



**Report of the First International Conference on  
Environmental, Cultural and Social Sustainability:  
People and Planet — Longer, Broader and Deeper Views**

25-27 February 2005  
University of Hawai'i at Manoa  
Island of Oahu, Hawai'i

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## SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE 2005

Notes by Peter Phipps

The Conference was opened by **Manfred Steger** (RMIT Globalism Institute) with a warm 'Aloha!' acknowledging the native Hawaiian host culture and **Deane Neubauer**, (UH and Founding Director of the international Globalization Research Network). *'As we are meeting here 2 bills related to sustainability are in the State legislature. For sustainability to become a public endeavour it has to move beyond the legislature and into the homes of the citizens'*.

**Lillette Subedi** (Ka'ala Farm) began with a beautiful and powerful chant of welcome, *'In Hawai'i we have certain protocols, the a'oli I sang for you this morning is the a'aina. The chant asks permission for us to understand the knowledge that is revealed to us. The k'ao, deep intuitive knowledge that each of us have is located on the slopes of Mauna Kauaula, home to our goddess Kaiala'*. Her visual slides showed her community working on a fallen mountain tree through many, complex processes and rituals to make it into a canoe eventually taken out to sea for fishing. It was a powerful illustration of the connection of highlands to sea both from an eco-system point of view and from a deep philosophical and practical point of view. It was 'ea', Hawaiian systems of governance, in action.

**Maumo Kim** (Director, Hawaiian Affairs at the University of Hawaii Manoa) introduced a Hawaiian chant, encouraging all of us to be able to *'ground ourselves in the timeless world of duration'*. **Ramsay Taum**, (Director of O'ahu Operations of The Hawai'i Nature Centre) sang a chant asking for the integration of mind, body and spirit which needs to be nurtured for all time. He said, *'This is sustainability, this is aloha, not just a greeting, but to be (alo) in the presence of (ha) life giving breath, the unconditional extension of trust and friendship by sharing the breath of life'*. He pointed out that, *'Previously Aloha was the highest principle in Hawai'i, today it is money. One Hawaiian model for sustainability is the ahupua'a system which is more than a land management system, it is a system for sustainability. Sustainability is about the deepest kind of relationships: 'a' = fire, the heat energy, 'i' = the spiritual water in all things, the flow. Add them together and we have energy as steam so 'ai' = food. 'Ma' is internal, dark, female while 'na' is external light and male. Mana is the balance of both, a shared value which, like yin and yang, produces a third value from binaries in balance. 'Aina' is that which provides food and energy, not just 'land' in the western sense. Mahalo is the spirit of gratitude for all this. Aloha!'*

**Walter Jamieson**, (Dean of the School of Travel Industry Management UH and author of the UN monograph *Poverty Reduction through Sustainable Tourism*) observed many development NGOs have had a view of tourism as destructive for poor communities, often for very good reasons. He said there is, *'a lack of evidence for "trickle down" in developing countries, for example in Cambodia almost 90% of tourism expenditure leaves the country and in many other developing countries it is 80% leakage. Tourism creates many low paying and low status jobs while enriching local elites and expatriate companies, but combined with*

*the environmental and social impacts that come with it may be detrimental over-all to the poor and marginalised segments of society. Pro-poor tourism means a paradigm shift away from measuring success for developing countries by international arrival numbers and looking at the impact on people living in poverty'. With a similar concern for the effects of globalization on communities* **Mike Douglass** (UH Globalization Research Centre Director) described his project on the privatization of civic spaces in Asian cities. He identified these as ranging from the political and other civic uses of public parks and squares in cities such as Manila, Tokyo and Jakarta, to the domestication of sidewalk street culture in Saigon.

**Manfred Steger** presented two key notions in the concept of sustainability: first there has to be limits to human acquisition and desires; secondly the recognition of global interdependence. He described the opposite to sustainability as a system with no limits to acquisition: free market capitalism, disconnection, violence, and war on a global scale, ongoing and perpetual. He then analysed the dominant ideology of this free market capitalism. Criticizing free trade agreements as a basis of economic sustainability **Lyuba Zarsky** (Nautilus Institute) explained that after NAFTA there was a sixfold increase in FDI into Mexico, mostly to manufacturing and a massive increase in exports, but crucially, 96% of inputs were imported and the local inputs into the export manufacturing sector actually decreased. The Mexican economy bisected: the export sector internationalised while aspects of the local Mexican manufacturing sector actually de-industrialised and GDP growth halved.

**Helena Norberg- Hodge** (Founder and Director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture) defined herself as a proponent of localisation rather than globalisation arguing we should be looking for human and ecological wellbeing, the essential factor for happiness being a sense of community that is based on long-lasting relationships over time. Her experience in Ladakh was an encounter with a people whose economy had not been affected by colonialism, and hence their respect for local traditional knowledge systems was very strong. It was a place with an astoundingly high standard of living and where people were basically really deeply happy, but she saw the well-intentioned development model arrive in Ladakh with import of subsidised foods undermining local culture and economy, schools teaching children to live in a petroleum-based, industrial, low-altitude, unsustainable economy and drawing them away from their local systems and by 1989 the intense competition for non-existent urban jobs promised by schooling had led to Muslims and Buddhists killing each other. *'We are in a situation where our leaders are being blackmailed and manipulated by corporate empires. Re-regulation of global trade will become more widespread (eg group of 22) through the growing social movements that are fighting for sustainability, containing capital in local democratic spheres. Deep dialogue and exchange between north and south can move beyond the myths of northern affluence and southern dependence'*. In a similar vein, emphasizing the negation of human values in processes of relentless globalization, **Jon Hawkes** (Cultural Development Network, Melbourne) made a plea for cultural sustainability as a keystone to other forms of sustainability.

The closing session reported back on the talking circle discussions presenting the central paradox of why unsustainable practice appears to be so attractive to people everywhere.

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