmatically, and, not least, rhetorically held together by a *principle of solidarity* and a *doctrine of neutrality*. These fundamental political assumptions, in combination with the prevailing geopolitics of the Cold War, were instrumental in making Sweden's remarkable tour de force on the world stage possible and helped secure its position as a leading international environment and sustainability player over decades.

SWEDISH ENVIRONMENTAL EXCEPTIONALISM?

To the extent that the Stockholm road to, and from, 1972 was a useful one – was it "exceptionalist"? The term itself is most often used about the United States, "the first new nation," whose exceptionalism is legendary. It is typically seen to rest, at least partly, on its status as a global superpower, with the prerogatives that afford for being selective and self-serving.[28] Another famous exceptionalism is the German *Sonderweg*. Yet another is Nordic exceptionalism, a variation on the concept of the "Nordic model," which underscores the tendency that Nordic countries consistently place high on welfare indices and happiness ratings. Sweden

[27] Mats Benner & Sverker Sörlin, "Shaping Strategic Research: Power, Resources, and Interests in Swedish Research Policy," *Minerva* 45(2007):1, 31–48. Sverker Sörlin, ed. *"I den absoluta frontlinjen": En bok om forskningsstiftelserna, konkurrenskraften och politikens möjligheter* (Stockholm: Nya Doxa, 2005). Mats Benner, Göran Marklund & Sylvia Schwaag Serger, eds., *Smart Policies for Societies in Transition: The Innovation Challenge of Inclusion, Resilience and Sustainability* (Cheltenham & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2022).

[28] It should be noted, though, that American exceptionalism is a tremendously complex concept with a long and winding history.

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as the ultra-modern European version of the United States, the "second new nation," is a standing trope in this discourse.[29]

Swedish environmental exceptionalism, we argue, belongs in the same class of phenomena, part reality, part trope: a national attribute that may only be possible, or at least is far less unlikely, among countries that are already exceptional in the way the Nordics are. We have already mentioned Peder Anker's *The Power of the Periphery* on Norway as a green nation (Chapter 1). It may be no coincidence that the two books, Anker's and ours, that single-out individual countries as environmental vanguards, both center on Scandinavian states.[30] Ironically, it can also be noted that despite their global contributions, Norway's and Sweden's activities on their respective home fronts over the long term are less convincing. Norway continues to practice whaling and is one of the largest oil producers in the world per capita, and in total, far ahead of countries such as Qatar, Libya, and Nigeria. Sweden, for its part, has harvested almost all of its old growth forest, dammed its great northern rivers for hydropower, and over the quarter century since 1999, managed to reach only one of its sixteen national environmental goals, which are set by the country itself (Chapter 1).

Hence, the two Nordic neighbors that produced the likes of Nobel laureate author-conservationist Selma Lagerlöf and passionate nature metaphysician Rolf Edberg (Sweden) and the world-leading eco-philosopher Arne Naess (Norway) are still today major exploiters of natural resources, and especially in the case of Sweden, highly industrialized. Such activities have to a not insignificant extent formed the basis of the prosperity that has enabled the Nordic model to flourish. Other Nordic countries differ markedly in their environmental history. Denmark, with few natural resources, has instead pursued the path of wind power and high-tech agriculture since the 1980s and stands at the top of global sustainability indexes. There is thus no unified "Nordic green model." As techno-modernist states of similar but distinct types, all Scandinavian countries have performed well on the environmental policy front. But they have done so following very different trajectories, conditioned by geographical factors, geopolitical position (Baltic,

[29] Arne Ruth, "The Second New Nation: The Mythology of Modern Sweden," *Daedalus* 113(1984): 53–96. Jenny Andersson & Mary Hilson, "Images of Sweden and the Nordic Countries," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34(2009):3, 219–228.

[30] Denmark, a global leader in wind power, being the third; Iceland is also sometimes counted among the Scandinavian countries. The Nordic countries also include Finland (again ranked the world's happiest nation in 2023 for the sixth consecutive year!).

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Arctic, North Atlantic), and political cultures. Norway and Sweden are wealthy nations, but they are nonetheless marked by their respective "resource peripheries" and varieties of the "resource curse" that affect countries that modernize on the basis of raw materials, be they forest, fish, minerals, or oil and gas.[31]

Again, it makes most sense to see Sweden's environmental exceptionalism not as the existence of a particularly abundant green genius that happened to hover close to the Arctic circle. Nor do we believe that it was an obvious byproduct of the country's vast forests, the popularity of mushroom and berry picking, and a widespread and deeply ingrained tradition of outdoor activities in Swedish nature, although these may have helped.[32] It is far more convincing to interpret a persistent and large social and political effort like the one we saw in Sweden during the second half of the twentieth century as a product of a political culture and a national strategy with internationalism as one of its central principles. In that respect, it may well be called an environmental exceptionalism that for a particular historical moment produced remarkable results and, indeed, brought progress, specifically in the emergent realm of GEG.

Arguing that the ultimate causes lie deeper, and are structural and strategic, is not to diminish the effort and brilliance of individual politicians, diplomats, activists, civic leaders, scientists, business leaders, and bureaucrats, who not only talked the talk but also often walked the walk. These individuals, operating through different domestic and international networks, undeniably helped foster Sweden's reputation as an environmentally progressive place. In this book, we have met a phenomenal array of such actors. But as a group of however skilled and forward-looking individuals, they would not have been able to pursue their ambitions and realize their visions had those not been in line with the broader interests of the country and rested upon what

[31] D. B. Carson, D. A. Carson, R. Porter, C. Y. Ahlin & P. Sköld, "Decline, Adaptation or Transformation: New Perspectives on Demographic Change in Resource Peripheries in Australia and Sweden," *Comparative Population Studies* 41(2017): 3–4. On Scandinavia's Arctic and North Atlantic resource connections, see Sverker Sörlin, ed., *Resource Extraction and Arctic Communities: The New Extractivist Paradigm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). See also the contributions in Felipe Irarrázaval & Martín Arias-Loyola, eds., *Resource Peripheries in the Global Economy: Networks, Scales, and Places of Extraction* (Cham: Springer, 2021).

[32] Daniel Wolf-Watz, Klas Sandell & Peter Fredman, "Environmentalism and Tourism Preferences: A Study of Outdoor Recreationists in Sweden," *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 11(2011):2, 190–204.

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governments and parliament could actually do. It was not (just) a stroke of genius. It was the general direction taken by an entire democratic nation. Seen in this coherent, retrospective light, it makes sense. It was a product of history.

DOES IT STILL WORK?

Here at the very end of our examination of the Stockholm story, we may ask: what happened to this coherent policy? Does Swedish environmental exceptionalism still exist today? What may happen to it in the future? These are questions, now broadly asked in the Swedish policy debate, which if answered in full would require another book.[33] What we can offer here in the final few pages is indeed only a sketch, drafted in the present about the recent past.

We have already indicated that Sweden's general position on the world stage is not the same now as it was in the last few decades of the twentieth century. *Stockholm* as an international hub of GEG thinking may not, however, have declined in status and visibility to the same extent. This may sound like a strange and somewhat paradoxical statement, but we think it is underpinned and supported by a certain logic. So far in this chapter, we have articulated the *policy rationale* for Sweden to take a proactive exceptionalist role. Let us now turn to the *external factors that can explain* the Swedish position and how these circumstances have changed since the Stockholm Conference. Although these changes started right after 1972, their implications have become more pronounced only in the last couple of decades.

National security and geopolitical context have been important drivers. There was also a set of skills that became embedded in the state apparatus for working within international fora, with Sweden continuing to learn through experience during the postwar period how useful international organizations could be.[34] Dag Hammarskjöld, a broad-minded liberal with a humanities and economics background – and an

[33] The future of Swedish exceptionalism is an issue that runs through several themes of politics at the same time, for example, foreign and neutrality policy (with increasing Swedish NATO collaboration, an application for membership in 2022 and full membership in March 2024) and the Swedish party structure (for a long time lacking a radical right wing populist party). One example, among many, discussing such themes in recent years: Jens Rydgren & Sara van der Meiden, "The Radical Right and the End of Swedish Exceptionalism," *European Political Science* 18(2019):3, 439–455.

[34] Ann-Marie Ekengren, *Olof Palme och utrikespolitiken: Europa och Tredje världen* (Umeå: Boréa, 2005).

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avid nature lover[35] – rose to become Secretary General of the United Nations, killed in a still-today unresolved plane crash in Northern Rhodesia (today's Zambia). Sida became a pioneering agency of its kind that enmeshed multiple interests in Swedish society and was generally considered a success, both in the Global South and in other Western nations, although not always among Swedish opinion makers.[36] Despite – or perhaps because of – Sweden's advanced plans in the 1950s to develop its own nuclear weapon, the Swedish anti-nuclear and peace movement became a powerful political force, with many, especially female, social democratic leaders taking strong positions on the issue. Among them were the diplomats Inga Thorsson and Alva Myrdal, the latter also a long-standing member of the government. Both were active in articulating the rationale of Swedish internationalism, with an emerging feminist tinge, and played important roles in the Swedish initiative (Chapter 4).[37]

The institutional conditions for Sweden in developing this pronounced ideological version of internationalism were of central importance. In the postwar decades, there were no international alliances or functional arrangements that constrained the move to make Sweden engage in international cooperation on its own terms. This would change after 1972. The first set of changes concerned the deregulation of financial markets and banks in the early 1980s. In the same decade, the concept of "governance," with the diffusion of authority it implies, entered international discourse.[38] For a state that had relied heavily on its strong central government, the governance agenda reduced autonomy and ushered in a new world that Sweden needed to adapt to. Governance was a concept associated with the new neoliberal toolbox that came to be applied in most policy areas, with the environment as no exception (Chapter 6).[39] Economic crisis and currency pressures

[35] Hammarskjöld was an avid out of doors practitioner, vice president of the Swedish Tourist Association, president of the Swedish Mountaineering Club (Svenska Fjällklubben), and wrote poetry and essays on Swedish nature.

[36] Annika Berg, Urban Lundberg & Mattias Tydén, *En svindlande uppgift: Sverige och biståndet 1945–1975* (Stockholm: Ordfront förlag 2021).

[37] See for example Inga Thorsson, *Att internationalisera Sverige* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1971).

[38] Anne-Mette Kjaer, *Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 1–7.

[39] A review article from 2008 demonstrates the proliferation of concepts and approaches, including "governance" that can be associated with the neoliberal influence on environmentalist discourse since the 1980s: Joseph Huber, "Pioneer Countries and the Global Diffusion of Environmental Innovations: Theses from the Viewpoint of Ecological Modernisation Theory," *Global Environmental Change* 18(2008):3, 360–367.

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made Sweden question its distanced relationship to the European Community. When the government eventually applied for membership in 1991, it was not presented as a major policy change, rather a pragmatic adjustment, characteristically announced in a small passage in a crisis policy statement. In 1995, Sweden joined what had by then become the European Union, and although environment was national sovereignty, the European integration gradually reshaped the image, and self-image, of Sweden as a nation, and it became increasingly reluctant to take on the oversized role that it had played in the past. This development has sometimes been linked to political personalities, arguing that the charisma and leadership of Olof Palme and Alva Myrdal were lacking in the following, less illustrious generation of political leaders, across the political spectrum. There may be some truth to this. Palme was a spectacular presence on the international scene, easily outshining his predecessor Tage Erlander, who had served as Sweden's prime minister for the entirety of the postwar period up until Palme's ascent to the position in 1969.[40]

The relative weakening of Sweden's convening and connecting powers at the political level had less to do with individual Swedish politicians, however, or even Swedish environmental policies. Wider changes in European and global geopolitics were the main driving forces behind this relative decline in Sweden's authority in the realm of the environment. Agency instead shifted in the direction of the *Stockholm institutions* that could act, at least formally, independent of the state, although funding often came from the government's purse. This de facto deferring, even devolution, of governance should have already been visible in the way agency was presented in the chapters above. These demonstrate a historical arc, starting with almost exclusively state actors: diplomats, government representatives, and a limited set of scientists who were state employees or had close ties to political leaders and public officials. The state thus coordinated the early phase of GEG, which was in this sense distinctly more govern*ment* than govern*ance*. Its self-imposed remit covered the entire spectrum: from the moral high ground, speaking on behalf of humanity and the need for global cooperation, through to policy initiatives ranging from the local to the global. It comprised the funding and institutional infrastructure of science and knowledge, from public agencies to universities, research institutes, and high-profile centers like SIPRI and SEI.

[40] Ekengren, *Olof Palme och utrikespolitiken*.

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It also included the social mobilization of citizens, activists, and experts, many of which were funded by Sida and other Swedish government agencies. One prominent example is the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), which bridges science, policy, and development work to improve water governance around the world. Since its founding in conjunction with the first Stockholm Water Symposium in 1991, SIWI has awarded the high-profile Stockholm Water Prize as part of the annual World Water Week in Stockholm, one of the largest international events on issues related to water and sustainability.[41] Other initiatives were funded through state expenditures for culture or education. The actual work in such cases was often carried out by strong and vital popular environmental and anti-nuclear movements, whose membership numbers have risen dramatically over the past fifty years. The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), which up through the 1950s was largely grounded in a combination of (male) naturalist expertise and nationalism, trebled its membership to 70,000 in the 1960s and 1970s as the environment went global and progressive, and trebled it again to reach 200,000 in the 1980s.[42] During this period, the environment became more civic; not less expert, but with a broadening understanding of what expertise could mean, and with less state mediation in the circulation of knowledge through the interaction of experts and civil society.[43]

DEFERRING FROM STATE TO SOCIETY

Under pressure from mounting constraints and new institutional and political commitments, the Swedish state has gradually deferred agency to a set of other actors that had been nurtured under the exceptionalist order. Research institutions, think tanks, academies, and their support structures in funding agencies and foundations continued to maintain a high profile. They increasingly stand out today as the inheritors of earlier state efforts and have served in many cases as a quasi-political task force for sustainability. One could think of this as a version of what has been called the politics of big issues playing out in (many) small places.[44] The

[41] https://siwi.org/ (retrieved August 6, 2022).
[42] Membership in the organization today stands at around 200,000.
[43] Sörlin, "Reconfiguring."
[44] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (1995), 4th ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

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Stockholm Environment Institute in particular has taken on this role. Officially declaring its origins to be part of the Stockholm Conference legacy, SEI is now a world-leading consultancy and think tank with offices on all major continents. This book has also paid attention to the Stockholm Resilience Centre, which has been especially active in conceptualizing work (e.g., Planetary Boundaries and Hothouse Earth) and has had strong ties from the start with the Academy of Sciences. The IGBP and Global Change programs – forerunners to a great deal of the work conducted at the SRC – had been based at the Academy since the 1980s and were succeeded there by one of the Future Earth global hubs following the transformation in 2015 of the international architecture for global change research. The Academy continues to host the Beijer Institute, as it has done since the first incarnation of the Institute was established there in 1977.

These are not just scientific institutes and consultancies that provide "policy advice" – itself a too-limited and slightly misconstrued way of understanding how the science-policy process plays out. Rather, such institutions have considerable policy agency of their own. Through initiatives, ideas and innovation, and action on the "con"-fronts, they replace some of the political clout that the state has either lost or deferred. Their alliance-building efforts have also been more dynamic outside Sweden, which is of course where most of the work on the Earth system scale takes place, conducting connective activities in order to catalyze larger actions rather than implementing change processes on their own.

Similarly, the profile of civic organizations has increased. The largest of those, SSNC, has evolved from a small, field-oriented expert organization in the middle of the twentieth century, to become a broad civic movement reaching hundreds of thousands of citizens. The organization's growth clearly reflects the far higher profile of nature and environment as areas of widespread popular concern. It has also engaged more actively in conservation and, more recently, climate as societal and political issues, providing consumer advice and ranking the "greenness" of political parties before general elections. SSNC and the Swedish/Nordic branches of Greenpeace and the WWF, all based in Stockholm, and several other small- and medium-sized civic organizatins and networks, have increasingly served as important nodes of global knowledge. This has in effect pluralized policy work, again shifting the nexus of agency from government to wider society. The work of civic movements has in recent years been crowned by the astounding success and worldwide fame of Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future activism. Significant in its

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own right, this should also be seen as the tip of an iceberg that has grown slowly and silently, but surely. Something similar could be said about the municipal and regional networks across Sweden that have formed alliances of the willing to share ideas and experiences, establish benchmarks, and move forward – faster than the state – in addressing community concerns over issues related to people and environment.[45]

One could see this as a series of documented strengths of the institutional and civic capacities of Sweden and its capital, Stockholm, as a broker and major convening hub. Representatives of government should be credited for their formidable ingenuity in grasping the moment of opportunity that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s to raise the issue in the UN. They subsequently built the domestic institutions and international networks that have since then served as part of the infrastructure and architecture for GEG. Government, however, cannot be expected to perform all the necessary tasks, especially as the agenda expands – which it has, dramatically, in the case of the environment and sustainable development. The engagement of civil society tends to make commitment more resilient.[46] Civic movements also managed to effectively halt many of the attempts to modernize and transform – in the eyes of the critics: essentially destroy – Swedish city centers during the same period as Sweden's UN initiative, with the May 1971 "Battle of the Elms" in central Stockholm being the most famous example (Chapter 1). Partly impacted by such events, Swedish national and urban governments have been less prone to launch massive modernist state projects, and although some are still pursued, they are certainly not nearly as common, especially in urban centers.

This deferring of initiative and execution may over the long term have drawbacks, and the moment may in fact have passed when politics not only defers but also devolves its institutional creativity. In today's political landscape, with a marked shift toward nationalist/authoritarian conservative politics setting the agenda – with or without an actual majority in the electorate – there is a tendency that the government, in its ambition to win elections, withdraws the kinds of messages that

[45] One of these is Climate Communes (*Klimatkommunerna*), an association of some fifty cities and municipalities (designated communes out of a total of nearly 300). Including most of the largest Swedish cities, fewer rural communities, they wish to be a vanguard of climate neutrality. https://klimatkommunerna.se/

[46] Sonny S. Patel, M. Brooke Rogers, Richard Amlôt & G. James Rubin, "What Do We Mean by 'Community Resilience'?: A Systematic Literature Review of How It Is Defined in the Literature," *PLOS Currents: Disasters*. 1. PMC 5693357 (2017).

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risk losing swing voters, especially in the countryside and among the socio-economically less privileged.[47] These are among the groups that tend not to readily identify with the gospel of transformation and a dematerializing economy. Nor are their favorite media on the frontlines of climate activism; even in Sweden, the opposite is the case.[48] Recent Swedish governments, experiencing that kind of electoral calculus, have become more reluctant to accept the progressive environment and climate politics of the European Union, including its new "taxonomy" (of what is in line with EU climate and sustainability goals) and solidarity programs to assist the Union's poor. Sweden for one has taken a strong stand against minimum wages and opposed a climate-focused forest policy, instead defending voluntary agreements between firms and trade unions, and protecting the property rights of companies and foresting farmers and households. Sweden has also tried to protect its car manufacturing industry by slowing down the implementation of some of the tougher emission targets.

DEVOLUTION – THE ENVIRONMENTALISM OF THE RICH?

What used to be an official Swedish environmental foreign policy aligned with development and solidarity has drifted toward a more cautious navigation of domestic politics and international engagement, eager to not neglect opportunities for Sweden, which remains one of the richest countries in the world. To paraphrase the Catalan ecological economist José Martinez Alier's famous expression "the environmentalism of the poor" (2003), we may in the case of Sweden instead speak of a gradual swing toward an "environmentalism of the rich."[49] Such an "inverted solidarity environmentalism" does not threaten to provoke the more cynical and blatantly self-serving outlook of the anti-environmentalist populist right. On the contrary, it encompasses a more careful and selective determination of an environmental and climate agenda that does not violate national economic interests and, perhaps above all, the sentiments, or resentments, of the authoritarian right and its electoral base.

[47] Natascha Strobl, *Radikalisierter Konservatismus: Eine Analyse* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021).

[48] Kjell Vowles & Martin Hultman, "Scare-Quoting Climate: The Rapid Rise of Climate Denial in the Swedish Far-Right Media Ecosystem," *Nordic Journal of Media Studies* 3(2021): 1.

[49] José Martinez Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Chaltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003).

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Although this is not just a Swedish dilemma, it is a policy pathway one would not exactly have expected from "the first new green nation" with the added ambition, since the Paris Agreement, to become the "first fossil free welfare nation." What has likely happened is a forceful combination of two major processes. One is the shift in the political landscape since the financial crisis, which has provoked the discombobulating and perplexing reversals of center-left politics in Europe, including, after the 2022 election, in an unexpectedly pronounced way, in Sweden. The other, partly related, is a more long-term process captured by the 1980s catchphrase "the hollowing out of the state."[50] It referred at first to the lack of capacity of the state in Great Britain but became an established view of how states increasingly defined themselves under globalization and neoliberalism in the decades around the turn of the Millennium. States took steps back everywhere, lowering taxes, seeking market solutions, devolving agency to local and sectorial interests, and replacing political deliberation with various forms of competition. Another expression in line with this hollowing out of the state was "multi-level governance," which, also reflecting in some way the EU subsidiarity principle, declared that decisions and authority should stay on the level where the issues and the expertise are.

We think this is what has happened in Sweden, which can to some extent help explain the declining interest in green issues on the level of parliament and government, despite the activism and deep engagement among Greta-inspired young people and, for that matter, wide swaths of the citizenry. The current environmental and climate politics of Sweden – simultaneously puzzling, and disappointing for many – are not, we would argue, an isolated policy mistake made in 2022 and 2023 in the face of rising European crises such as Covid-19, war-generated energy shortages, increased migration, and climate-related phenomena such as worsening droughts, floods, and fires. Rather it is a phenomenon that has been developing gradually over a period of several decades, including the neoliberal tendencies that have been pronounced in Sweden since around 1990.[51] It is particularly important to note that it is not something that

[50] R. A. W. Rhodes, "The Hollowing Out of the State: The Changing Nature of the Public Service in Britain," *The Political Quarterly* 65(2005):2, 138–151. Bob Jessop, "Hollowing Out the 'Nation-state' and Multi-level Governance," In: *A Handbook of Comparative Social Policy* (London: Edward Elgar, 2013).

[51] Kristoffer Ekberg & Viktor Pressfeldt, "A Road to Denial: Climate Change and Neoliberal Thought in Sweden, 1988–2000," *Contemporary European History* 31(2022):4, 627–644. https://doi.org/10.1017/S096077732200025X.

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is chiefly orchestrated by environment-oriented politicians or by civil servants, experts, or activists, who have often been forced to stand by, almost helplessly, as the insufficient and counter-environmental policies play out. Environmental politics has been the inadvertent object of changes that originated elsewhere, typically with reference to an unstoppable globalization, emblematic of the profound transformations in the role of the state in recent years.[52] What once seemed to be an almost inevitable, rational ascendency of a growing number of enlightened democracies to a reformed and ethically balanced position, *so zu sagen* within "planetary boundaries," has turned out to become a much more fraught and embattled terrain. As a result, some of the more utopian and normative versions of the emerging "Green State," heralded in the literature since the early 2000s, already seem hard to attain.[53]

In Sweden, long singled out as a green state vanguard, this devolution has been concealed by the fact that so many of the institutions, arrangements, and processes that were built in the postwar decades up until the end of the previous century, when the state provided more directionality and resources, have stayed vital and shouldered the agency that the state gradually deferred. To return to one of the central themes of this book, it is striking how well this sits with the observation that *the city* can play a significant role in policy. To put it very succinctly, Stockholm institutions have stepped in and filled some of the vacuum caused by the hollowing out and squeezing of the state by constraining external forces. This should perhaps come as no surprise. Cities also compete for attention, influence, and visibility in a globalized world. To successfully compete, they must also

[52] Significant examples in a vast literature are Arthur P. J. Mol, *Globalization and Environmental Reform: The Ecological Modernization of the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), and D. C. Esty & Michael Porter, "National Environmental Performance: An Empirical Analysis of Policy Results and Determinants," *Environment and Development Economics* 10(2005):4, 391–434. For an overview of the literature until 2008, see Frank Biermann & Philipp Pattberg, "Global Environmental Governance: Taking Stock, Moving Forward," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 33(2008): 277–294. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.environ.33.050707.085733.

[53] E.g., Lennart J. Lundqvist, "A Green Fist in a Velvet Glove: The Ecological State and Sustainable Development," *Environmental Values* 10(2001):4, 455–472; Robyn Eckersley, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004); Andreas Duit, Peter Feindt & James Meadowcroft, "Greening Leviathan: The Rise of the Environmental State?" *Environmental Politics* 25(2016):1, 1–23. See also the careful overview of the literature by Annika Kronsell, & Karin Bäckstrand, "The Green State Revisited," In: *Rethinking the Green State: Environmental governance towards climate and sustainability transitions* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1–23.

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learn to collaborate. We hear most about this global competition in areas such as finance, technology, art, and fashion (Chapter 1), but, as we have consistently argued, it is essential to see how similar processes take place in environmental governance. To be green is also, or has become since 1972, increasingly a game of urban competition and responsible branding.

This is a far-from-new observation. Alliances of proactive green cities have existed since the 1990s. One of the largest organizations of this kind, Local Governments for Sustainability, started in 1990 and now coordinates activities among urban and regional governments in more than 125 countries around the world. Similar initiatives exist in North America and Europe, including Sweden, where the international Transition Town movement and network have also taken root across the country. Indeed, some of the earliest environmental action in Stockholm and around Sweden was focused on the urban environment (Chapter 4). Stockholm has since the 1960s taken a prominent role in this area and received a great deal of international recognition, including being named the first European Green Capital in 2010 (Chapter 1). What is new, however, in Sweden and elsewhere, is the increasing mismatch between the different levels of multilevel leadership, with cities in many cases being the most pro-active. In Stockholm and other more or less progressive places around the world, the analysis is simple: if you are not green, you are not on the right side of change, and will soon be out of the game. While at the state level, government officials – bound by the constraints and compromises of national politics – often do not want, or are simply unable, to take on a leadership role, even now during the Agenda 2030 decade when the sustainability transformation was supposed to accelerate.

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In the current crisis-ridden moment of history, what can we expect of GEG, and what can we expect of Stockholm? We should probably look ahead at, and embrace, continued critical involvement and active participation of civil society, young people, and the private sector in fostering GEG. Such involvement certainly cannot solve all problems, especially not those at the level of international relations and geopolitics, but there is evidence to suggest that engagement from below and from consciously acting citizens influences politics at the state level, and there is rising interest "to understand how individuals in affluent societies reason around their own actions" in relation to environment and climate change.[54]

[54] Recent work on Sweden in this vein is Nina Wormbs & Maria Wolrath Söderberg, "Knowledge, Fear, and Conscience: Reasons to Stop Flying Because of Climate Change,"

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This speaks in favor of opinion-making and education, to continue building understanding and narratives that mobilize science in shaping a new kind of general education that encompasses the basic tenets of geo-anthropology and the Anthropocene. It also entails profound opportunities, and challenges, for educational systems at all levels. Again, this cannot take place without civic effort to overcome inertia and push environmental politics out of its current deferral mode.

We would likely see a continued renegotiation of the knowledge bases for "the environment." These have continuously widened since the emergence of the concept in its modern understanding. We are now in a phase where the implications and challenges for societies of environmental and climate changes are moving to the forefront on a large scale, also in affluent societies. To reach a more sustainable state of the world, economies will have to change and legal systems, inherited since the birth of capitalism and global trade, need to be reformed. The very criteria and parameters of what it means to lead meaningful lives in sustainable societies under a different kind of human–Earth relationship must be re-articulated. A particular challenge, especially since this requires democratic discussion and decision-making, is the speed with which the changes will take place. Multiple timescales need to be operating in tandem.

An increased role will likely be assumed by the human sciences, that is, scholarly disciplines that provide insights on, and in favor of, change in human and social organization. These are vast fields of knowledge, some of which have not been sufficiently mobilized for the environment in the past. In recent years, there has been a distinct rise in interest in the environmental, climate, energy, and other humanities that speak to these challenges.[55] The concept of Environmental Social Sciences and Humanities (ESSH) has entered circulation to argue for the significant potential that these knowledge fields can provide.[56] In the past, much of the research within the human and social sciences was engaged to build the kinds of incentive and value structures that characterize the

Urban Planning 6(2021):2, 314–324. Nina Wormbs & Maria Wolrath Söderberg, "Thinking Structures of Climate Delay: Internal Deliberations among Swedes with Sustainable Ambitions," *Environment, Development and Sustainability* (online July 31, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-023-03618-x (retrieved August 17, 2023).

[55] J. J. Williams, "The New Humanities," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 65(2019), December 13.

[56] Noel Castree, William M. Adams, John Barry, et al., "Changing the Intellectual Climate," *Nature Climate Change* 4(2014):9, 763–768.

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environmentally destructive states that we now have. There is, hence, an emerging potential for reform and new contributions. Religion, ideas, values, social and psychological drivers, history, media, communication, thought, and affect – such dimensions will likely play larger roles. Design, architecture, and social planning will also widen their scope.

There will be continued politicization of climate and environment, perhaps even increased polarization. Geopolitical conflict in the twenty-first century will likely be hybrid and complex, involve natural resources, and put pressures on limited Earth Systems properties (atmosphere, oceans, forests, glaciers, soils, etc.). These are life-sustaining governable objects of the Earth that are required for the well-being of all but are affected to various degrees by states, firms, social groups, and other types of actors. Their abuse and devastation is not (yet) considered criminal behavior, but regardless of their status they are driving potential conflict, further necessitating transformation in order to lower the risk of conflict. Polarization on the national level will thus be accompanied by deepened polarization at the global and regional level.

The fact that politics are hybridizing will also play out in a new kind of "politics with other means." These were Clausewitz' famous words for "war." Distinctly environmental war, or climate, resource, or energy wars, or combinations of these, cannot be excluded; they will be part of hybrid conflicts. A similar politics with other means will take place on the national, local, and community level, where certain societal units, prominently including cities, will keep defining livable and sustainable futures. This may include lifestyle choices, values, registers of affect and attitude, ideas of family life, or evolving and emerging versions of modernity. Ways of life are, inevitably, also ways of (lived and applied) environmental governance. This may become politics that have so far had less articulation, and with most of it yet to come.

The trajectory of Stockholm since the mid-twentieth century remains a template for how such politics with other means could look in a world undergoing multiple crises and facing tremendous challenges. It at least provides a series of experiences, and of institutional and political mechanisms – and bold moves – that we think can be useful as new ideas emerge in an increasingly complex world, at least as unforeseeable as it has ever been.

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