

Breaking with Our Heritage Mental Health – Empowerment

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Abstract

My article “identity and authenticity: breaking with our heritage for sustainable regional human development” [1] was motivated by a global academic encounter in the University of Urbino (Italy). It had been organized by the European SPES¹ “Business and Spirituality” initiative. The meeting and related publications discussed “place-based approaches to sustainability.” This basically refers to the local sustainable development of municipalities and regions, as opposed to the general era of finance based globalization. In the paper I discussed two breaks with heritage processes: my own and that of the city of Eindhoven in the Netherlands. Interestingly, by letting go of the overarching behavioral mindset heritage, a new space of empowerment, meaning and purpose appeared. This gave a boost to our individual and regional mental health.

Having said that, the question arises: “Do we know what ‘mental health’ is?” Currently we have the definition suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO):

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It has intrinsic and instrumental value and is integral to our well-being.”

This definition in my view is incomplete. There are key elements missing that are inherent to mental health. Aspects such as ‘purpose’, a sense of responsibility, authentic self determination and existentialist awareness, need to be included. My own breaking example brought me on a totally new, positive and evolutionary path, including such mental boost. For the city of Eindhoven it evolved into a charismatic attraction for people and business development with a new boost of activities and growth. For me it had opened my mind to a new, previously hidden, unnoticed world of existential values. It introduced me to the complexity of human evolution, leading [2] eventually to a proposed society built on a set of five natural conditions (**Figure 3**) for our sustainable existence as a human species (referred to as a Sustainocracy).

This whole and uniquely sensed experience developed my curiosity about this phenomenon of mental and behavioral breaking points or moral crossovers (**Figure 2**). I learned to see them as both an instrument for mental healing and human evolution through transformative adaptability. However, at this stage, in 1996, this “post breaking point reality” was only related to me. My surroundings were reasoning still in a totally different way, often even wondering about or disputing my choices. Could I find or even develop more proof of principle of my instrumental suppositions? I could not force people, institutions or entire societies to a breaking point, or even to try to understand me. What I could do is to create an environment related to the core human values and positively invite them to my “post personal breaking point” way of thinking with Sustainocracy. But would they (people and institutions) accept? And if so, would this have the expected mental health effect? And all the other societal and evolutionary effects that I was attributing to it all? That became a challenge for me to find out.

¹ <https://eurospe.org/our-mission-spiritual-based-humanism/>

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Breaking Points

The principle of a “breaking point” (**Figure 2**) in this article refers to the choice to abandon a particular life conducting behavioral pattern in order to develop another one. This can be triggered by a variety of considerations. In this particular case the aspect of morality is elaborated on, providing evolutionary indicatives and inspiring insights about society, our behavior and mental health. Indicatives that could be an invitation for further research and societal application.

My own mental breaking point (the reason will be explained later in the article) with my old behavioral patterns made me aware of two evolutionary lines in our lives: our actions and our morality. These lines can be applied to us individually, to a community, society and humanity as a whole. The complexity and evolution of morality is especially key in this evaluation. When we look up its definition we come across the following:

- (Wikipedia) Morality is the categorization of intentions, decisions and actions into those that are proper (right) and those that are improper (wrong).
- (Britannica) the moral beliefs and practices of a culture, community, or religion or a code or system of moral rules, principles, or values. The conceptual foundations and rational consistency of such standards are the subject matter of the philosophical discipline of ethics, also known as moral philosophy.

If we compare both definitions, we can determine a degree of contextual subjectivity in what is proper (right) and improper (wrong). The financial system for instance, with its rules and regulations, tends to have a different set of values than those applied to sustainable life processes. Equally there are cultural and religious differences that are perfectly acceptable in a particular community but can be conflictive or give rise to confusion when these communities meet or mingle.

We tend to give a lot of attention to our action-driven interests and daily habits, and much less to the complexity or development of the morality behind these daily routines. My own breaking gave my own understanding of morality a boost. This had a great impact on my worldview and behavioral choices. It raised my personal curiosity about how those two lines of daily routines and morality interact. It led to the exchange of views with a diversity of intellectual sparring partners. Prof. Paul de Blot JS, business spirituality at Nyenrode University in the Netherlands, for instance argued that these two lines have a parallel nature (**Figure 1**). He envisaged our morality (our distinguishing between good and bad), our To Be, as a learning environment based on processing the consequences of “what we do.” (our To Do)

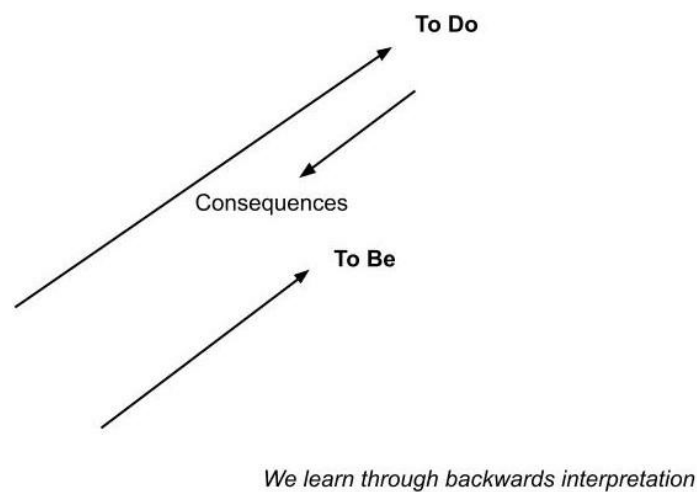


Figure 1. We learn from processing the consequences of our actions.

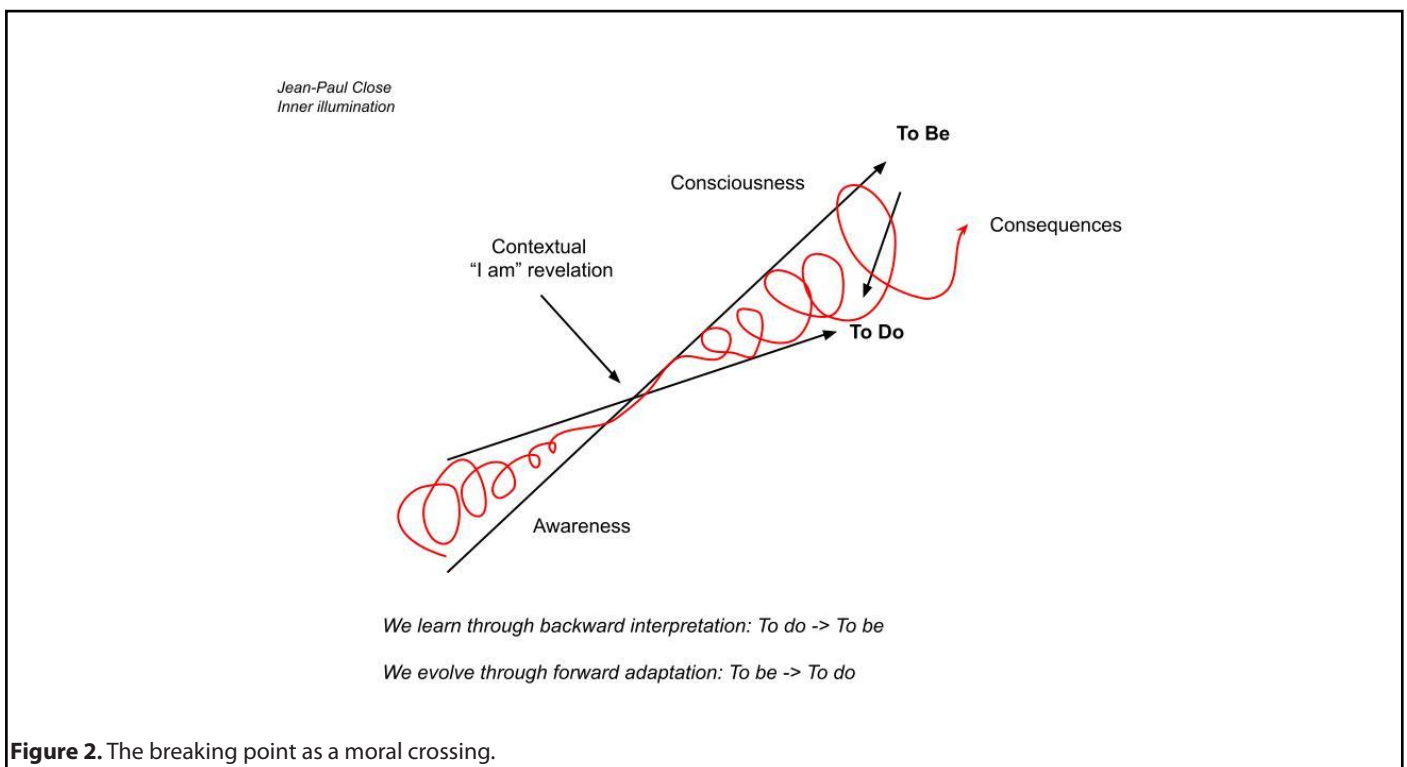


Figure 2. The breaking point as a moral crossing.

This would explain why we develop our actions up to a point of singularity, a moment of collapse, a crisis. Then, only then, we process our learning in order to introduce modifications in our new action-based trajectory. This starts when we are a child and experiment with our actions in a playful manner. We run, may fall, hurt ourselves and learn to be more careful when we run the next time. In principle it is the same when an economic recession surprises us in the adult world, motivating us to learn and (ideally) apply modifications. When we are a child we have our caring parents that warn us when we are too adventurous. They base their cautiousness on their own negative experiences or adult worries, passing such insights to us as a heritage. We can accept such insights and integrate them into our behavior, even if we have not experienced any of the pains ourselves. We can also ignore them and experiment with life to build on our own experiences. Often there is no free choice involved, since certain behavioral patterns are imposed on us by local traditions, rules and dictates.

Equally, when we consider our health (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual), we tend to take it for granted. Until we get ill. Then we try to get back to our normal state of health. A proactive, conscious attitude towards health in general, including mental health, requires a deeper understanding of life and the sharing of a sense of responsibility that overarches and regulates our actions.

A breaking point occurs when we challenge our normalized behavior and its origins, producing a totally new set of behavioral choices. We may justify our breaking by a situation that we are dealing with, pains that we wish to avoid or specific

values that we wish to acknowledge. In fact, what happens is that our newly defined morality, our revised or enhanced perception of good versus bad, redefines our actions. The previously defined parallel behavioral lines experience a cross-over (**Figure 2**), referred to as the behavioral breaking point. This is very difficult to understand for people (or institutions) who have not experienced this crossing. They remain still firmly anchored in the reigning mainstream behavioral patterns and sense of comfort. The breaking point redefines our identity (To Be) and the way we and others perceive ourselves, our actions (To Do) and our relationship with our environment.

In the case of world economics, we don't have any parental reference models as guiding forces to protect us. We may learn from historical events or through our own pains of suffering negative consequences, such as a new crisis, recessions, the reaction from nature or even revolts initiated by ourselves. We have learned to see the world of finance based economics as a status quo that, when disrupted, needs to be worked back to. This world, as we know it, tends to be opportunistic. It does not have a morality of its own other than the desire for growth. If we provide it with morality we tend to define it within the scope of political and financial self interests, not humanism or ecology. And if the morality of humanism and ecology demand attention they are seen as a financial cost, placing even more pressure on the opportunistic working of the system.

A breaking point, after which we see the world of economics as an adjustable means within a much larger functional context, is only recently becoming part of our global debate.

The Doughnut economy [3], zebra enterprises and my own approach with Sustainocracy and 4 x WIN entrepreneurship of the 21st century, are proof of such evolutionary suggestions based on enhanced levels of human existential morality and ethics.

Working Beyond a Breaking Point

Let us consider the breaking point of the city of Eindhoven. This happened after more than 100 years of being forced to serve the development of a large multinational during the industrial era. The city suffered sudden collapse when the multinational decided to move elsewhere. The city had three choices: to stay in its chaos, try to attract another large industry or redefine its existence. It is normally against human nature to simply accept a collapse. The vulnerability of the city, through its dependence on another entity, became a powerful learning environment. The breaking point occurred when the city decided to redefine its own identity, independent of large industries. Instead of living a traumatized life, blaming the multinational and global economics for its negative faith, it took its (financial) prosperity in its own hands. The birth of the Brainport triple helix construction, in which the local government, business development and technical university defined the development of the city together, enhanced the empowerment of the city as a community of interrelated institutions. It is now up to the city as a community to learn to use this adaptive resilience in all those future occasions when the environment produces challenges to which it needs to react.

In analogy to the breaking point of the city of Eindhoven we can view humankind as a whole and its dependence on the financial doctrine that produces crisis after crisis. Can we expect humankind to develop its own historical mental and behavioral breaking point? Could this lead to a new evolutionary level of empowerment, including our long-term sustainable development as a species? Are we willing to leverage ourselves above the mechanisms of political financial doctrines with views about our evolutionary resilience? The answer is “yes,” however not directly at a global scale unless a major global crisis forces us. In analogy of the meeting in Urbino (Italy) we see that such evolutionary steps tend to be small and localized at first, especially when complex and involving all the cornerstones of society. They manifest themselves at the local level, strengthening the new common story through purpose driven implementation and experimentation. Such a new local spirit produces unification, enthusiasm and commitment.

The city of Eindhoven had empowered itself institutionally with Brainport, however still within the scope of the political financial ecosystem. This global, human designed, artificial ecosystem had originated historically by “making use of humankind and the planet” for its own systemized benefits. On a global scale this type of economy is competing for the usage

of the same planetary and human resources. With the size of humankind today we can observe the negative consequences across the globe. But these consequences are not sensed as negative by everyone, making it difficult to create unity in developing a breaking point. Those who benefit from the political financial economy will not easily wish to adapt themselves. The larger the environment that experiences the negative consequences, the bigger the pressure for change and a breaking will develop. We can already detect three major forces at work in the world as we speak:

- the artificial political financial structure, defending its self-interest, empowering itself again and again through impositions, warfare, foul play, domestication, etc.
- the human population, empowering itself against the abusive political financial doctrine through uprisings, human rights movements, freedom fights, developing new initiatives, etc.
- nature, against the abusive and polluting human attitude, through climate change, plagues, illnesses, catastrophes...

All these forces together produce an unprecedented level of tension in the world, with a large array of mental disturbances among the people. How can this tension be eliminated? How can we turn the tide and develop mental resilience, health and empowerment. All I had was my own experience of personal empowerment after my own breaking point...and the example of the city of Eindhoven, in its own way.

Key to the post breaking point experience is the boost of an inner sense of purpose, meaning and the empowerment of the “self.” It breaks away from particular unfitting mental and behavioral impositions that conducted one’s life blindly before the breaking point. This sense of mental freedom, together with a boost of moral awareness and guidance, is experienced as a rebirth. It may involve a phase of great difficulties, due to “letting go” of previous comforts. But these troubles are faced with determination and commitment.

With this in mind, the question arises whether there is a possibility to satisfy all the previously identified three forces, transforming the negative tension into positive and constructive energy? My own breaking point put me in a situation in which I could determine five essential conditions (**Figure 3**) for our human existence. When I applied these to myself I could sense how much humans have alienated from these values in our current societal context. Taking back my own responsibility for those five essentials opened a totally new world for me.

With these insights and ideas I could also clearly see that, by extending this responsibility to the people and institutions around me, a key for sustainable human evolution could be found. It would take us away from our fears while developing

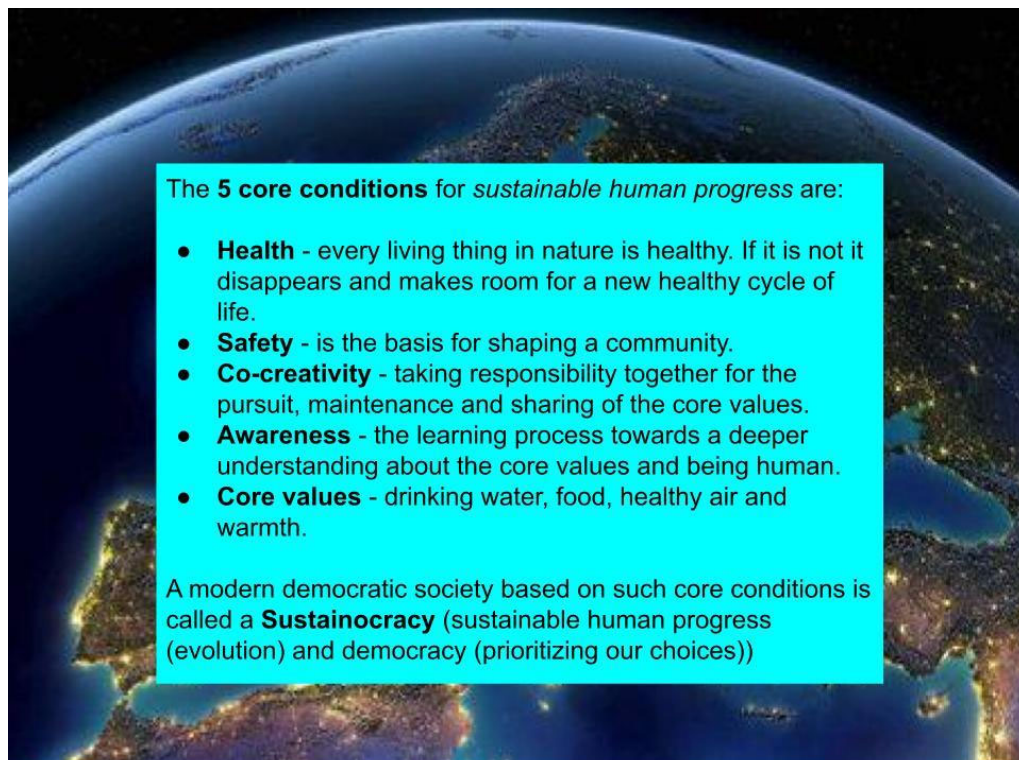


Figure 3. The 5 core conditions for our sustainable human existence.

our mental strength through awareness, self-empowerment and collaboration. It became my personal challenge to experiment with this “core human values driven” approach in my own direct surroundings (neighborhood), extending it eventually to the level of the city (Eindhoven) and region (Brabant).

What I never suspected was that the approach would open a Pandora’s Box of mental health issues in society.

The Positive Invitation

Institutions consist of human beings, that are citizens themselves. They equally benefit from the core natural values or suffer the negative consequences. The approach could therefore unify citizens and institutions through a common, meaningful humanistic and ecological purpose. In the process the role of both citizenship and the institutions would adjust themselves to serving those values in a proactive manner. Citizens would be challenged to take more responsibility for their own core values once they acknowledge their importance and their own influence on them. Institutions would be challenged to support this responsibility by eliminating their own negative impact on these natural core values. A new arena for the introduction of revised policies, innovations, services, education and science appears. It enhances the core

values as responsibilities rather than speculative commodities. Institutional support of proactive citizenship would emerge. I refer to this as the “economy of values,” or the “transformation economy.”

On paper this sounds great, but how does a simple citizen get this movement off the ground in a complex world of fragmented financial self-interests, opportunism, a generalized sense of victimization (always blaming others), alienation of responsibilities and an overall lack of existential ethical awareness? The only non-violent, evolutionary, experimental option that I found was “the positive invitation.” This option assumes that there are plenty of people with a level of awareness and sense of responsibility at all levels of society that do want to make a positive difference. They may feel blocked in their current position and can use an external invitation to get the level of leverage that they are looking for.

From Ego to Eco

This positive invitation approach introduced a breaking “path” rather than a breaking “point,” one that has a slower pace of acceptance and development. For instance, it challenged the triple helix political financial ecosystem, such as Brainport Eindhoven, to embrace the “economy of natural values.” This involves the development of integral health, safety, citizen

empowerment and awareness, out of overarching strategic self-interest, not just from a financial goals perspective. The approach gives citizens a more direct and real time democratic voice, instead of limiting their influence through a vote every four years. A voice they would have to learn to use effectively, not just to influence institutional hierarchical dominance, but also to develop their own responsibility in an impactful way. Instead of fighting the old hierarchy of demands, regulation and pressure, citizens could look for ways of cooperation and co-creation, based on a common ground (**Figure 5**), such as integral and positive health at regional level.

It also introduced respect for our human selves as a unique manifestation of nature, learning that an abusive attitude would be equally abusive to ourselves. Working together with nature would benefit us equally. I use air quality as an example. We breathe about 20,000 times a day, in and out. If we pollute that air, we pollute ourselves, with all kinds of negative consequences. We can try to solve this with an expensive healthcare system or trying to regulate polluting industries. Or we can learn to stop polluting the air. The latter is more effective and sustainable in the long term for the human species. It is also cheaper.

But this clashes with our historical development as a dominant species through for instance “the use of fire”. An overall breaking point in our attitude is needed.

Ever since we learned to dominate our surroundings for our own benefit we entered a state of confusion about “what we really are.” Our egocentric, dominant thinking got us to

define ourselves as “divine,” “stewards” and even “owners of the planet,” and “living descendants of God(s),” separating our existence into hierarchies of clustered and competing elites, defending, protecting and even imposing our self-interests over those of others. Our worshiping of materials like gold gave a standard to introduce generalized methods of exchange based on predetermined material values. This evolved into money, at first through the exchange of the precious metals themselves (coins), and later through an imaginary counter value expressed through paper “I owe you’s”, numbers in a bank account, etc. When in the 70’s of the last century gold collateral was abandoned, there was no limiting factor anymore for the production of money as an imaginary value. We gradually reached the deepest point of our political financial lack of existentialist ethics, expressed through words like the “anthropocene” or “humankind, the 6th cause of mass extinction of living species on Earth.”

A breaking point challenges this historical sense of dominance, this human egocentrism or sense of superiority, and all its spin-offs that developed over time. These spin-offs however provided us with an unprecedented level of technological and scientific knowledge and instruments. Those have been motivated and implemented in the field of confusion, both in the areas of unethical production of death and destruction, as well as wellness, comforts and progress, while we searched for the existentialist boundaries between dominance, control, financial growth and adaptive sustainable progress (eco) (**Figure 4**). In this battle with ourselves we can gradually distinguish an evolutionary pattern.

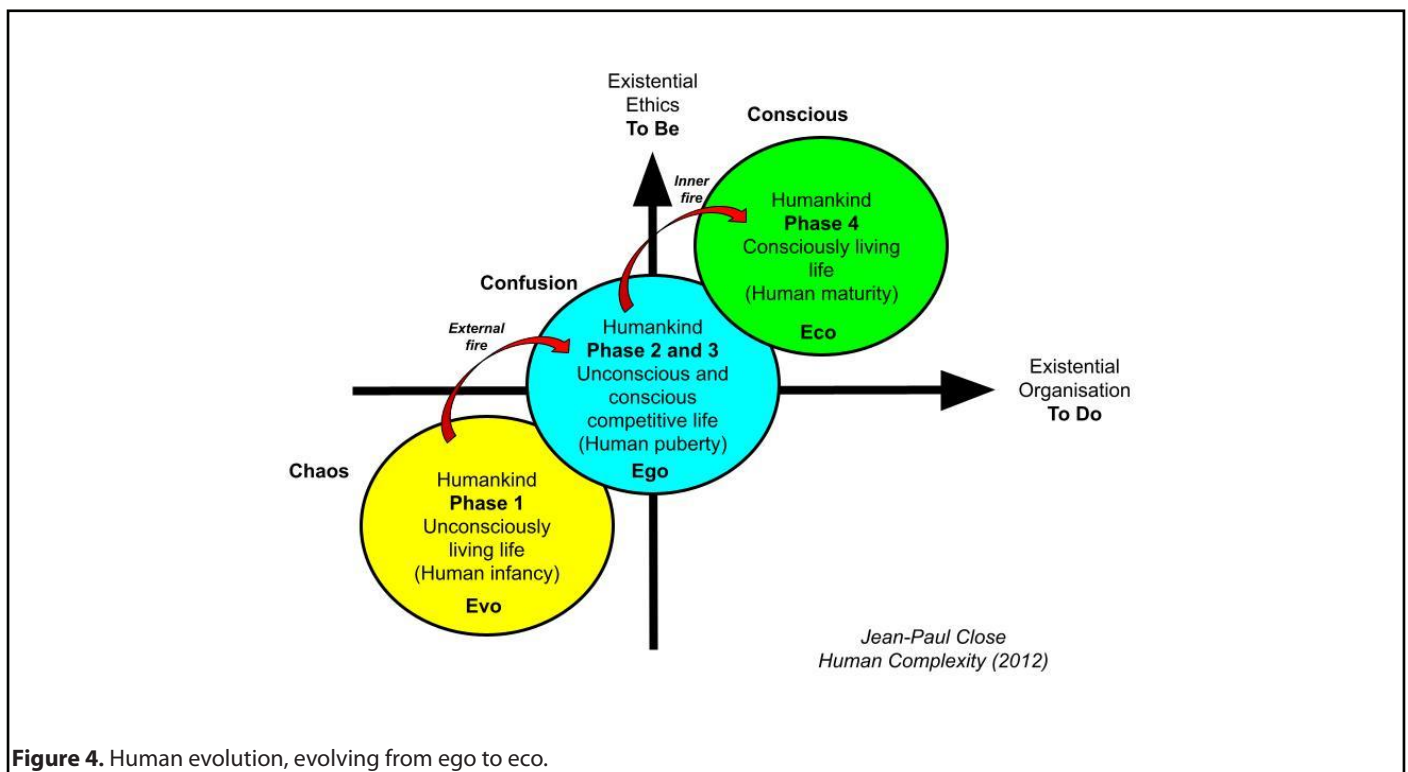


Figure 4. Human evolution, evolving from ego to eco.

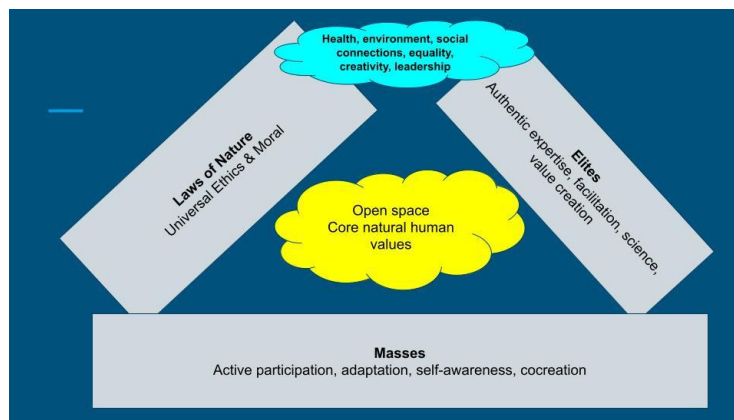


Figure 5. Replacing the hierarchies of doctrines with the open space of sustainable progress.

We arrive at the four suggested phases of human evolution, applicable to individuals, communities and eventually, potentially for humankind as a whole:

- **Evo:** The first phase of humankind, comparable with early childhood, when we appear as a new life form in the spectrum of the complexity of all life forms on our planet. Through trial and error, we learn about ourselves and how to sustain our species in an intuitive way.
- **Ego:** The second and third phases of human evolution appeared when we developed our competitive self awareness, individualism, self centered interests, levels of dominance and control, forcing subordination. At first this was an unconscious competitive reaction to encounters with other humanoids (phase 2), developing gradually into conscious desires of self interest, control, aggression and growth (phase 3). We settled, started to create boundaries and developed the aspect of ownership 'this is mine'. This can be compared with our evolution as children through puberty towards maturity.
- **Eco:** The fourth (potential) phase of entire humankind, as we can see in the development of family life and certain communities, drops the competitive attitude and develops value driven diplomacy, empathy and symbiotic care among people and our natural environment. It is a level of maturity that can also develop different gradations of environmental integration at social, ecological and economic levels within and among communities, similar to the functioning of the living nature and ecosystem as a whole.

After my own personal breaking point I found myself in the underpopulated field of "eco," surrounded still with a dominant and institutionalized mainstream Western society based on "ego." The field of ego is still very individualistic,

competitive and self-centered, as a way to combat its own desires, confusion, fears and insecurities. The field of eco however presents itself as holistically minded, adaptive, diplomatic, non-conflictive, self-conscious, values driven, sharing, determined and patient at the same time. While ego tends to view its actions through dominant and competitive interaction with its surroundings out of self-interest, the eco centered personality presents an inner sense of meaning and purpose based on sustainable dialogue, harmonization and balance.

From a mental health perspective the evolutionary area and era of "ego" appears to be very demanding. In the next section all these puzzle pieces will come together, providing indicators for our sustainable evolution as humankind, including the potential of mental resilience after a long period of integral degradation. An overall breaking point is needed and introduced at societal level. Humankind is now presented with a choice.

Applying the Eco Mentality to Society

How can we relate these two, three or four evolutionary fields to the mental health perspective? There are many, especially when one is in the position of observing human evolution already from an eco-perspective. A significant part of my own life has been lived blindly in the psychological field of ego, as part of my own natural phases of human development within the overall mainstream doctrine of the Western society. Now, after many decades developing the eco field I have enough material to compare. But instead of getting into a critical and judgmental attitude towards my fellow human beings and our shared evolution, I prefer to live my eco phase of life experimentally as a learning environment while inviting others to participate. By doing so the mental health differentiation will emerge by itself, as an experience, not because I lecture about it.

With this in mind we go back to the case of air pollution. Instead of criticizing our polluting behavior, a breaking point could be achieved by addressing the benefits of unpolluted air in relation to our health. The approach, referred to as AiREAS [4], involves and affects all local leadership archetypes (territorial, innovation, science and cultural behavior) together. It also redefines the interaction between citizens and institutions in an open space of sustainable development and shared responsibilities, guided by our existential values rather than money (Figure 5). Together we build a new common story for society, a next level: The healthy city.

As a vehicle I had established the STIR foundation in 2009, depersonalizing the eco-based ideology and approach from myself. Through the positive invitation (Figure 6) I hoped to achieve more than through the critical fight. With STIR I could position my “eco” self in the center of this drawing, together with the five essential conditions (Figure 3) of our human existence and continuity. All the silos of fragmented financial identifiers were invited to profile themselves as unique expert contributors in the converging center. Their contribution is based on co-creating our existential natural human values together, expressed for instance through ‘the healthy city’ or ‘city of tomorrow’ commitment.

Voluntary Participation

The breaking point of the city of Eindhoven had been forced by circumstances beyond its own control. It became an involuntary process forced by an existential crisis. My own contribution to the city, with my core human values approach, did not build on an immediate existential crisis. My own breaking point had occurred at the height of my own success in the political financial reality that governed my life at the time. It occurred when I was confronted with an inner moral choice. This revealed a possible underlying old trauma inherited by choices in the past that were not mine. My

father had developed a worldwide career thanks to his fluent dominance of the Spanish language. His marriage produced four children, of which I was the oldest. During my entire childhood my father was always traveling. His presence in the family was through postcards and the occasional phone calls. When he arrived back home after four to six weeks of absence, it was to wash his clothes, pack his suitcase again and leave for another four to six weeks. At the time I never gave it a second thought. This was our “reality,” and we were used to it. As the oldest of four, with the absence of my father, I (unconsciously) developed a protective attitude towards my mother and siblings.

Many years later I was in a similar situation as my father. I had a child of my own during the development of an international career. My own youth broke through into my conscious memory. I did not want my daughter to grow up with a postcard father. Due to the forthcoming divorce from my wife there was no possibility to take the family with me abroad. My choice was easily made. If they don’t come with me, despite the divorce, I would stay. This choice had a huge impact on me. The trusted reality where I came from had provided me with income and status. I replaced this with a great deal of nothingness, an empty space to develop with the only satisfaction of my inner morality and choice.

The benefit of my personal breaking with my heritage was that I had become aware of the two realities, the one that I had broken away from (political financial) and the one that I developed after the breaking (human values). It opened up my mind to the different dimensions of life, the universal characteristics of it, and the mental conflicts humankind faces between its self-aware actions, the resultant direct and indirect consequences, and our applied or ignored morality. Applied to mental health I arrived at the following suggestion from a sustainable evolutionary point of view:

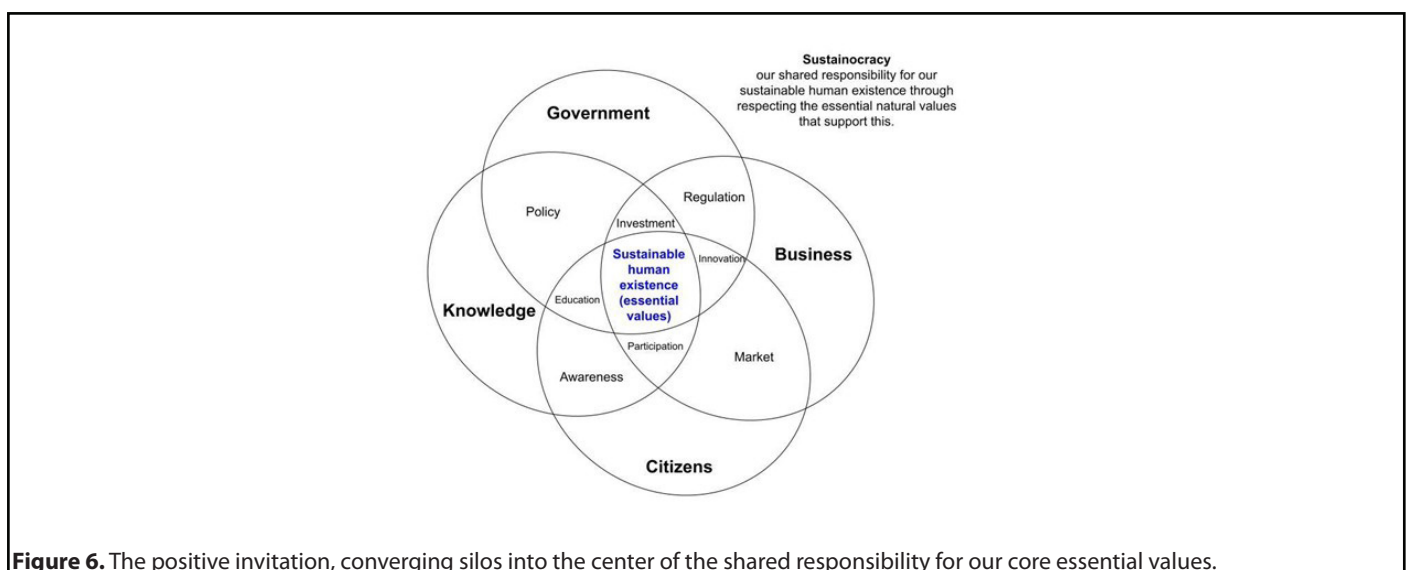


Figure 6. The positive invitation, converging silos into the center of the shared responsibility for our core essential values.

Mental health is a “dynamic state of mind that balances between action driven productivity and existential, values driven morality, in a permanent adaptive, core natural values driven way, within ourselves and with our natural surroundings.”

With this in mind, I could suggest that “a breaking point brings us back into the state of mental health.” This is of course a powerful statement, implying that, under certain circumstances humankind can enter unhealthy states of mind and related behavior, often without knowing or realizing it. Such an unhealthy state of mind would block us mentally from our evolutionary path. Even more serious is when such an unhealthy mentality develops levels of self-justification and authority, imposing itself and its doctrines onto humankind and our behavior. In the past such historical situations have led to long periods of chaos before a new cycle of unification into wellness and harmony could develop. But this lesson seems to be forgotten.

Can humankind protect itself from such mental deterioration or impositions? Especially when these come disguised in promising political formats, subjectively formulated justice, forced dependence or dictatorial expressions of narcissistic self-interests? How can we avoid the periods of chaos that invariably follow such periods of blind dominance and institutionalized control? (**Figure 7**)

A first step could be to acknowledge and agree on:

- What the conditions for our sustainable existence are as a natural species (To Be, our morality). For instance, by accepting the five, core natural human conditions (**Figure 3**) as overarching shared responsibilities, not as commodities or instruments of forced political financial dependence.

- Acceptance that taking care of our sustainable existence as a species positively influences our mental health.
- That healthy, progressively adaptive societies are built on these acknowledgements (To Be and To Do in community formats).

Sustainocracy was my first educated attempt to achieve this, positioned in the field of harmony, balance and symbiose. Meanwhile the rest of the world seemed to be struggling in the fields of Greed and Control or in Chaos and the fear of Premature Death.

By inviting my city's surroundings (government, fellow citizens, business, science, education) to develop ‘the healthy city’, a gradual and voluntary breaking path was introduced for all participants that accepted the invitation. Instead of defining their identity in the competitive environment of financial dependence, they had to define their authenticity by contributing to the healthy city challenge, not with money but with their expertise and behavior. A transformation started to occur.

Relating Breaking Points with Mental Health

When I started to invite citizens of Eindhoven to develop the core natural human values for themselves and the city as whole, only specific groups of people engaged. The mainstream workforce, for instance, captured within the artificial financial ecosystem, had no time or interest in joining. This large group of people is mentally blocked and tunnel-visioned by their daily tasks. These provide them with financial means for access to their basic needs and entertainment. They are unconsciously anchored in the field (**Figure 7**) of personal interests, financial growth or control, whether they are aware

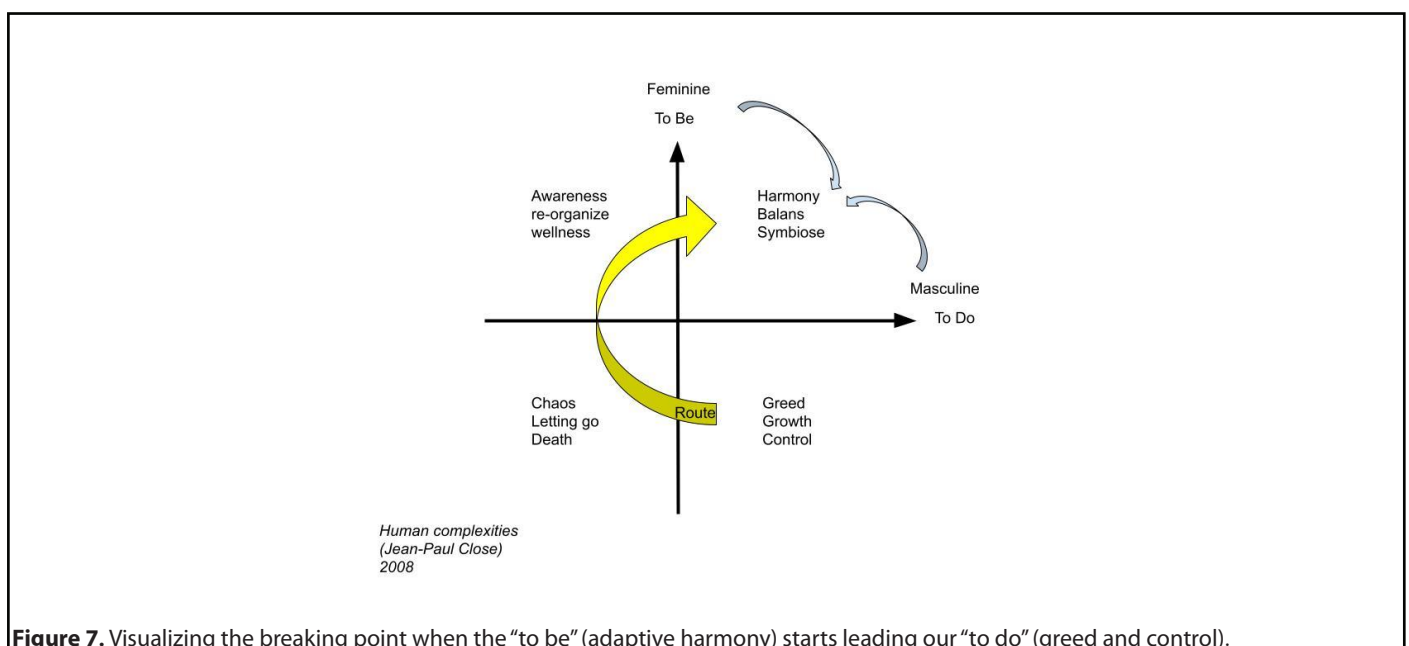


Figure 7. Visualizing the breaking point when the “to be” (adaptive harmony) starts leading our “to do” (greed and control).

of it or not. Many of the institutions for which they work have a similar attitude. The entire society seems to be primarily conditioned within this area of financial development. Little are they aware or concerned about the consequences or their vulnerability. Short term financial objectives rule, nothing else. These large populations do not comply with any of the definitions of mental health provided in this document due to their structural and blind dependence on financial means for whatever they need. And if they are aware, they invariably place the overarching responsibility outside themselves and within the doctrine of the hierarchy or “others.” Like a director or a major multinational stated when invited to the healthy city table, bringing his lawyers: “We cannot be made responsible for the health of the city, we are responsible for the quality of our products.”

By placing financial means between us and the natural and healthy abundance offered by nature, we condition ourselves and our minds to perform according to the rules of the financial system. This is not experienced as a mental health problem or limitation by the people involved, even though it has important consequences for our behavior, our interhuman relationships and our relationship with nature. For people, like me, that experienced a breaking point with this attitude, the finance based and fixated mentality can be seen as a mental blockage. Interestingly, the opposite occurs as well, namely that people that are captured in the financial doctrine tend to consider those who step out as “mentally disturbed.” A similar phenomenon occurs in religious doctrines in which the “only universal truth” seems to be the one dictated and owned by that particular church.

Delegating our own responsibilities to political financial hierarchies produced the overall psychic alienation of realities. It resulted in the destruction of our habitat, our social cohesion and disconnected unity with our universal living origins. Breaking with it brings us back to our genuine natural human selves. But the resulting potential peace and harmony comes with a price.

A large diversity of institutions did engage with my positive invitation. They engaged in the field of health and air quality through the AiREAS initiative. By joining, initially they had nothing to let go of, no price to pay, other than maybe their own polluting behavior. They however had much to gain by offering their innovations. It became a self-selecting process of institutions in survival mode, opportunistically trying to get quick access to funding. They would disappear rapidly when they realized that the AiREAS initiative had no funding, personnel or buildings of its own. AiREAS only had an immaterial purpose and a diversity of partners that represented all cornerstones of society (government, business, citizens and science/education) committed to the challenge. The institutions that remained in the coalition were committed to the intended human and nature centered end results. Gradually they also started to reflect about their own contribution to the problems.

Citizens, who normally only represented their complaints against government or polluting industries, would become equally frustrated when learning about their own responsibilities too. Shared responsibility is exactly what it says. One cannot demand responsibility from others if one is not prepared to accept one’s own. Those that stayed (citizens and institutions) began to redefine their behavior and purpose in a contributive way, developing a powerful identity and authenticity in the field of values driven, contributive cooperation towards community health.

Other initiatives initiated by me, within the scope of the core natural values, received much less institutional support. For instance, our regenerative local food initiative, FRE2SH, engaged primarily local pioneers in the food sector. The large global food sector is a major driver of the global economic and capitalist sector. Transforming this sector from commodity-based speculation to regenerative cooperation with local nature and citizens, were a world apart from each other, especially in the urban domain. With AiREAS we could establish a functional and emotional eco precedent that could eventually also extend to other areas of prioritization. But this was still something that needed to manifest itself in the future.

Equally our proactive approach to health is not the same as the institutionalized reactive structures of healthcare or remedial environmental measures. In AiREAS we integrate both the environmental attention with the social domain. This was very difficult due to the differentiation of interests and structures in institutions and government departments. Existential morality demands taking integral health proactively at heart. Financial interests in the hierarchy of healthcare had their own views on ethics. They valued the problems out of organizational and financial self-interest. The potential elimination of the problem would make their position obsolete. From a mental health point of view it can be argued whether such a deeply developed attitude of financial dependence is morally or ethically justifiable? It is not in view of the eco reality of Sustainocracy.

Back to the citizens: Research in AiREAS [5] has revealed that over 50% of our exposure to unhealthy air was caused by ourselves. The first physical health gain could be achieved by involving citizens. Initially the idea was to try to influence the local citizen’s lifestyle with research data from AiREAS with air quality, created under the flag of Sustainocracy and STIR. Such research had revealed that many of our health and environmental issues could be directly related to our own choices. Rather than just influencing government, business or science, I had to try to engage the local citizen community itself with their own core natural human essentials. This proved to be more difficult than expected. A new invitation, this time to integral positive health covering all areas of health, not just air quality, would hopefully become more effective. We coined the new initiative the “Community of Social Inclusion, Integration and Innovation,” COS3i in short.

As mentioned before, the general workforce did not join, unless demanded functionally by their institutions. This despite their own contribution to the problem, not just through their jobs but, for instance, due to the mobility choice to their jobs. Their argument would be “but how do you want me to get to my work?” Their access to their job by car would be considered more important than the general health issue, of themselves or others. Interestingly often those in a professional function do not relate themselves or their function to citizenship, as if they were two different realities: their private life and their job.

In Sustainocracy there is no difference, considering the shared natural human centered responsibility as equally relevant at home as in any function.

One citizen group that did voluntarily join were elderly people, enjoying their pension and concerned about the environment, their health or the price of their house. They both have time and, on many occasions, certain expertise to engage and contribute. Their approach to reality is often “a critical stand towards the functioning of government.” This complied with their upbringing in a strongly regulated, hierarchical environment. Information about their own behavior, as part of the shared responsibility, was easily minimized, denied or ignored. After all, they had worked hard for their comforts. However, their critical approach to government did impact the functioning of these institutions that had to also rely democratically on the votes of this important group. Analyzing this from an eco point of view we can suggest that there are traces of existential ethics involved here, despite the negotiation of self-interests.

We arrived at the insight that “defending self interest is a great motivator, as long as it contributes to the common existentialist cause. Else it potentially becomes degenerative for the community.”

Another group that engaged were people with a foreign background. These people had come to the Netherlands because of a love relationship or a professional opportunity. At a later stage we saw large groups of refugees that looked at ways to develop their lives in new and positive ways. Eindhoven had modernized itself with the presence of over 150 nationalities. This put an overall pressure on the local community to find a common ground of positive interaction. Here we see a different interpretation of such interaction when considering the “ego” world of financial self-interests and the “eco” world of social harmonization.

Many of these people came with a broader worldview and mindset than the conservative, narrow-minded locals, who had not enjoyed or suffered such expatriation experiences. Many locals saw the multicultural environment as a threat rather than a virtue. In the “integral and positive healthy city” approach of STIR and AiREAS I did not want to exclusively focus on the (conservative) local Dutch majority, nor did I want to

moralize about unhealthy behavior. Instead, I preferred to invite all local citizens to their own healthy behavior and experience the benefits. Meanwhile these many “internationals” were tending to cluster with their fellow country people in cultural associations that represented their own cultural traditions, language and origin. In town we had many such clusters that organized events of their own, attracting mostly people from their own backgrounds.

Research [6] has revealed that our mind is conditioned by our interpretation of positive feedback of our actions (the predictive brain). The contextual comfort of the consumer society, the adherence to local cultural expressions, the imaginary and speculative world of money, the economy of growth and capitalism, having a job, all have the tendency to trigger such positive mental feedback through the predictive mind of comfort and pleasures. Moralization about this has proven to be counterproductive. People have the tendency to stick to their perception of comforts, even if the entire degenerative spiral worldwide could be attributed to this attitude. However, the international community had a more open mind while trying to develop their own comforts in a, for them, totally strange, cultural environment.

A TED talk [7] appeared in which American brain researcher Matthew Lieberman explained that the first basic need of any human being is “the social connection.” This contradicts the common (capitalist) belief that our first basic need is material wellness (Pyramid of Maslow). Personally, I agree with Lieberman from my own international and intercultural experiences. Only my social connections helped me develop where I am today, not materialism or money. When I returned to the Dutch society in 2001 I was shocked by the growing levels of individualism, egocentrism and structured dependence produced by financial prioritization. This culture also enhanced fears, opportunism, competition, jealousy, inequality, aggression, loneliness, bureaucracy, segregation between people and government, etc. Paradoxically it was referred to as the “society of care.” But this society of care was seen as a cost, not as a co-creation or shared responsibility, developing many layers of social control, expensive bureaucracy and inhuman “tunnel visioned” doctrines.

The logo of COS3i (**Figure 8**) was designed with a diversity of lettertypes and colors, representing the colorful diversity of the population. It became a challenge to interconnect all those cultural islands with a message to learn about and from each other. The breaking point would be to transform the traditional and unjustified “fear of the other”, based on prejudice or media influences, into “curiosity, dialogue, understanding, respect and cooperation.” The core natural human values can be seen as overarching values for all human beings, irrespective of their origin and background. This proved to have a converging character, with positive elements of mental health as a consequence.



Figure 8. The COS3i logo, representing diversity and connection. The union of the S and 3 also shows a heart shape.

Between 1996 and 2020 (the start of COVID lockdowns) we organized and engaged with hundreds of initiatives, all with the message of interconnectedness. As human beings we are all equal but not the same. In this authentic differentiation we find both the key for destruction (judgment, competition) and for progress (connection, collaboration). It all depends on the context in which we place this diversity, ego or eco.

Local politics also reacted, for instance when we spontaneously organized an explanation of party politics for internationals during the municipality elections. Most internationals come from countries that have no parliamentary democracy, yet they are invited to vote during the local municipality elections in the Netherlands. This was a new world for them. If not informed they would neglect it, sometimes even interpreting the official electoral post from the government with fear. The size of the multicultural presence is so significant (30% of the population) that, if they unite, they would be capable of creating a political breaking point in town. From a core human values and shared responsibility point of view such perspective was warmly received. I was invited on several occasions to perform speeches that created such a broader eco reality, also among the political representatives.

Small but significant breaking points were achieved when, for instance, the local municipality abandoned its policy to just communicate in Dutch. The traditional (ego) thought was: if these foreigners come to the city for their (financial) benefit, they would be expected to integrate into Dutch society and learn the language. This type of chauvinism did not work anymore in our open and dynamic society, nor was it of political interest to exclude such an important portion of society from voting. As a consequence, the political environment was challenged to see the foreign presence not solely as a welcome, finance-driven workforce, but also as a valuable contribution to the cultural, social and economic evolution of the region. This change of perspective forced local politics to develop a level of empathy and connection that went beyond the original Dutch standards.

Unfortunately, the large majority of traditional Dutch citizens remained generally in their old, blind, finance-dependent comfort zones. They often fear “losing their benefits” due to the arrival of other nationalities. I had experienced similar fears and aggression against foreigners in Sweden when I lived there with my first wife between 1988 and 1990. Refugees from Chile (Pinochet regime) had come to Sweden in times of a financial recession. They were considered by the population as the main reason for their problems. My Spanish wife at the time was easily confused with the people from Chile, sensing the discrimination at first hand.

Nowadays conservative nationalist political parties feed those fears with warnings against religious doctrines or terrorists invading the country. Instead of trying to develop human unity, like we positively did with COS3i, social segregation and hatred was spread out of political interests. Such sick-minded political doctrines put people up against each other, where normally they could and would coexist peacefully. This does not mean that extremist religious doctrines or terrorist groups do not exist. They need to be dealt with but never used for political benefit. It has even been documented [8] that such political doctrines are capable of secretly hiring such extremists or terrorists to do what these same politicians warn against, just to prove their point and gain votes. How sick minded can one make it?

Social safety, that includes respect for ourselves and others and our natural environment, is one of the five core principles of Sustainocracy. It is unbelievable, and ethically unjustifiable, that public representatives use chaos, aggression and fear in their own community (or elsewhere) to gain a position of power and authority. With COS3i we proved the contrary but we did not pursue political power, just sustainable human development and social cohesion.

In our view the existential core natural human values are not subject to political debate, negotiation or delegation. They are a shared moral and ethical responsibility without exceptions.

During public presentations to these groups of migrants they would often express their fears and uncertainties due to the political negativity and its spin-offs on society. In turn I would show them that the entire Dutch population was, in a way, descending from migration throughout history. It was just a small gesture of relief in an overall situation of growing tension. It also shows that politics is part of the local and global problem, demanding a new ethical breaking point also in this field of attention. It is important to note here that politics is not the same as “the government”. The government is a public service. Politics is a competitive field of conflicting interests. Sustainocracy can work very well with the government, not with politics, unless they commit to the core natural human values and take their part of responsibility. In the playing field of conflicting interests this is not always evident as shown in these examples.

Another significant group that engaged were the “unemployed.” Many were looking for fulfillment, often carrying a burden of a mental trauma of some kind. The dominant financial world had left victims due to its constant pressure to perform in an endless spiral of inflation. Many that joined COS3i carried issues of low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, a negative self-image, trust issues and more. Not being able to perform in the financial rat race made them feel like outcasts, without personal recognition or opportunity to prove themselves. They were surrounded by institutions that put pressure on them to get back into a salaried environment, considered “the normal life,” because the system benefits with taxes rather than having to carry the social costs. Like this the political financial doctrine maintained an unhealthy social segregation, exerting pressure and developing inequality without human centered empathy or allowing the possibility to participate in a values driven, non financial way. Many people showed relationship problems, burnout, addiction to substances or alcohol, aggression, psychic disorders, fear attacks, psychoses, etc. The system would blame the people, the people would blame the system.

They joined CO3Si due to its humanistic social integration approach, valuing the people for who they are and whatever unique contribution they could add to the community from an social integration point of view. Some would do that by helping the elderly or people in need, others by playing musical instruments, or setting up second-hand clothes exchanges. Others provided counseling services, do voluntary activities, set up men or women spiritual circles in nature, social gatherings around cooking, and many more initiatives that fit the “immaterial economy of values” and much less the “capitalist environment of materialism.”

Not all these people were direct victims of the pressure or inhumane attitude of the financial structures and doctrine. They often carried traumas that were passed on by their parents. These ancestors had gone through a divorce, debt problems, abusive foster parents, refugee status, slavery,

discrimination, sexual abuse, alcohol misuse, mental issues from World War II or other conflicts in the world. Their offspring had not lived through these issues themselves, but the burdens were passed on between the generations through the behavior of their parents. All this produced mental health problems and constraints that people had to cope with.

The “healthy city” approach of the STIR foundation, in which the ideology of Sustainocracy had been deposited, had given rise to initiatives like COS3i. It was much more than developing a healthy environment. We did not judge people based on financial performance. It invited people to contribute to the core natural values, according to their abilities. We did not build relationships of trade with money as a reward, although on occasions this could certainly be possible in a concrete project.

We saw money as a means, not even the main one. Reciprocity was a broader expression that also covered immaterial rewards such as friendship, care, a hug, applause, a sense of belonging, etc. And positive health of course.

Unfortunately, many such people derived their identity from the traumas lived, or passed through parental behavior, reviving them constantly. They would not be aware of, or dare to go through a breaking point. For them their trauma-based reality, the permanent self-victimization, was their comfort zone. Any perspective of a breaking point would fill them with fear, backing away from participation and even feeling ill when being invited. They feared losing their identity, not knowing what could come next. Our reassurance and offers for help were insufficient for them to cross the line.

Others, however, indicated that they did want to work towards such a personal breaking point for personal empowerment. But a breaking point is not a simple press on a button. Every person is different and reacts differently to situations. Often people don’t even know about the existence of breaking points, feeling the need only to deal with their status quo, rather than approaching change. The trick would be to find the right trigger that would help the person make the transition. Sometimes the trigger presents itself automatically under the right circumstances, such as the ones presented by participating in COS3i. It then needs to be carefully handled and socially embedded for the benefit of the person involved. The financial system often opposed, inhibiting these people to engage fully with the COS3i environment, prioritizing the financial demands.

In general personal breaking points were achieved by changing perspective for the person involved, or by a drastic change of environment. For the latter we had established relationships with caring partners in other countries where we could take the people. Another proven approach were family constellation exercises, energetic massages and spiritually oriented personal attention.

To my surprise hundreds of cases presented themselves as we developed CO3Si. The group of people with mental troubles, fears and concerns is much larger than would seem at first sight. People are very good at camouflaging their issues, especially in a society that shows only a single dimension, the financial one. As soon as commitments are required their struggles start interfering. It became very comforting to observe those people that we could help through their breaking point. They felt a new boost of inspiration, and even a future personal mission, through the core natural human values. Equally we felt a great concern for all those that were carrying their heavy emotional backpacks while doing their best to make something of their lives. We could idealize a healthy city of tomorrow but needed to see the reality of damaged people by society today and yesterday. We really needed to attend to these people and at the same time try to prevent those issues from recurring today, in order to not feed the problems of tomorrow. Our mission became extra significant, trying to prepare a society that does not need breaking points anymore.

In view of all the cases described above, the need to develop the overarching commitment to our existential core natural human values became evident. Up to this stage it had been a positive invitation to “an option”, not yet an overarching contextual “name of the societal game”. The image shown above in **Figure 6** became more than relevant. It became of existential key importance for both our sustainable existence as well as the development of our mental wellness.

Our Younger Generations

From all the above we learn that our heritage of financial prioritization has influenced our mental health, or lack thereof, in many different ways. People that earn enough money to sustain themselves learn to fear losing what they have. This gets them into a competitive attitude and desire for more. It is a self-selecting process, distilling selfishness, egocentrism and even narcissism from the pack. Those who get stuck develop all kinds of other behavioral disorders as we have seen through COS3i. Or they need to deal with mental disorders passed on between generations.

But how about our younger, upcoming generations?

During our initial attempt to address the educational system with our core human values and empowerment, we were rejected firmly. The educational system was feeding the system of obedience, preparation for the labor market in a financially oriented environment. It had no interest in embracing a different reality for itself or for the students. Only through international exchange programs could we interact with young people. They were temporarily detached from their home doctrines due to their international travel. Gradually the situation of education in and around Eindhoven changed when we started to get government, local businesses and

scientific research on board within our “healthy city” approach.

In general, we observed that the younger generation already grows up with the idea “to do things differently than their parents.” The world that their parents were handing over was “on fire.” Having suffered broken families, seeing the development of warzones, fearing World War III, witnessing the speculative rise of prices to just live a modest life, with shortages of houses, unfulfilling “bullshit” jobs, youth react in different ways. Some develop a negative or passive attitude, focusing on consumption and entertainment. The financial doctrine tends to refer to them as the “lost generation.” Never before has the level of suicide been so high among teenagers and young adults. But many others try to find their own way. Are they lost? Or are they developing a different part for themselves away from the traditional societal doctrines? Were they born already with a breaking point genetically coded in their approach to reality? They tend to develop a day-by-day attitude towards life, not knowing what to expect tomorrow. Many sense the drama that is occurring in the world as something that does not belong to them. They want to make a difference. A student from Hong Kong university, participating in the local values driven HKIIEEL program, wrote the following remark when asked about the education of values:

Li Hiu Nam Hilaria (A student from the Education University of Hong Kong)

“While academic skills and knowledge are crucial for student growth and societal contribution, attitudes and values education are equally important to guide the application of these skills in a positive direction. As outlined by the Education Bureau (2021), values significantly influence decision-making and behaviors, emphasizing the need to reflect on societal benefits rather than just personal views. The role of values education is increasingly important in a global city like Hong Kong, where diverse media messages are prevalent. By helping students analyze and evaluate the information they encounter, values education encourages responsible and thoughtful decision-making. This educational approach not only develops resilience, emotional control, and problem-solving skills but also nurtures essential qualities like empathy, self-discipline, and courage. Overall, values education plays a pivotal role in enhancing students' capabilities and fostering key personal qualities that prepare them for future challenges and contributions to society.”

Also in the Netherlands, when STIR and its sustainocratic spin-offs get a chance to interact with students, we invariably get the feedback, “why don't we learn this at school?” They get motivated, feel empowered, develop a sense of purpose and meaning. During international encounters about ethics, societal development, spirituality, etc. increasingly the arguments are heard that, “we (education) have failed horribly over the last fifty years.” In general, the formal world of education is preparing our youth with (ego) doctrines of the

past. This does not fit the current, destructive, anthropocenic reality anymore. Many young people have the feeling that the real learning is done on the street, “in the real world,” both bad and good, leading to all kinds of behavioral expressions among these generations. They miss the guidance into an overarching (eco) morality, a perspective that helps society and young people move forward beyond and away from the degenerative spiral that many are trying to break away from. Educational institutions also need to break away from the current condition as a service for the political financial doctrine. They need to break free and develop themselves as a genuine pillar on which societies evolve, not as a fixed doctrine but a dynamic, adaptive learning environment, guided by existential ethics, not just money or technology.

Wrapping Up and Recommendations

The empirical experiences described above invited people and institutions to my own post-breaking point and immaterial eco initiatives. On many occasions this helped them to acknowledge the benefits of this approach for themselves. Often this resulted in an experimental breaking point for them, with related empowerment and mental health through the renewal of existentialist purpose and commitment. After all, we are all first natural human beings before we are citizens or placed in a professional function. This new collaborative and sharing mindset was introduced to provide all involved with a warm and integrated feeling. It provided those engaged with at least a perception of the two realities, one (political financial hierarchy) judgmental, demanding and competitive, the other (sustainocracy, shared responsibility) values driven, appreciative and collaborative. Even if the first is still overarching and often still degenerative, the alternative has been experienced and now represents a choice. The more people and institutions recognize and embrace human essentials as a shared responsibility, the sooner it will break through as a new normative and eco driven mainstream. It is expected to empower all people with meaning, purpose and true mental health.

The general recommendation is to accept the five core human values as a shared responsibility at individual, community, institutional and societal level, for existential, sustainable development. These values can then be respectfully integrated throughout society, our constitutions, our healing services and the development of the “economy of values” in which money is a means, not a goal. If we do not, as we have shown in this article, we remain responsible ourselves for the crises, collapse and mental disturbances that are generated by our own existential negligence.

It will not eliminate ego entirely. The youthful condition of puberty will always be an intermediary stage between childhood and adulthood. However, it places ego, eventually, in the societal context of evolution to overall human eco maturity.

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