

Great Transition

The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead

PAUL RASKIN, TARIQ BANURI, GILBERTO GALLOPÍN,
PABLO GUTMAN, AL HAMMOND, ROBERT KATES, ROB SWART

A report of the *Global Scenario Group*



Stockholm Environment Institute - Boston
Tellus Institute
11 Arlington Street
Boston, MA 02116
Phone: 1 617 266 8090
Email: info@tellus.org


SEI Web: <http://www.sei.se>
GSG Web: <http://www.gsg.org>
SEI PoleStar Series Report no. 10

© Copyright 2002 by the Stockholm Environment Institute

Cover:

Stephen S. Bernow
Devera Ehrenberg

ISBN: 0-9712418-1-3

 Printed on recycled paper

To our grandparents, who labored and dreamed for us.
To grandchildren the world over, for whom we labor and dream.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Preface.....	ix
1. Where Are We?	1
Historical Transitions	1
The Planetary Phase.....	5
Branch Point	8
2. Where Are We Headed?	13
Many Futures	13
Global Scenarios	14
Driving Forces	19
Market-driven Development and its Perils.....	22
Barbarization and the Abyss.....	25
On Utopianism and Pragmatism.....	28
3. Where Do We Want To Go?	31
Goals for a Sustainable World	31
Bending the Curve	32
Limits of the Reform Path	40
From Sustainability to Desirability	41
4. How Do We Get There?	47
Strategies	47
Change Agents.....	49
Dimensions of Transition	54
Values and Knowledge	55
Demography and Social Change	57
Economy and Governance.....	60
Technology and the Environment.....	64
Civilizing Globalization	69

5. History of the Future	71
Prologue	71
Market Euphoria, Interruption and Revival.	73
The Crisis	79
Global Reform.	81
Great Transition.	86
Epilogue	89
6. The Shape of Transition	91
References.	97

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to each of our *Global Scenario Group* colleagues who joined us over the years in an exhilarating exploration of the global past, present and future—Michael Chadwick, Khaled Mohammed Fahmy, Tibor Farago, Nadezhda Gaponenko, Gordon Goodman, Lailai Li, Roger Kasperson, Sam Moyo, Madiodio Niase, H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo, Atiq Rahman, Setijati Sastrapradja, Katsuo Seiki, Nicholas Sonntag and Veerle Vandeweerd. This essay is a manifestation of that joint effort.

We thank the Stockholm Environment Institute, Rockefeller Foundation, the Nippon Foundation, and the United Nations Environment Programme for major funding for GSG activities over the years, and Steven Rockefeller for both inspiration and a grant for the early stages of writing. We are deeply indebted to Eric Kemp-Benedict for invaluable contributions to the research and modeling, Faye Camardo and Pamela Pezzati for rigorous editing and David McAnulty for publication assistance. We appreciate the comments of the many reviewers of early versions of the manuscript, and particularly wish to thank Bert Bolin, Michael Chadwick, David Fromkin, Nadezhda Gaponenko, Gordon Goodman, Roger Kasperson, Lailai Li, Madiodio Niase, Gus Speth and Philip Sutton.

We hope the product honors the many wellsprings of collective insight that flowed into it. But any remaining errors of fact, lapses in judgment and failures of imagination are the responsibility of the authors alone.

Preface

“The future is always present, as a promise, a lure and a temptation.”

—Karl Popper

The global transition has begun—a planetary society will take shape over the coming decades. But its outcome is in question. Current trends set the direction of departure for the journey, not its destination. Depending on how environmental and social conflicts are resolved, global development can branch into dramatically different pathways. On the dark side, it is all too easy to envision a dismal future of impoverished people, cultures and nature. Indeed, to many, this ominous possibility seems the most likely. But it is *not* inevitable. Humanity has the power to foresee, to choose and to act. While it may seem improbable, a transition to a future of enriched lives, human solidarity and a healthy planet is possible.

This is the story elaborated in these pages. It is a work of analysis, imagination and engagement. As analysis, it describes the historic roots, current dynamics and future perils of world development. As imagination, it offers narrative accounts of alternative long-range global scenarios, and considers their implications. As engagement, it aims to advance one of these scenarios—*Great Transition*—by identifying strategies, agents for change and values for a new global agenda.

The essay is the culmination of the work of the *Global Scenario Group*, which was convened in 1995 by the Stockholm Environment Institute as a diverse and international body to examine the requirements for a transition to sustainability. Over the years, the

GSG has contributed major scenario assessments for international organizations, and collaborated with colleagues throughout the world. As the third in a trilogy, *Great Transition* builds on the earlier *Branch Points* (Gallopín et al., 1997), which introduced the GSG's scenario framework, and *Bending the Curve* (Raskin et al., 1998), which analyzed the long-term risks and prospects for sustainability within conventional development futures.

It has been two decades since the notion of “sustainable development” entered the lexicon of international jargon, inspiring countless international meetings and even some action. But it is our conviction that the *first wave* of sustainability activity, in progress since the Earth Summit of 1992, is insufficient to alter alarming global developments. A new wave must begin to transcend the palliatives and reforms that until now may have muted the symptoms of unsustainability, but cannot cure the disease. *A new sustainability paradigm* would challenge both the viability and desirability of conventional values, economic structures and social arrangements. It would offer a positive vision of a civilized form of globalization for the whole human family.

This will happen only if key sectors of world society come to understand the nature and the gravity of the challenge, and seize the opportunity to revise their agendas. Four major agents of change, acting synergistically, could drive a new sustainability paradigm. Three are global actors—intergovernmental organizations, transnational corporations and civil society acting through non-governmental organizations and spiritual communities. The fourth is less tangible, but is the critical underlying element—wide public awareness of the need for change and the spread of values that underscore quality of life, human solidarity and environmental sustainability.

Global change is accelerating and contradictions are deepening. New ways of thinking, acting and being are urgently needed. But as surely as necessity is the spur for a *Great Transition*, the historic opportunity to shape an equitable world of peace, freedom and sustainability is the magnet. This is the promise and lure of the twenty-first century.