

# Ignacy Sachs and ecodevelopment: the concept and its posterity

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## Abstract

First pronounced in 1972 by Maurice Strong in the corridors of the United Nations Conference in Stockholm, ecodevelopment was conceptualized in the 1970s by the Polish economist Ignacy Sachs. His objective was simple: designing a development method adapted to Third World countries. To do so, he proposed, on the basis of the project he presented in Peru in 1972, a reorganization of production and consumption practices. This reorganization would be adapted to the surrounding ecosystem and would be coordinated by a planning State and a strong and organized civil society. Its concept is based on five principles: social, economic, environmental, cultural and territorial, with sustainability as its watchword. However, it seems that, although this project seems ambitious and respectable, ecodevelopment was quickly ousted from the debate in favor of sustainable development. This concept, more flexible and liberal, has been gaining consensus since the 1980s.

The objective is to try to shed light on the reasons for the shift away from ecodevelopment, in the light of the paradigms of the end of the 20th century. It seems important to conclude that the failures of sustainable development today question its viability and efficiency, which may lead us to think that ecodevelopment is still a current project.

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## Introduction

On April 04, 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of the United Nations (UN) unveiled its latest report on global warming trends. The results were decisive: the world has three years to limit this warming and allow a livable future for all. Created in 1988, the IPCC has published numerous reports on this issue, and has now begun its sixth assessment cycle. But, it seems that the environmental issue is still struggling to find its place on political agendas.

However, ecosystems are the foundation of human activities, and this is why, since the 18th century, some economists have been looking into the question and the importance of nature, defined then as *a set of material resources independent of human activity, in a country wealth creation*. Natural resources were at the heart of the economic system at this time, and this is why researchers were interested in doing what was called *the economics of nature*. This discipline, quite different from today's economics, looked at interdependencies between environments. Later, the School of physiocracy was born in France, represented by F. Quesnay. The term physiocracy literally means the power of nature. Although nature was studied, it played little part in classical economic thought. Anyway, the goal by studying nature remained getting the most out of this object. In his 1776 work, *Research on the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, A. Smith considers nature as a set of material stocks. He gives short and rare passages to this subject. But, over the years, the link between human activity and destruction of nature is timidly felt. Thus, in 1867, K. Marx points out, for instance, the correlation between the process of exploitation of workers and the loss of soil fertility in the agricultural dynamics of a capitalist economy.

In the decades that followed, nature was replaced by the environment, which refers to all the elements, physical phenomena and other living beings, which surround a living organism. This wider definition takes into account the role of Human in the ecosystems. However, it was not until the 1960s that scientists and economists began to question this paradigm and warn about the potentially harmful aspect of human activities on the environment and on the disappearance of certain resources - questions that were far from being important during the massive development of industry in Europe in the 19th century, since pollution was even considered as "*an inevitable side effect of an industrialization perceived as beneficial*".

Then, how can we reconcile development and the environment? This is what the economist Ignacy Sachs set himself to solve in the 1970s<sup>3</sup>. He wrote his thesis<sup>4</sup> at the Delhi School of Economics in 1960, and then traveled through Europe, particularly Geneva, where he discovered the United Nations and took part in numerous debates on Third World development. In 1971, he created the Research Group on Development Strategies (GRSD) within the EPHP. His position allowed him to meet many of his fellow researchers. From his meeting with W. Kapp, he retained the deep link between development and the environment, as well as the possibility of a *via media* between a total halt to progress and predatory growth. The United Nations conference of 1972 allowed I. Sachs to develop his ideas, but, above all, it is the place of birth of the term *ecodevelopment*. Maurice Strong launches this word in the corridors of the conference. He will make it, accompanied by I. Sachs, M. Nerfin and some others, an innovative project. First defined as "*a development strategy based on the judicious*

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<sup>2</sup> See *La Contamination du Monde*, F. Jarrige and T. Le Roux, Ed Seuil, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The biographical elements of I. Sachs are taken from his memoirs *La Troisième Rive*, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> His dissertation is entitled *Patterns of Public Sector in Underdeveloped Economies*, and focuses on the role of the state in development.

*use of local resources and peasant know-how applicable to isolated rural areas of the Third World*<sup>5</sup>", ecodevelopment has been extended to all countries of the world during the research.

Therefore, we believe that ecodevelopment can be rightly considered as the precursor of sustainable development. Consequently, this article consists in apprehending the concept of ecodevelopment as a potential alternative to sustainable development. Taking into account the weaknesses of this last one, and especially the difficulties of development, in adequacy with the natural environment, met by the countries of the South, we are going here to lean on the ecodevelopment project and bring elements of answers to the following problems: in which measures the project of ecodevelopment exceeds the insufficiencies of the development of the end of the 20th century? In what way could this project, of socialist inspiration, could bring a more effective answer to the ecological and development issues, than sustainable development has been able to do?

Without dwelling on the geopolitical context of the 1960s and 1970s, we will seek to understand how the ecodevelopment project, initially intended for developing countries, was envisaged by I. Sachs, and will attempt to understand the way it can be applied to any area wishing to implement a development in harmony with its ecosystem. This will allow us to discuss the research techniques adopted by I. Sachs, an heterodox socialist economist in a neoliberal world in the midst of globalization. Finally, we will conclude our reflection by looking at the reasons that have brought sustainable development to the forefront, at the expense of ecodevelopment. Through his project, we will see that I. Sachs challenges many economic and political postulates, which was undoubtedly the cause of his ousting. In spite of that, we will endeavor to explain in which measures ecodevelopment is not a vain project, and indeed represents an alternative to the sustainable development failures.

Therefore, we will try here to compare the notions of ecodevelopment and sustainable development. This analysis will allow us to highlight the insufficiencies and benefits of these two notions, by insisting particularly on the theoretical and political shift that has occurred since the 1980s. This is how we will manage to give back to ecodevelopment a certain significance, whereas this notion seems to us too often missing from the thoughts on ecological sustainability.

## **1: An alternative development project**

As early as 1952, C. Levi-Strauss wrote in his book *Race and History* that adherence to the Western mode of development “*results less from a free decision than from an absence of choice. Western civilization has established its soldiers, its trading posts, its plantations and its missionaries all over the world; it has directly or indirectly intervened in the lives of the colored populations; it has upset their traditional mode of existence from top to bottom, either by imposing its own or by establishing conditions that led to the collapse of existing frameworks without replacing them with anything else*” (C. Levi-Strauss, 1952, pp. 53-54).

By denouncing the subjection of Third World countries to the Western model, this author had already perceived the non-viability of such a system. Largely inspiring the reflections of I. Sachs on the subject, the latter seeks to show that other ways of developing are possible, and this is what he endeavors to explain through his ecodevelopment project. Initially focused on developing countries, he will extend his development method to all countries, in order to better coordinate the three major pillars that underpin his concept: equity, ecological prudence and self-reliance<sup>6</sup>. Thus, by adopting an approach that differs from standard neoclassical economics,

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<sup>5</sup> According to I. Sachs in *Écodéveloppement, une Approche de Planification*, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> I. Sachs explains that he prefers to keep the English term, because the French translation (développement autocentré) makes the idea too imperfect (1974, p. 561).

I. Sachs insists on the importance of adopting development strategies adapted to the environment in question.

**a) A foresight tool**

The end of the 20th century marked the advent of a liberal economic policy adopted by the developed countries. The latter sought to impose this policy at world level in order to consolidate their power and promote their economic model, which was considered more sustainable. I. Sachs opposed this method, advocating the implementation of a development model based on planning and resources specific to each country. Therefore, I. Sachs wants to propose a third way of development for developing countries, halfway between real socialism and reformed capitalism. Then, he set out his ecodevelopment project, based on five major principles, which can be adapted to various sectors, as long as the specific characteristics of the environment concerned are respected. With his innovative concept, I. Sachs is looking for another possible way of development. His model, based on a rather simple and intuitive framework, is obviously inspired by the principles set out at the Founex and Stockholm<sup>7</sup> conferences. In 1974, after the Cocoyoc<sup>8</sup> conference on a better distribution of wealth and reflections on development and the environment - this text was strongly criticized by the United States<sup>9</sup> - I. Sachs formulated his ecodevelopment project. This is no longer intended solely for the countries of the South, but can be adapted by all. His first model, set out in *Population, Technology, Natural Resources and the Environment*, (1973), is relatively simple: it sets out the existing relationships between population (P), technology (T), natural resources (R), production (Y), and the environment (M). In the traditional development model<sup>10</sup>, the environmental variable is not integrated. Inserting it creates new connections between the variables and new effects, which are important to take into account. He then presents an alternative model<sup>11</sup> and explains that taking the environment into account has effects both on the framework of production and consumption, but also on the technologies employed and the use of different resources. As a result, feedback effects are expected: degradation of natural resources due to pollution, changes in production processes due to environmental conditions, and changes in the quality of life. Following the presentation of this new model, I. Sachs proposes the first principles of an ecodevelopment strategy, which he will deepen by defining eight criteria -which will be reduced to five in 1993- to be respected to enter into an ecodevelopment approach. His watchword is sustainability. Thus, he sets out criteria for “*socially inclusive and environmentally friendly development*” (I. Sachs, 1997, pp. 28-30):

1) Social sustainability, which is “*the implementation of a development process based on an alternative growth and fueled by an alternative vision of society*”. The aim is to build a civilization of 'being' based on a more equitable sharing in order to substantially improve access to wealth and reduce the gap in living standards between rich and poor.

2) Economic sustainability must be measured through macro-social criteria and not only through the prism of profitability. The aim is to make decisions taken at the micro level more consistent with these macro social criteria. Economic sustainability is therefore “*about more efficient allocation and management of resources and a steady flow of private and public investment. This requires overcoming the current external constraints: the burden of debt*”

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<sup>7</sup> See appendices 3 and 4.

<sup>8</sup> This declaration is available on the website: [http://www.juerg-buergi.ch/Archiv/EntwicklungspolitikA/EntwicklungspolitikA/assets/COCYOOC\\_%20DECLARATION\\_1974.pdf](http://www.juerg-buergi.ch/Archiv/EntwicklungspolitikA/EntwicklungspolitikA/assets/COCYOOC_%20DECLARATION_1974.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> According to I. Sachs, 2007, p.264.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 2.

*servicing and the net flow of financial resources from the South to the North, unfavorable terms of trade, protectionist barriers imposed by industrialized countries, and limited access to science and technology.”*

3) Ecological sustainability is strengthened through various measures such as increasing the “*carrying capacity of Spaceship Earth*”, limiting the “*consumption of fossil fuels and other easily depleted or environmentally damaging resources and products*”, and promoting “*self-limitation of material consumption by rich countries and privileged groups around the world*”.

4) Spatial sustainability: spatial planning is essential, with the aim of “*ensuring a better urban-rural balance and a better spatial distribution of human settlements and economic activities*”.

5) Sustainability and culture: the aim here is to “*promote change with cultural continuity, translating the normative concept of ecodevelopment into a plurality of local solutions, specific to each ecosystem, cultural context and site*”.

Ultimately, ecodevelopment is the harmonization of all these criteria. I. Sachs states that the establishment of a healthy environment that respects these five dimensions necessarily requires this harmonization<sup>12</sup>. In order to coordinate these criteria, I. Sachs proposes to work both on supply and demand, defined as the “*control levers of ecodevelopment*”, because “*the real issue is the environment as a dimension of development, closely intertwined with the choice of purposes, uses and methods of growth*” (I. Sachs, 1978, p. 17). Using the proposed figure<sup>13</sup>, I. Sachs presents three levels: level A, which corresponds to social demand, which he treats from a theory of generalized consumption of goods and services; level B, which represents the match between social demand and supply, as well as the choice of growth conditions; and level C, which describes the effects on the environment. These levels are linked by public policies, and all affect the environment to a greater or lesser extent. In addition, it is relevant to refer to the table drawn up by E. Berr (2013)<sup>14</sup> to briefly summarize the five major dimensions of I. Sachs’ concept of ecodevelopment.

Theorizing ecodevelopment is not the only objective of I. Sachs. His ultimate aspiration is to be able to apply the criteria set out to different countries in order to highlight the specific resources of each ecosystem, to improve the well-being of populations and to meet their basic needs<sup>15</sup>. Thus, he proposes several fields of application such as food, housing, energy, industrialization of renewable resources, or conservation of natural resources. His reasoning is based on use value and needs. Exchange value is less important in his model than it is in standard development theories. It was in 1972, during a UNDP mission to Peru, that I. Sachs first thought about a concrete ecodevelopment program for this region<sup>16</sup>. After the discovery of major oil deposits, the risk for this region would be to follow the same path as Argentina took a few years later, causing a major crisis, which is still relevant today. After examining the various resources available in the Peruvian Amazon, I. Sachs makes several recommendations that would allow this region to develop without imitating the Western model. He proposes, among other things, to create an ethnobotanical research program to gather as much information as possible from the indigenous people of the region and to identify interesting resources to be exploited, without going backwards by favoring old practices. He then advocates that a large part of the funds allocated by the UNDP<sup>17</sup>, about a million dollars, be directed towards this

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<sup>12</sup> I. Sachs (2011, p. 2). See also I. Sachs, 1974, p.55.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 4. Table presented in his *article L'écodéveloppement comme Fondement d'une Économie Politique du Développement Soutenable, Revue Francophone du Développement Durable*, E. Berr, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> See in particular I. Sachs, 1974, p.558.

<sup>16</sup> The recommendations developed in this paragraph are taken from the article *Ecodevelopment: A Planning Approach*, I. Sachs, 1978, pp. 20-22.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Lipchitz and C. Delmon in “*Le PNUD, un "Machin" Onusien Utile ?*”, *Revue internationale et Stratégique*, 2010/3, p. 64-74.

research<sup>18</sup>. Through discussions with Peruvian colleagues and local authorities, I. Sachs was able to develop working hypotheses that would make it possible to make a radical break with the traditional vision of livestock breeding, development and agriculture in the region. He saw the potential of the area for aquaculture, fish farming and agroforestry. The numerous river arms are a space to be exploited, and sources of numerous natural riches.

### **b) Breaking with the standard economy**

The implementation of an ecodevelopment strategy cannot be efficient in a neoliberal society. Thus, adopting a holistic and multidisciplinary methodology, I. Sachs insists on the need to switch to a mixed<sup>19</sup> and planned economy, with planning being the major support of his concept: “*I consider it absurd to believe that planning is dead because of what happened to it in the former Soviet empire [...] I sign and I persist: planning is indispensable for the effective initiation of development*” (I. Sachs, 2008, p. 34).

I. Sachs emphasizes the importance of planning<sup>20</sup>. To set up such a project, it is essential to move towards a planned economy, i.e. “*characterized by coordinated decisions, with the central authority setting a more or less detailed program for each production unit, which it is responsible for carrying out*”<sup>21</sup>. Planning is therefore imperative and general. Referring to A. Rapoport, he explains that Man is “*the only living species capable of imagining and anticipating the alternatives of the future, and, consequently, of planning*”, (I. Sachs, 2012, p. 4). Planning is therefore one of the major pivots of ecodevelopment. In practice, planning, in the sense of I. Sachs, must enable economic, social and ecological ambitions to be harmonized. This is why it is necessary to review the development objectives by adapting them to each area, as well as the equity in the distribution of wealth. With this in mind, a special session organized by the UN opened in 1975. It led to the publication of the *What Now?* report<sup>22</sup>, which supports the implementation of a different kind of development in order to maintain a sustainable international order. I. Sachs was largely inspired by this report and explains: “*From there, it was only a step to postulate, as the Hammarskjöld Foundation's Que Faire? report does, an endogenous and self-reliant development, subject to the logic of the needs of the entire population and not of production as an end in itself, finally aware of its ecological dimension and seeking harmony between man and nature*” (I. Sachs, 1980, pp. 11).

It is not a question of imagining a utopian development, but rather, for the planner, of succeeding in implementing a project that allows a better balance between development and environment. I. Sachs believes that we must learn to build a project that will be oriented towards the future of a society, while considering its history and culture<sup>23</sup>. This is why planning must look to the long term.

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<sup>18</sup>The UNDP refused this proposal “*on the grounds that it was impossible to control the use of funds distributed to a relatively large number of small research and documentation units*” (I. Sachs, 1978, p. 20).

<sup>19</sup>A mixed economy blends both socialist and capitalist elements. Enterprises are either privately or publicly owned, and a central authority maintains control over various matters. Market economy and centrally planned economy are combined. The market allocates resources and the state regulates them. The aim is to include more social considerations than in a pure market economy.

<sup>20</sup>See I. Sachs, 2001, p.2.

<sup>21</sup>As defined by *Alternatives Économiques*.

<sup>22</sup>The *What now?* report is available at <http://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/What-Now-1975.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> See I. Sachs, 1978, pp. 651-652.

I. Sachs defines himself as a heterodox economist<sup>24</sup>. It is therefore logical that he adopts a working method that differs from the one used by neoclassical economists<sup>25</sup>. I. Sachs is based on a holistic system of thought, i.e. he studies the characteristics of a whole in its totality, thus justifying his attachment to multi-disciplinarity and multi-scale approaches. He builds his ecodevelopment project through an extended hypothetico-deductive method. It is reasonable to consider the work of this author as belonging to political economy, which gives an important place to the institutionalist and qualitative dimension. I. Sachs relies on contextualizing his research. Through his field surveys, debates and reflections, he gives his concept of ecodevelopment a reference framework that allows realistic planning projects to be carried out (Figuière and Metereau, 2021). Finally, I. Sachs adopts a comprehensive and normative approach. He seeks to integrate himself into the environment he is studying, to establish rules according to what he observes in order to be able to guide the behavior of populations or the use of useful resources, to enable development that is inclusive and respectful of the environment. From then on, I. Sachs uses a systemic approach in his research, insisting on the importance of having a holistic vision of what is being studied. This is how he explains his desire to know the real economy<sup>26</sup> of each case, a term to be compared with the substantive economy - as opposed to the formal economy - defined by K. Polanyi<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, I. Sachs applies a heuristic and operational approach in his research<sup>28</sup>. His model is not rigid as a neoclassical economist might be. He explores many development options that might be appropriate for a space. I. Sachs draws much inspiration from his contemporaries and predecessors, and particularly emphasizes the influence of Gandhi on his projects<sup>29</sup>. For him, Gandhi is one of the forerunners of development theory, with his empathetic thinking for the most miserable, and his reflections on rural development in India<sup>30</sup>. I. Sachs seeks to break away from a European-centric conception, and therefore naturally turns to Indian, Japanese, or Russian authors such as L. Tolstoy<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, I. Sachs began by developing a concept that combined the environment and inclusive development. This concept will become a project based on a precise and complete scientific analysis. Very different from standard development methods, ecodevelopment is an alternative for countries in the South, but also for countries that are already developed and are experiencing difficulties such as inequalities. Because of these differences, I. Sachs adopts a methodology opposed to that of the neoclassicals, insisting on the importance of a systemic and holistic approach that allows projects to be adapted to each space. This has obviously epistemological consequences: I. Sachs questioned the primacy of economics and advocated multidisciplinary, which eventually led to the withdrawal of this concept, which was far too atypical in the eyes of the international community.

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<sup>24</sup> He defines himself as an eco-socio-economist (see C. Figuière and R. Metereau, 2021, p.168).

<sup>25</sup> The neoclassical school is essentially based on the notions of marginal utility and market equilibrium, the individual being considered as a true homo oeconomicus. The method, mainly microeconomic, is based on methodological individualism. Neoclassical economists are known for being liberal and advocating a self-regulating market.

<sup>26</sup> See in particular the article Inclusive Development and Decent Work for All, I. SACHS, 2007, p.9.

<sup>27</sup> K. POLANYI, *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, 1957.

<sup>28</sup> See I. SACHS, 1980.

<sup>29</sup> See for example *La Troisième Rive*, I. Sachs, chapter 4, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> From the interview given for the Audiovisual Research Archive by I. Sachs, Chapter 1, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> See the interview given by I. Sachs for the Audiovisual Research Archives, Chapter 1, 2008.

## **2: A project quickly evicted in favor of sustainable development**

If the 1970s marked the peak of ecodevelopment, it also marked the beginning of its rejection. The announcement of a globalization on a large scale, in which the environmental and development characteristics specific to each country are erased, aims at the adoption of a way of life and of production of big scale, based on the practices of the countries of the North. Thus, ecodevelopment is facing many rejections<sup>32</sup>, so much so that this project is almost forgotten in favor of sustainable development. I. Sachs does not fail to reveal his doubts about this notion: « *The expression that is currently favoured by the authorities - "développement durable" - is a clumsy translation of "sustainable development", a term that is not devoid of ambiguity, which no doubt ensures its success. Should it be interpreted as a purely ecological category or, on the contrary, should it be expanded to include social, cultural and economic components?* »<sup>33</sup>, (I. Sachs, *L'Écodéveloppement de l'Amazonie*, 1990, pp. 12). Thus, by proposing another method of development, which opposes the liberal precepts followed by international institutions, including the UN, I. Sachs sees his concept being set aside, because it is too inconvenient. However, the failures of sustainable development to respond to environmental issues, more and more pressing, could put this atypical project back on the agenda.

### **a) A challenge to the UN's assumptions**

Ecodevelopment is part of a heterodox framework and, by definition, does not follow the rules of the standard neoclassical economy. Thus, I. Sachs proposes a project which would come to upset the world order, in particular by reconsidering the role of the market and the relations of force, which strongly displeases the industrialized countries. I. Sachs perceives development as a real process and not only as an end result to be achieved<sup>34</sup>. In order to make this development possible, he poses as a fervent opponent of neo-liberal precepts, particularly the deregulation of markets. Let us remember that development is always socially inspired, and therefore the invisible hand of the market alone cannot allow a country to develop equitably. The liberalization of the market since the 1980s has many social consequences<sup>35</sup>, and is therefore not compatible with growth and equality, according to I. Sachs<sup>36</sup>. Because of the dualization implied by this liberalization, a growth of exclusion appears, especially on the labor market in the countries of the South. Moreover, I. Sachs criticizes any personal appropriation of profits<sup>37</sup>. In a pure market economy, companies are free to internalize profits and externalize social costs, which leads to growth through inequality. However, he does not argue for a system in which the market is absent. He explains that developing countries should focus on their domestic market and make it grow<sup>38</sup>, rather than trying to follow the path taken by developed countries. South countries must successfully resist the immediate gains that the market might offer, and focus on long-term development that produces real social progress. This is why applying cost-

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<sup>32</sup> See E. Berr, 2013, p.12.

<sup>33</sup> Originally written in French : « *l'expression qui a actuellement les faveurs officielles – "développement durable" – constitue une traduction maladroite de "sustainable development", terme non dépourvu d'ambiguïté, ce qui assure sans doute sa fortune. Faut-il l'interpréter comme une catégorie purement écologique ou, au contraire, l'élargir pour y inclure les composantes sociales, culturelles et économiques ?* »

<sup>34</sup> See for example *Le Développement Reconsidéré*, I. Sachs, 1994, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> See in particular *Critique de la Mondialisation*, P. de Senarclens, 2003, chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> See I. Sachs, 1975, p. 649.

<sup>37</sup> Just after the 2008 subprime crisis, he returns to this recurring problem of capitalist economies, I. Sachs, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> See in particular *L'Écodéveloppement, Stratégies pour le XXIème Siècle*, I. Sachs, 1997, p.53.



benefit analysis<sup>39</sup> seems to be of little relevance. Ecodevelopment proposes to develop the off-market, and to massively reduce the hold of capitalism on the economic and social spheres. To give again a political and social dimension to the economy is one of the objectives of the eco-development. I. Sachs firmly fights the myth of a self-regulating market, supported by the neoliberal counter-reform of the 1980s, which puts forward the benefits of a globalization only regulated by the market. I. Sachs therefore refuses the predominance of economic calculation, and prefers to reason directly about use value, without referring to the market in terms of regulation. This would be ensured by the State and the decentralized planning of development investments, as well as a massive participation of civil society in the choices to be made. From this point of view, it is clear that eco-development is at the antipodes of a massive liberalization of commercial exchanges in which the market is considered as central.

Moreover, as early as 1974, divergences appeared between the countries of the South and, mainly, the United States, revealing a certain ambition to regain power on the part of the latter. Through his research, I. Sachs demonstrates that one of the problems of development is the model on which the countries of the North are based. With the advent of globalization, the asymmetry between the two poles is reinforced, putting in parallel some winners - the developed countries - and many losers - the developing countries. This is why I. Sachs wants to question this model. Without this, the countries of the South will never be able to make themselves heard on the international scene. Again, I. Sachs proposes to focus on a self-limitation of consumption in the North, as presented by the Indian thinker R. Kothari in 1990: « *Our common future cannot be based on abundance, which is ecological suicide and a factor of social and economic exclusion. It can and must be based on a restriction of needs, as Gandhi constantly reminded his compatriots and others.*<sup>40</sup> ». I. Sachs insists largely on the fact that no country in a situation of underdevelopment or maldevelopment will be able to escape from this situation without questioning the overdevelopment of the countries of the North. The subordination and dependence of peripheral countries on developed economies is harmful to the environment and to international relations. The consumption model at work in the countries of the North is a source of global tensions because of the unequal distribution of wealth that it generates. In parallel to these international cooperation, the concept of eco-development exposes the importance of the civil society in the decision-making process, which would lead to a rebalancing of the national and international balance of power. The democratic planning, essential to eco-development, must allow the four actors of a society to participate, namely the planner, the entrepreneurs, the workers and the organized civil society. The latter is a cornerstone of eco-development and must be integrated in the discussion processes. Through the establishment of participatory democracy at all levels, civil society can intervene in the proposed development strategies.

Thus, at the beginning of the 1980s, I. Sachs began to have more and more difficulty in making the benefits of his concept heard. UNEP even ended up putting an end to the financial support it had been giving to I. Sachs' research on the various projects to be carried out in the countries of the South. Ecodevelopment, by proposing to redistribute the powers more equitably, both between countries and between actors, provokes many contestations, notably from the Northern countries members of the UN. Thus, its project is gradually giving way to another vision of development in harmony with nature, more in line with the dominant neoclassical model of the 1980s.

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<sup>39</sup> See A. Diemer, 2015, p. 63. Cost-benefit analysis proposes assigning a monetary value to the components in question in order to calculate the net value of a policy.

<sup>40</sup> Originally written in French : « *Notre avenir commun ne peut reposer sur l'abondance, qui est un vrai suicide écologique et un facteur d'exclusion sociale et économique. Il peut et doit reposer sur une restriction des besoins, comme Gandhi le rappelait constamment à ses compatriotes et aux autres* ».

## **b) What is the future for ecodevelopment?**

The birth of sustainable development has led to the almost definitive ousting of ecodevelopment. More in accordance with the neoliberal rules, the sustainable development imposes itself in the world policies, without bringing viable solutions to the development and climatic stakes.

The Brundtland Report, commissioned in preparation for the United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, puts forward a new way of developing and thinking about development, which seems quite revolutionary. Defined as "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (WCED, 1987, pp. 51), sustainable development makes the link between development and the environment; the countries of the North and the South; and present and future generations. The report outlines an economic development that respects both human well-being and the environment and the sustainability of various natural resources. Generally speaking, sustainable development is based on three pillars: economic, social and environmental. Harmonizing these three dimensions is a key issue, the objective being to create a better distribution of resources between different countries, which allows for intragenerational equity. Moreover, this notion also drives intergenerational equity since individuals are linked both by the quality of the environment and the quantity of available natural resources that are left from one generation to another. This report is an advocate of environmentally compatible growth. Largely supported by the orthodox economists of the time, sustainable development is mostly based on the idea that environmental protection is primarily based on growth. Thus, at the end of the 1980s, sustainable development became a consensus and continues today to be an authority on environmental policies. However, in the end, it turned out to be a formula for « *protection de l'environnement modérée au regard des impératifs de croissance* ». I. Sachs explains that sustainable development induces a return to universalist solutions that are in line with the neoclassical doctrine. By being less precise and less radical than the ecodevelopment project, sustainable development becomes the roadmap of international institutions, in particular the UNEP, which is then mainly devoted to decontamination. The objective is not finally to harmonize human practices with their environment, but rather to internalize the negative externalities released by these practices. In this context, it is necessary to evaluate the social cost of these impacts. Sustainable development recommends a monetary evaluation of the costs generated, and therefore follows neoclassical precepts. This does not change the balance of power between countries, and prevents - or at least slows down - the emancipation of Third World countries. The market becomes a central figure in sustainable development. Establishing this development is then to reconcile the growth of markets and production with natural limits and human rights. The virtues of regulation by the market are widely recognized since sustainable development is a notion that supports the sustainability of capitalism. Sustainable development, as demonstrated by G. Rist, does not take into account other ways of life than that of the developed capitalist societies of the North. The vague definition of sustainable development, as well as the lack of distinction between development and growth, demonstrate the absence of a precise theoretical anchoring of this notion. It proposes solutions to global problems, and not local ones like the ecodevelopment project.

Thus, at first glance, sustainable development seems to be an interesting concept and in adequacy with the development and the respect of the environment. But, if this concept has so quickly ousted ecodevelopment and has become unavoidable, it is because it does not upset the neoliberal paradigm. From then on, the decade 1980 marks a turning point in the research of I. Sachs. His project was discarded, then forgotten, in favor of a sustainable development that proposed universalist and market-centered solutions. However, it is legitimate to wonder

whether this conceptual shift was effective, given the worsening of environmental conditions since then, and the development difficulties still present in many countries of the South.

Therefore, is I. Sachs' project not ultimately a failure? The development project proposed by I. Sachs seems too different from the economic, social and political models in place at the end of the 20th century. Although many changes took place between 1970 and 1997, capitalism became established in practice, and the heterodox concept of I. Sachs could not fit in. Globalization, based on free trade encouraged by the GATT, leads to strong competition between countries which pushes for the privatization of public services such as health and education. This intensification of competition goes against the principles of ecodevelopment. The global dynamic is therefore not beneficial to all countries, and this is why I. Sachs proposes an alternative based on "*economic collaboration between states and the freedom to organize national life as one pleases*" (K. Polanyi, 1944, p. 326). This implies a modification of the relations between the countries of the world, which, as mentioned above, is not to the liking of the most developed countries. This is how I. Sachs criticizes, for example, the way Europe has been built since the 1970s. Moreover, adopting the concept of ecodevelopment means to accept to change one's way of life and consumption. Again, this objective raises a problem, and participates in the setting aside of the project. Without a voluntary limitation of the consumption of energies, in particular on behalf of the countries of the North, a more equitable redistribution of the world's wealth could not occur. This is why I. Sachs insists on the specificities of the space considered primordial, hence the importance for him to combine both green and blue revolution. He refers here to aquaculture practices, i.e. the cultivation of aquatic plants and the breeding of animal species in freshwater, lagoons or seas. The blue revolution must support the green revolution to allow an efficient development focused on the potential of each ecoregion studied.

Although he recognizes the progress made since the 1970s, I. Sachs remains globally disappointed with the progress made, and especially with the results of the 1992 Conference, which fell short of what he had hoped for. The objective was to come up with an action program combining the environment and development and allowing for better international cooperation. But the tone was set at the beginning of the conference by the speech of American President G. BUSH, who declared that "*the American way of life is not negotiable*". The United States, whose international weight is indisputable, is recalcitrant to any change of model. This creates a first problem since international cooperation is openly questioned. Thus, at the end of the 20th century, progress is there, but too little of it, so that advances are struggling to be established. This is why it is legitimate to think that ecodevelopment can still be useful and that the research of I. Sachs has not been in vain. Throughout his works, I. Sachs advocates a strong version of sustainability - an anachronism here because this notion will only be evoked later by H. Daly (1992). By making a constant link between thresholds of irreversibility of resource use and the immoral character of a systematic recourse to monetary calculation, I. Sachs is indeed a herald of strong sustainability, which has become central in environmental theories. Other principles of ecodevelopment can also be considered as precursors. This is the case of inclusive development, which could be the beginnings of an inclusive globalization. Ecodevelopment, although relegated to the background following the advent of sustainable development, still seems to have potential, and especially seems to be able to provide answers where sustainable development has proved ineffective or unsuitable. I. Sachs also notes some progress in countries that have decided to adopt ecodevelopment projects. However, these devices occur late compared to the conceptualization of the ecodevelopment, but they nevertheless a reason for hope for I. Sachs. With time, other projects could see the day, giving a new impulse to ecodevelopment.

## Conclusion

*"I will soon be 80 years old, but I do not intend to tie up my boat. Like the hero of a tale by João Guimarães Rosa, I will continue to sail to the discovery of the third side of the harmonious social landscape, where the polarities and exclusions, the hatreds and the violence observed on the two sides (the capitalist and the real-socialist) will have disappeared of the long and not so quiet river of my life)"*<sup>41</sup>, (I. Sachs, 2008, p. 400).

The last sentences of I. Sachs' memoirs illustrate the perseverance he showed throughout his life. Fighting from the beginning for a more inclusive and environmentally friendly development, his ideas had difficulty to be imposed in the international community. In spite of that, I. Sachs endeavored to enrich the ecodevelopment, bringing in the course of his research various modifications as for the substance of the concept, but also for its application to the environment. First established from the mal-development, for the countries of the Third World, the ecodevelopment relied on three main principles: the ecological prudence, the self-reliance, and the equitable assumption of responsibility for the needs of all. Then, other assumptions were added, such as economic sustainability - aiming at terms of trade favorable to all countries- and spatial sustainability - allowing a better distribution of activities on a territory. In the face of growing environmental difficulties, ecodevelopment no longer concerns only the countries of the South, but can be adopted by all economies.

In his project, I. Sachs proposes to move progressively towards a mixed economy society, in which the State would play the role of a planner. He proposes trajectories of development adapted to the natural resources of the territory, and conceived in partnership with the whole of civil society. Limiting our consumption practices, aspiring to more frugal lifestyles, rediscovering the systemic link that unites to the environment, these are the objectives of I. Sachs. But, to concretize these aspirations, the development model of the industrialized countries of the North cannot continue to spread all around the globe, and must be transformed. However, going against this model means calling into question the neoliberal postulates, widely accepted by the majority of Northern countries and international institutions.

Nevertheless, unable to ignore the ecological emergency, they supported the implementation of sustainable development, apparently close to ecodevelopment. But it was, in reality, a liberal concept and largely inspired by the Washington Consensus. From then on, ecodevelopment, a heterodox project with a socialist aim, has been abandoned in favor of sustainable development, a consensual principle but with numerous ecological and social weaknesses.

All in all, since the 1970s, the ecodevelopment project has shined, been dismissed, and could regain a certain enthusiasm in the years to come, in the face of the failures of sustainable development. Combined with strong political and social wills, ecodevelopment proposes a reorganization of the ways of life, of production and of sharing of the wealth in the world, with the aim of reaching a level of development socially, environmentally, and economically just and fair.

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<sup>41</sup> Originally written in French : « *J'aurai bientôt 80 ans, mais je n'ai pas l'intention d'arrimer mon canot. Comme le héros d'un conte de João Guimarães Rosa, je continuerai à voguer à la découverte de la troisième rive aux paysages sociaux harmonieux, d'où auront disparu les polarités et les exclusions, les haines et les violences observées sur les deux rives (la capitaliste et la réelsocialiste) du long et pas tellement tranquille fleuve de ma vie.* », I. Sachs, 2008.

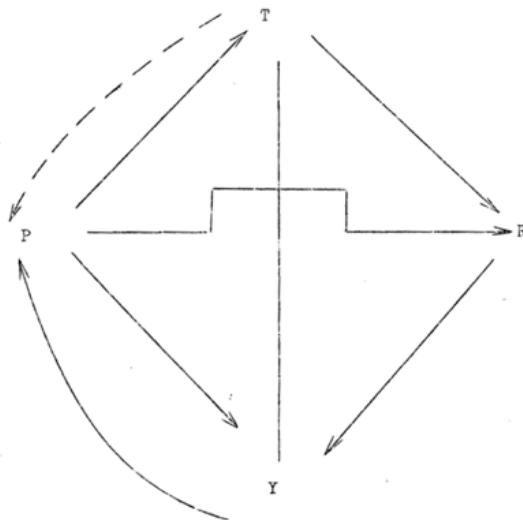
## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Traditional development model

Graph presented in *Population, Technology, Natural Resources and the Environment*, I. Sachs, 1973, p. 6. Specifically, he explains:

« Essayons maintenant de mettre en rapport l'environnement (M) avec la population (P), les techniques (T), les ressources naturelles (R) et le produit (Y). Le champ de vision traditionnel de l'économiste du développement est représenté dans la figure 1. A l'aide des techniques disponibles, la population transforme les ressources en produit approprié à des fins de consommation et de reproduction sociale. La dialectique qui s'instaure entre la pression démographique et les ressources a fait objet d'une très vaste littérature portant sur le changement technique et social. » (*Environnement et Style de Développement*, *Annales* n°29, 1974, p. 556).

DIAGRM . 1



## Appendix 2: Development model that integrates the environment and the return effects

Graph presented in *Population, Technology, Natural Resources and the Environment*, I. Sachs, 1973, p. 7. He explains the reading of this new diagram in *Environnement et Style de Développement*, Annales n°29, 1974 :

« Introduisons maintenant l'environnement M. La figure 2 indique les nouveaux rapports pertinents :

$R \rightarrow M$  et  $T \rightarrow M$ , effets sur l'environnement des modes d'utilisation des ressources et des techniques de production employées ;

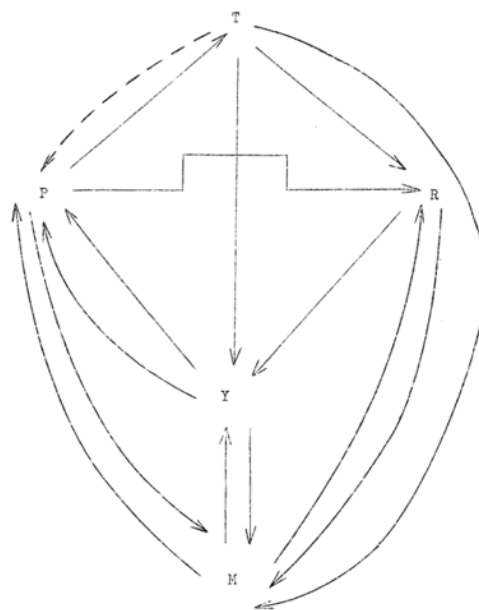
$Y \rightarrow M$ , impact sur l'environnement des modes de consommation du produit,  $P \rightarrow M$ , impact sur l'environnement des établissements humains ;

$M \rightarrow R$ , dégradation des ressources naturelles du fait des nuisances ;

$M \rightarrow Y$ , conditionnement de la production par la qualité du milieu ;

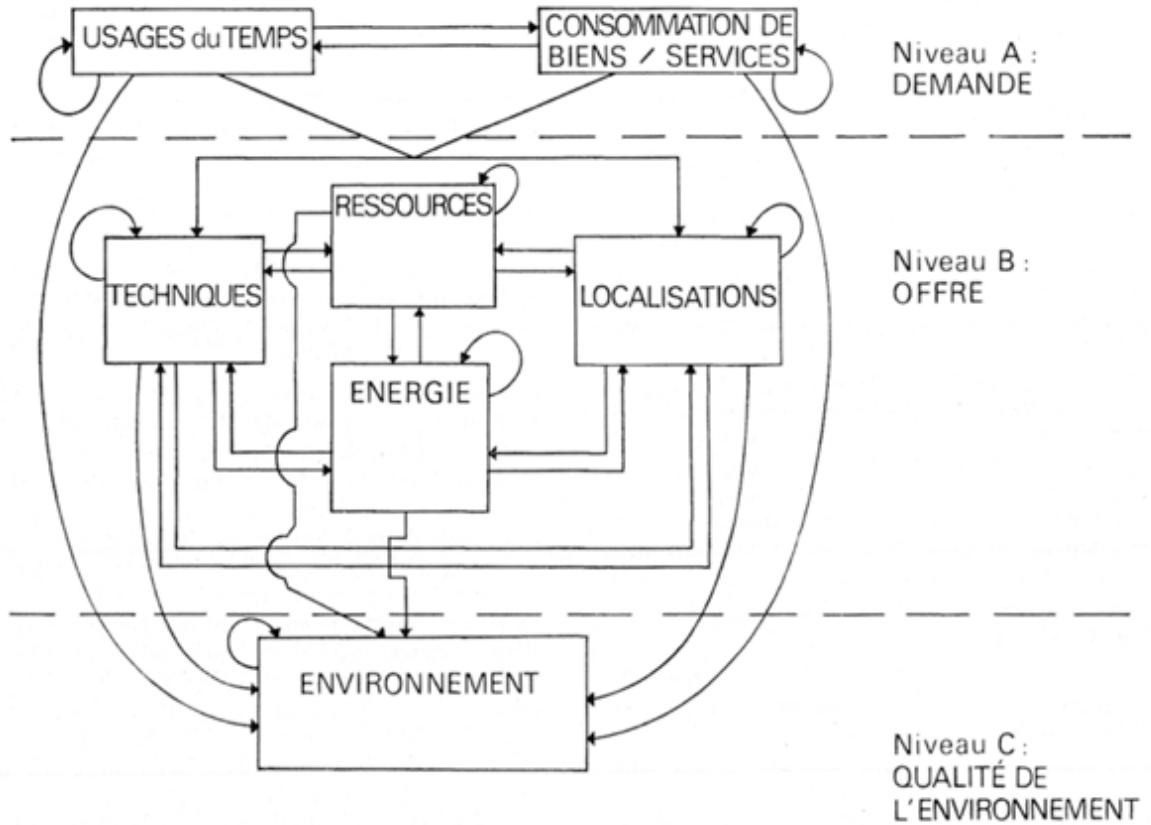
$M \rightarrow P$ , environnement en tant que composante de la qualité de la vie. » (p. 556-557).

DIAGRAM 2



**Appendix 3: Analysis of the relevant places of action, indicating their interdependencies**

Diagram presented in *Écodéveloppement : une Approche de Planification*, I. Sachs, *Économie Rurale* n°124, 1978.



#### **Appendix 4: The five dimensions of ecodevelopment**

In his article *L'Écodéveloppement comme Fondement d'une Économie Politique du Développement Durable*, Revue Francophone du Développement Durable, n°2, 2013, p. 16-17, E. Berr makes a synthesis of the five dimensions of the ecodevelopment project established by I. Sachs.

**Tableau 1 : Les cinq critères de l'écodéveloppement**

Sociaux	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Un niveau acceptable d'homogénéité sociale</li><li>- La distribution équitable des revenus</li><li>- Le plein emploi ou une sécurité d'emploi assurant un niveau de vie acceptable</li><li>- L'accès équitable aux ressources et aux services sociaux</li></ul>
Économiques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Le développement équilibré des différents secteurs de l'économie</li><li>- La sécurité alimentaire</li><li>- La capacité de moderniser sans cesse l'appareil de production</li><li>- Un degré d'autonomie suffisant en matière de recherches scientifiques et technologiques</li><li>- L'intégration au marché international dans le respect des souverainetés nationales</li></ul>
Écologiques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- La protection des capacités de renouvellement des actifs naturels</li><li>- Le contrôle des limites d'utilisation des ressources non renouvelables</li></ul>
Culturels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Le changement dans la continuité (équilibre entre le respect des traditions et l'innovation)</li><li>- La possibilité de concevoir un programme national de façon indépendante : l'autonomie personnelle, l'endogénéité (plutôt que la confiance aveugle dans des modèles étrangers), la confiance en soi alliée à une ouverture sur le monde</li></ul>
Territoriaux	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- L'instauration d'un équilibre entre les aménagements ruraux et urbains (renverser les tendances favorisant l'allocation des fonds publics aux zones urbaines)</li><li>- L'amélioration des paysages urbains</li><li>- La lutte contre les disparités régionales</li><li>- L'application de stratégies de développement respectueuses de l'environnement pour les zones écologiques fragiles</li></ul>

Source : d'après Sachs (1997, 84-85).



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