



International Association on Social Quality  
Bredeweg 8  
1098 BP Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
Phone: +31 (0)20 665 4923  
Email: [info@socialquality.org](mailto:info@socialquality.org)  
IBAN: NL47 RABO01 42767 107  
KvK 41216943  
[www.socialquality.org](http://www.socialquality.org)

To all scholars interested in the Paris  
Conference on climate change  
December 2015

Concerning: invitation to join an academic  
sustainability initiative

Amsterdam/The Hague, 17 November 2015

Dear colleague,

The Twenty first Conference and Meeting of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which will take place in Paris November 28-December 12 2015, is approaching rapidly, and will require major input from the academic community. In 2012 the Dutch-based International Association on Social Quality (IASQ) contributed to the *Rio+20 Conference*, arguing that there was a dominant but problematic distinction between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of overall sustainability.<sup>1</sup> This distinction dates back to the 1987 Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future'.<sup>2</sup> Since then there has been a tendency to refer to **three dimensions** of sustainability.

However, in this categorization the 'social dimension' received no serious formulation, and in practice has become a random collection of everything that is considered non-economic or non-environmental. This has resulted in an underdeveloped discourse around the social dimension of sustainability. IASQ argues that the traditional used 'social dimension' should be changed into the socio-political and the socio-cultural dimensions, both of which are central to the empowerment of citizens to play a role in setting society on a more sustainable path. In addition to the socio-economic and socio-environmental dimensions we believe that the socio-political and the socio-cultural dimensions make up the four pillars of sustainability, and also need to be taken into consideration.

Given the urban context of contemporary societies and predictions that 75% of humankind will live in cities in the future, we believe that socio-political and socio-cultural issues need to be given far greater consideration in the global sustainability debate.<sup>3</sup> The urban context of sustainability is currently

<sup>1</sup> Available as: Social Quality Working Paper nr. 11 (2012), 'Development Towards Sustainability, The need for a Comprehensive Conceptual and Methodological Framework for new politics and policies: A social quality perspective' (<http://www.socialquality.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Working-Paper-11-2012.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), 'Our Common Future', (New York: WCED/UN), <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-ov/htm>. See also recently: G. H. Brundtland (2015), 'The Changing Climate on Climate Change', <http://www.socialeurope.eu/2015/09/the-changing-climate-on-climate-change>.

<sup>3</sup> UN-Habitat (2009), 'For a better Urban Future', (Paris: UN), and: C. Beguinot et al (2012), 'Human rights and The City Crisis: for the Urban Future', (Naples/Rome: Gianni series of urban studies), and: L.J.G. van der Maesen and A.C. Walker, eds (2012), 'Social Quality: From Theory to Indicators' (Basingstoke: MacMillan), and: L.J.G. van der Maesen (2013), 'Analysing Societal Circumstances,

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neglected, yet it is here that the outcomes of processes in and between the four dimensions will be largely implemented.<sup>4</sup>

We feel it is essential to apply these four dimensions to comprehensively elaborate the sustainability discourse and go beyond the limited focus on carbon emissions as main cause of climate change. These shortcomings have been acknowledged by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), which acknowledges that previous assessments have focussed largely on the impacts of climate change, rather than the implementation of actions to combat climate change<sup>5</sup>, and as should be added, which multiform causes and consequences go far beyond the question of carbon emissions.

In order to achieve a greater level of co-ordination across the 'social sciences' (including economics and law), we are urging political leaders participating in the Paris conference to support the establishment of a complementary **cross-disciplinary global academic network** to address the socio-political and socio-cultural aspects of sustainability in relationship with the socio-economic and socio-environmental aspects. This would transcend the current lack of conceptual work and the related fragmentation of empirical analyse and policy applications in the four realms of sustainability. This view is also expressed in the extensive World Social Science Report 2013.<sup>6</sup>

IASQ, in collaboration with the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), the Townsend Centre for Poverty Research (TCIPR, Bristol), the Economic, Social and Political Research Institute (Eurispes, Rome), the Plekhanov University of Economics (Moscow), Griffith University (Brisbane) and the Zhejiang University (Hangzhou), is preparing a draft background paper to explain and justify the creation of such an international academic network. The draft of this paper will serve as basis for a **manifesto** to be sent to participants of the Paris meeting.

We cordially **invite you to support this initiative**, and attach a preliminary draft of the first section of the background paper. Please contact IASQ at the address below, if you wish to be part of this initiative. We hope to engage as many supportive academicians and institutes worldwide as possible.

We aim to publish the manifesto in *The Guardian*, financed by crowd-funding activities before the Paris Climate Conference. Subsequently we hope to send the draft text of the manifesto with all the names of colleagues who agree with it in the middle of November. At the end of November we will send you a draft version of the background-paper.

With our best wishes,

Dr Laurent J.G. van der Maesen (director IASQ)  
Professor dr Des Gasper (ISS, Erasmus University Rotterdam)  
(vandermaesen@planet.nl)

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Sustainability and Sustainable Urban Development: New Theoretical and Methodological Challenges for Social Quality Indicators', *International Journal of Social Quality*, Vol.3 (1), pp. 82-106.

<sup>4</sup> In German language this means 'verwirklicht' which is more precise.

<sup>5</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014), *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Summary for Policymakers*, (Cambridge: IPCC, Cambridge University Press – [http://ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/art5/wg2/ar5\\_wg11.p.4](http://ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/art5/wg2/ar5_wg11.p.4)), p.8.

<sup>6</sup> International Social Science Council (ISSC), UNESCO and OECD (2013), *World Social Science Report 2013: Changing Global Environments*, (Paris: ISSC/UNESCO/OECD. In this Report Cailods argues that 'the regional divide in social sciences production (including economics) on global environmental change is at least as big as for the social sciences overall (Ibid, p.127). Raworth and Rockström referring to the conceptual need to link the notion of planetary boundaries to social boundaries call for 'a new interdisciplinary science for sustainability needs to encompass all these concerns' (ibid, p.88). In line with our arguments - see for conceptual and methodological reasons - we should prefer to speak about 'societal boundaries' as expressed in the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural dimensions.