Slide 1

Systematic Planning for
Social Sustainability

A PhD project
Merlina Missimer

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Slide 2

SUSTAINABILITY
=
DESIGNING
UNSUSTAINABILITY OUT OF
THE SYSTEM AND KEEPING
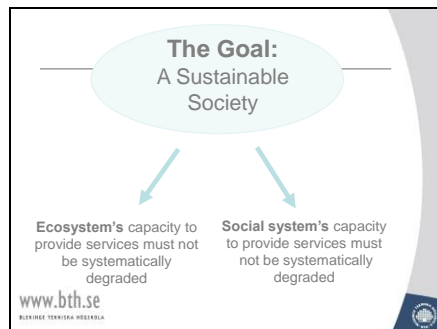IT OUT OF THE SYSTEM

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It is important to mention that sustainability is not about creating the perfect society, but about sustaining the capacity of our human society to exist and thrive.

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The Goal:
A Sustainable
Society

Ecosystem's capacity to
provide services must not
be systematically
degraded

Social system's capacity
to provide services must
not be systematically
degraded

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A sustainable society is dependent on the sustaining of two systems. The ecosystem and the social system. With social sustainability we are focusing on the sustaining of the social system
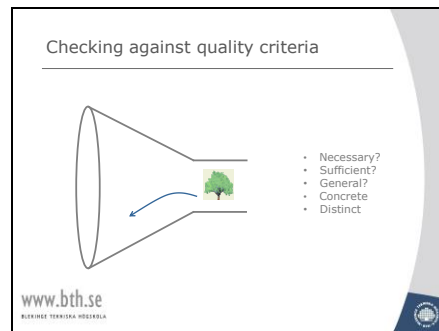
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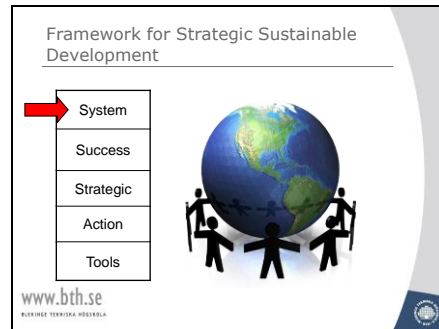
Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development, FSSD, is designed to make it possible to put any topic or organization or sector or other planning endeavours in context of social and ecological sustainability for the whole global civilization, and to apply logical guidelines for how to move strategically – stepwise while ensuring sufficient incomes to sustain the transition – towards a situation when the planning endeavour is no longer part of civilization's un-sustainability problem. The framework is composed of five levels.

1. Systems level, the first level, is an organization or region or sector in civilization in the biosphere. It is explored enough to make it possible to derive a definition of...

2. Success for organization, i.e. its vision informed by basic sustainability principles. Once the goal is clearly defined, it is possible to be

3. Strategic, i.e. apply strategic guidelines for how to move towards the goal stepwise and while ensuring a sufficient influx of economic and other resources to sustain the transition.

4. The Action level denotes any concrete action and action program, and

5. The Tools level contains concepts, methods and tools to foster (4) actions to really follow the (3) strategic guidelines to arrive at compliance with the (2) sustainable goal of the (1) organization in the system.

This framework has previously been successfully used for the ecological system, and this study attempts to repeat the applied logics for the social system. The key element here is the second level – how to develop a robust principled definition of social sustainability. Is this possible? We believe so, in any event we believe there is a lot to learn from trying.

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This slide outlines a criteria-list for basic success principles, one that was used when we did this analysis for ecosystems. To be operative for S.D., the basic principles need to be Necessary (so that we don't include more than needed which should be left for later when values etc. are discussed), Sufficient (so that there are not gaps in the thinking), General (so that we can understand the principles together and work together across disciplines and sectors), Concrete (so that they really guide the analyses, envisioning and planning) and Distinct (so that they don't overlap i.e. each principle covering its unique part of success).

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When we look at the parts that the social system is made up of, there are, of course, individual human beings.
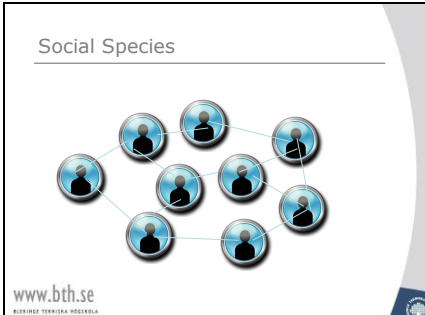
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Human beings have innate fundamental needs, which they aim to satisfy. The Chilean Economist Manfred Max-Neef provides one categorization of human needs.

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However, human beings are a social species, and we form groups and communities to meet individual and collective needs. We set out to study the social system as such, i.e. its makeup to ensure that the chances of meeting individual human needs are optimized and the risk of abuse of individuals is put at a minimum. A metaphor from the world of ants would be to describe our focus on the stack, and its basic constitutional elements to optimize the conditions for the individual ants, rather than the individual ants per se. From the literature, we have seen two key-elements surface as perhaps being key for effective relationships and support between individuals in a social system – trust (between individuals, and between individuals and their public institutions), and diversity, i.e. ways of ensuring resilience.

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Trust

- *Economics:* trust is considered a lubricant because it lowers the transaction costs between entities
- *Sociology:* trust has become one of the main important factors when discussing interactions between individuals within a group or even an individual and society
- *Politics:* High social trust is also associated with democratic stability, low levels of corruption, and relative economic equality.
- Rothstein: A *lack* of social trust can lead to serious social problems - *the social trap*.

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In the literature on larger systems, trust is often discussed as the essential element of a strong social fabric. Bo Rothstein explains what happens when there is a social trap: mistrust generates further mistrust, and once a certain amount of people are or have become mistrustful, the situation spirals into a vicious cycle within society. Beyond a certain level, it gets increasingly difficult to revert the process, a sort of entrapment. If others are corrupted and earning money from their corruption, and if there is a long "collective memory" of the lack of impartiality and unjust, selfish behaviors from most other individuals and groups , there is no reason to believe that one individual's ethical behavior will pay off at any larger scale beyond smaller groups of friends and family. Two social "diseases" are typically the result from this, segregation and corruption.

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Trust → Trustworthiness

- "You cannot make others trust you. This, however, does not imply that [….] trust is an unmanageable problem. It shows that we had better approach the issue from the question of why a consumer would trust someone else. If we do so, we notice that trust raises the question whether the other person is worth being trusted." (Meijboom 2006, p. 432).

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Again, it is hard to create trust (especially on a larger scale). In the long run, trust between the individuals of a society is obviously related to the *trustworthiness* of the individuals of a society.

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Trustworthiness

- **Ability/Competence**
  Ability is that group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain.......Thus, trust is domain specific (Zand, 1972)
- **Motivation (Benevolence)**
  Benevolence is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor. aside from an egocentric profit motive. Benevolence suggests that the trustee has some specific attachment to the trustor.
- **Integrity**
  The other party's lack of consistency in adhering to espoused values or the unacceptability of their values would lead to a perception of low integrity MAYER AND NORMAN 2004

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Research on trust and trustworthiness shows that trustworthiness is composed of three things – ability/competence, a motivation of benevolence and integrity.

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Groups – FIRO Theory

- William Schutz Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation 1958
- Three dimensions of interpersonal relations are necessary and sufficient to explain most human interaction at this human-to-human level to create *trust*. Each dimension of the FIRO Theory has a corresponding feeling.
- Reciprocal feeling of

  Being Liked: opposed to feeling unappreciated.
  Being Significant: opposed to feeling unimportant, meaningless, and of no value.
  Being Competent: opposed to feeling inept and unable to cope.

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The FSSD seeks to identify practically applicable guidelines for planning towards sustainability. To that end, we have found a concept for interpersonal relationships that have been widely used in smaller groups, e.g. in the navy and in squad teams where performance is highly relying on inter-individual trust, and where people know each other, the FIRO theory. Would it be possible to learn anything from this model, and see if it could be extended to mean something for the larger social system and how would the result look like in light of the other considerations made here? The components outlined in this bullet list, are shown to be essential for individuals in small groups to be operative together.

If we look at the FIRO elements, it is possible that they are necessary, concrete, and distinct enough for smaller groups to ensure trust between its members. But are they enough and general enough for the larger social system?

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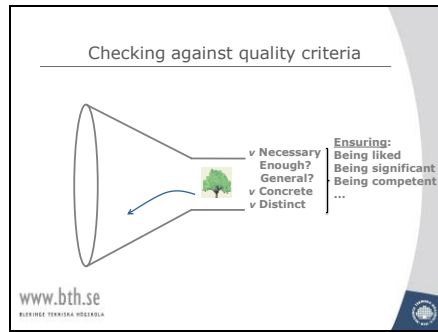
This slide outlines a criteria-list for basic success principles, one that was used when we did this analysis for ecosystems. To be operative as boundary conditions for planning, basic principles of goals need to be Necessary (so that we don't include more than needed which should be left for later when values etc. are discussed), Enough (so that there are not gaps in the thinking), General (so that we can understand the principles together and work together across disciplines and sectors), Concrete (so that they really guide the analyses, envisioning and planning) and Distinct (so that they don't overlap and cause confusion). If we look at the Firo elements, it is possible that they are necessary, concrete, and distinct enough for smaller groups to ensure trust between its members. But are they general so as to be applicable also for the larger social system, and are they enough for the larger social system?

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Building further on the FIRO theory for smaller groups, we here attempt a hypothesis, to be tested, for how a social system could be said to be socially sustainable.

Human rights – would replace "being liked". You cannot like people you have never met, i.e. most people in the social system at large. But you can understand that other people are *likable* and deserve respect as regards their personal integrity. Which points at ensuring the safeguarding of, "self" and "privacy" of each individual affected by an organization. It implies that the individual is not abused, covering questions about working

conditions, enough wages, time for leisure and family so far as all stakeholders are concerned. These aspects are to be compared with the UN declaration of human rights.

Influence – would replace "being significant" on the same ground as above, i.e. you cannot say that people you have never met are significant. But when you design any social system, e.g. an organization, you can make certain that individuals will find it easy to express their points of view and safeguarding that every individual has the right to express his or her opinion, a freedom of thought and speech. This includes ensuring, that each individual affected by the organization is clear about structure of rights and responsibilities and is listened to. What are the structures to prove this, from "suggestion box" at the office to "the structure and reliability of general elections".

Competence – is about utilizing diversity and empowering people to develop and contribute to satisfying people´s needs in organizations. It includes the securing of sufficient resources for education and other sources for continuous personal and professional development. It need not be changed from the smaller group; it is only the scale that differs when education systems move from education programs and schools in the smaller group to society at large.

Purposefulness/"Raison Détre". Any socially sustainable organization needs to transmit a clear sense of "Reason for being". It includes safeguarding honesty about motifs and actions and transparency in letting stakeholders know what the organization is up to, so as to transmit a general sense of purpose or meaning. There are many examples of how a dignified intent,

purpose, can keep people together in tight social relations also under long times of serious stress.

Impartiality – is about acknowledging that all people have the same rights and are of equal worth. It includes the individual's value system, the organization's core values and extends to society at large through traditions, norms, law. Taking this principle seriously is not only a way of sustaining trust in the system, but indirectly also implies that communities would sustain diversity and thereby be more resilient.

Effective Societal Institutions – We need *effective* governance in line with those principles at all levels. If one or another organization succumbs due to failure to comply with any of them it does not inherently mean that society at large is socially unsustainable. At one organizational level however, where public power is exerted at non-party-political levels – schools, hospitals, police, multilateral institutions – effective governance in line with all principles is mandatory to sustain social sustainability.

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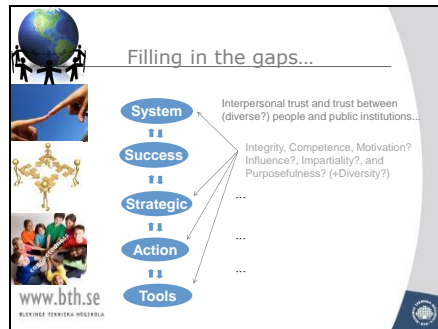
We are currently in a process of reading literature, and consulting with social scientists, to test the attempted definition of social sustainability. Do these principles hold to scrutiny with regard to the outlined quality criteria necessary, sufficient, general, concrete, and distinct? Another, parallel, study is to look at the essential terms from this research field, and see where they belong in the framework.

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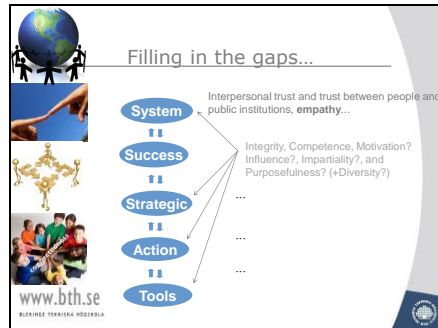
Where, for instance, does "empathy" belong? It reflects the individual's capacity to put him or her in the clothes of other people. So it is a constitutional element of people, and belongs to the first level of the framework, a description of people and how they relate to each other.

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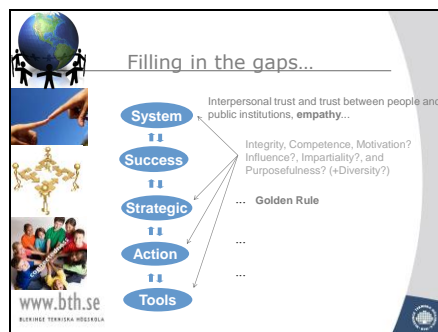
So where does the related term "Golden rule" belong? It is a widely spread term from many philosophical and religious systems, and denotes an instruction to use our constitutional capacity of putting ourselves in the clothes of others. The meaning of this is to avoid doing harm, by asking if it would be OK if others did to me, what I am now going to do to them. I.e. in this context it serves as a test if an action would really fit the social sustainability principles, a sort of acid test belonging to the third level, with its strategic guidelines. "If I would be exposed to this decision, would I find it sufficiently complying with the outlined five principles?"

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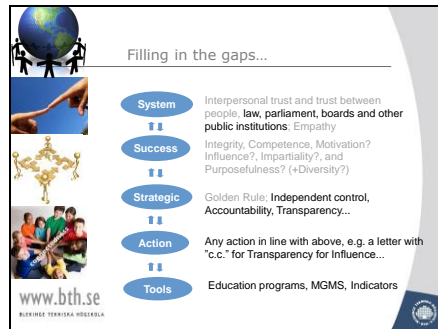
But wouldn't it be naïve to believe that if we only have those principles on paper, trying to use them, that the system would turn sustainable? Well, even if the principles as such are robust enough as principles, we still need constitutional elements to safeguard, for instance, that power is not abused. We may need parliaments to control governments, and boards to control top management, and accountants to control boards etc. Those are constitutional elements at the systems level, to follow a guideline of Independent control that we may need to add on the third, strategic level. Other terms that are frequent in this literature are Accountability, and Transparency. At the actions level, we can play around with appreciated vs. unappreciated actions, to see where this leads us in this framework. Say that a person has a routine of sharing decisions in a relatively wide community of stakeholders by using "c.c." on mails. Each of those actions seems to speak to "Transparency", a guideline to comply with the principle of "Influence", i.e. allowing people to react and help the system avoid mistakes.

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The study continues in an action-research mode, whereby we are going to continue to scrutinize our attempted outline of social parameters along the five-level framework, test it in business and cities, communicate the results with scientists and in peer-reviewed science, and eventually develop support tools for the implementation and monitoring of social sustainability.

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Conclusions

- Looking at "ourselves" in the complex social system is not easy.
- Many protocols are mixing values, facts, aspirations, ethics, measures... into non-operational confusion.
- We need robust methods to study "ourselves" – this does NOT take care of itself.
- Structured approach in line with five levels of the Framework seems feasible

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