

2 0 1 0

STATE OF THE WORLD

Transforming Cultures

From Consumerism to Sustainability

THE
WORLDWATCH
INSTITUTE

Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability

Many of the environmental and social problems we face today are symptoms of a deeper systemic failing: a dominant cultural paradigm that encourages living in ways that are often directly counter to the realities of a finite planet. This paradigm, typically referred to as consumerism, has already spread to more than two billion individuals and has led to consumption levels that are vastly unsustainable.

If this cultural orientation spreads further—particularly if the total human population reaches 9.2 billion by 2050 as projected—there will be little possibility of solving climate change or other environmental problems that are poised to dramatically disrupt human civilization. In order to thrive long into the future as a species on a healthy planet, we need to cultivate a new cultural pattern—one centered on sustainability that can effectively compete with and eventually replace the consumerism. This cultural orientation, of which all could realistically partake, would no longer be centered on consumption but on living good lives within the natural limits of the planet.

Of course, shifting cultural patterns is not a simple task, but will take a sustained, long-term effort to redirect the institutions that shape culture, eventually leading to a decline in support of consumerism and growing acceptance, even dominance of a culture centered on sustainability. These institutions include schools, the media, businesses and governments. Some of this is being done, to one degree or another, but environmental priorities are mainly focused on immediate crises and pushing for policy changes that solve environmental symptoms. Focusing on underlying problems or “root causes,” in contrast, will have a more lasting impact.

By bringing about a cultural shift that makes living sustainably as “natural” as a consumer lifestyle is today, not only will this address urgent crises like climate change, it could also tackle other symptoms like extreme income inequity, obesity, and social isolation that are not typically seen as environmental problems. For example, a sustainable diet—spread through schools, social service providers, the media, new ecological restaurants and stores—that encourages consumption of more vegetables and whole grains instead of meat, added sugars, and processed ingredients will not only reduce environmental impacts of the consumer diet (such as climate change, proliferation of ocean “dead zones,” and air and groundwater pollution) but reduce obesity and improve human health and quality of life.

State of the World 2010 will paint a picture of what this sustainability culture could look like, how it differs from the current consumer culture, why we need to urgently make this shift, and, most important, how we can *and already are* making the shift. After the first chapter introduces the need for a new cultural paradigm and the means to spread it,

subsequent sections will look at the key institutions that are dominant shapers of culture and how these institutions are being harnessed to shape a culture of sustainability. The book will then be used throughout 2010 to do significant, targeted outreach to those actors already poised to lead this cultural transition: environmental educators, green-leaning policymakers, environmental journalists, sustainable business managers, eco-celebrities, foundation officers, and environmental organizational leaders.

Table of Contents

Cover:

Chris Jordan

Introductory Chapter:

Growing Cultures That Sustain People and the Planet

This chapter will set the stage both for what a sustainability culture paradigm would look like and why it is critical we move beyond the consumer culture paradigm. It will follow with a discussion of how cultures change and how the key lies in using the dominant institutions of culture (i.e. the leading shapers of culture) to actively create new cultural norms. The chapter would then briefly detail the many institutions that could be used—such as education, media, social service provision, business, and government—and in the process introduce the rest of the book.

Chapter Author:

State of the World 2010 Project Director, Erik Assadourian

Section 1: Sustainable Traditions: Old and New

Traditions have always shaped people's values and in turn how people view the world and how they act.. Many traditions hold important lessons in living sustainably and there is value in revisiting them. Other traditions are starting to form in response to new ecological realities and may one day be as central to our cultures as ancient traditions are today. *Section Introduction: Erik Assadourian*

Textbox: Expanding Our Understanding of Time (Alexander Rose)

Textbox: Instilling a Global Ecological Ethic (Patrick Curry)

- From Agriculture to Permaculture (Albert Bates)
- Raising Sustainable Families (Robert Engelman)
- Rituals That Sustain Us (Lisa Lucero and Gary Gardner)
- Elders' Role in Teaching Sustainability (Judi Aubel)
- The Role of Religions in Growing a Sustainable Society (Gary Gardner)

Section 2: Education for Sustainability

To maintain humanity long into the future, sustainability will need to be the central tenet of education—whether in a rural or urban, industrial or developing country setting. This

section introduction will include discussion of the current priorities of education now and what sustainability education looks like (both in ideal and current forms). *Section*

Introduction: Erik Assadourian

Textbox: The Millennium Assessment of Human Behavior (Paul and Anne Ehrlich)

Textbox: Reconnecting People to the Planet (Almut Beringer)

Textbox: California Academy of Sciences as a Museum of Sustainability (Greg Farrington)

- Centering Child Development and Education on Sustainability (Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson and Yoshie Kaga)
- Rethinking School Food (Kevin Morgan and Roberta Sonnino)
- Protecting Children From the Merchants of Consumption (Susan Linn)
- Transforming Universities into Centers of Sustainability (David Orr)

Section 3: Media for Sustainability

What is the role of the media—including news agencies, video, the arts, the Internet, and advertising—in spreading and maintaining the consumer culture? How are media outlets, governments, organizations, and others working to shift the role of media to help spread a culture of sustainability? This section will discuss the many forms of media and their role in maintaining cultural priorities and how a counterforce of ecological media is starting to bring about a new norm. It will also detail the role of marketing, the need for oversight, and the opportunities anti-marketing and social marketing efforts could offer if supported more vigorously. *Section Introduction: Erik Assadourian*

Textbox: Inspiring Sustainability with Art (Satish Kumar)

Textbox: Lights, Camera, Eco-Consciousness (Yann Arthus-Bertrand)

- Employing the Strategies of Marketers for Living Sustainably (Jonah Sachs and Susan Finkelpearl)
- Teaching Media Literacy (Robin Andersen)
- Journalism's Role in Catalyzing Sustainable Behavior (Raj Chengappa)

Section 4: Greening Business and Economies

This section would investigate how business cultures are being transformed from within, such as through the corporate responsibility movement and commitment by engaged leaders. It will also look beyond this movement to cutting-edge shifts that are going on in business and economics, including social enterprise, new corporate bylaws that internalize being socially beneficial, localizing business, and greening of financial systems. Ultimately these efforts work to reorient economies around well-being and within the limitations of a finite Earth system. *Section Introduction: Erik Assadourian*

Textbox: The Folly of Infinite Growth on a Finite Planet (Oystein Dahle)

Textbox: Greening Finance (Eduardo Athayde)

Textbox: Cradle to Cradle: Adapting Production to Nature's Model (William McDonough and Michael Braungart)

- Designing Economies With People and Planet at the Center (Robert Costanza, Ida Kubiszewski, and Joshua Farley)
- Shortening the Work Day (Juliet Schor)
- Changing Business Cultures From Within (Ray Anderson, Mona Amadeu, and Jim Hartzfeld)
- Relocalizing Business (Michael Shuman)
- The Role of Social Enterprises (Johanna Mair and Kate Ganly)

Section 5: Government's Role in Stimulating a Cultural Shift

This section will describe key governance and political changes being implemented that will help nurture cultures of sustainability. Topics will include accurate pricing and choice editing, upgrading understandings of security, and shifting focus of healthcare from treating the sick to preventing sickness. This section could also detail efforts of making sustainability a priority in politics, e.g. through the growth of cross party efforts that are trying to put sustainability first, rather than partisan concerns. *Section*

Introduction: Erik Assadourian

- Editing Out Unsustainable Behavior (Mike Maniates)
- Redefining Security (Michael Renner)
- Growing Sustainable Cities (Peter Newman)
- From "Sickcare" to Healthcare: Shifting Medicine's Focus to Prevention (Walter Bortz)
- Upgrading Jurisprudence to Consider Earth's Limits (Cormac Cullinan)

Section 6: Social Movements That Bring Us Toward Sustainability

Sustainability is regularly rated as a low priority to people and politicians. Framing this cultural shift around such a far off concern as long-term survival of humanity may be counterproductive, at least for the majority of people. This section will investigate the many social movements that are working toward sustainability in innovative and attractive frames.

Textbox: Sustainable Decline: A Growing European Movement (Serge Latouche)

- Reclaiming Time: For Improved Well-being and a Sustainable Future (John de Graaf)
- The Voluntary Simplicity Movement (Cecile Andrews and Wanda Urbanska)
- The Global Ecovillage Network (Jonathan Dawson)

Contact Information:

Erik Assadourian

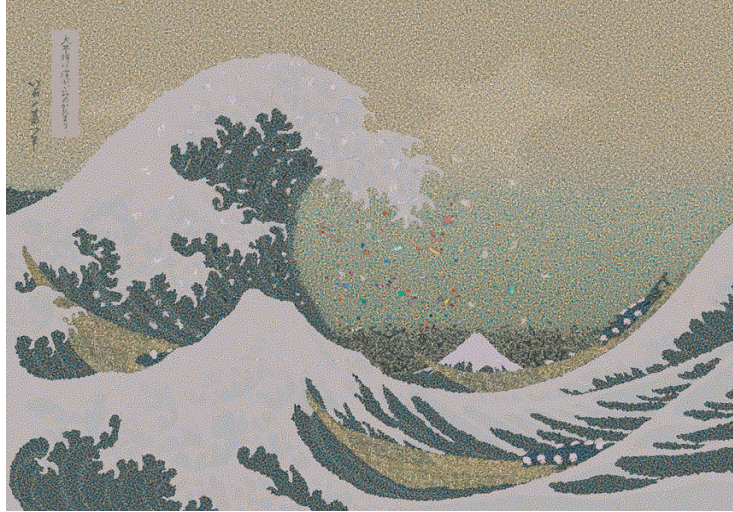
Project Director, *State of the World 2010*

eassadourian@worldwatch.org

Skype: erik.assadourian

+1 202-452-1999 x534

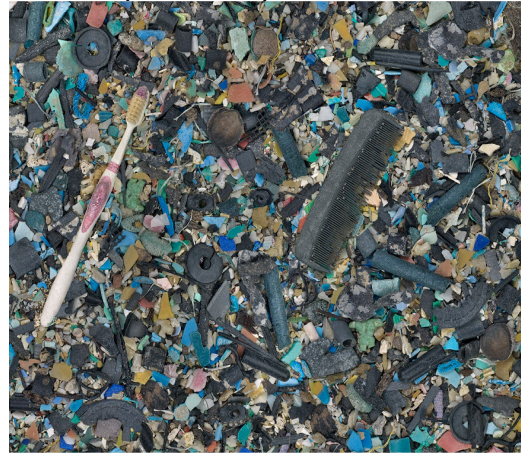
A Closer Look at Chris Jordan's *Gyre*



Entire photograph consisting of 2.4 million pieces of plastic



Zoom-in of the peak of Mt. Fuji



Even closer look at *Gyre* materials

Back Cover Blurb [draft]:

More than 2.4 million pounds of plastic enter the world's oceans every hour. This chilling figure is represented by the 2.4 million pieces of plastic used by artist Chris Jordan in his reincarnation of the famous 1820s woodblock print by the Japanese master artist Katsushika Hokusai. Like a tsunami, consumerism has transformed human cultures and Earth's ecosystems. Left unaddressed, we risk disaster. But if we harness this wave, and redirect our cultures to surge and change in sustainable ways, we have the opportunity to not only prevent disaster but to create a new cultural paradigm—a culture of sustainability—that could provide high quality lives for all people, while at the same time healing the Earth.