

The sixty years crisis

A short history of a huge problem



Introduction Part A – The Problem!

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A call for help!

The global warming is now a fact. And it is going to get worse. In the end it will affect all life on earth. It is a catastrophe of Biblical dimensions. The Great Flood, Sodom and Gomorra, Armageddon and Apocalyptic punishment at the same time.

The global warming is only one consequence of our environmental crisis. A crisis caused by our generation. You and me. It is the unsustainable lifestyle of us the fortunate people living in the rich western part of the world that is the cause of this huge problem. We are consuming the earth.

Independent if you believe in God and/or Science we have done something very wrong – a mortal sin. Against the very principles of God and Nature. We now have to change –all!

“A total make over” of ourselves and how we live.

This is your mission. The most important thing you can do with the rest of your life. Good Luck!

A huge problem

Hi! My name is Carl Ohlen. I want to share with you some facts that you may or may not be aware of. Numerous alarming UN reports have been published recently. But the situation is even worse, much worse. We are rapidly moving towards an environmental disaster which is affecting the very foundation of life on earth. And WE = You and me are responsible.

It is unfortunately too late to stop this degeneration because we have already done too much damage that will take hundreds and maybe thousands of years to reverse. We may reduce the effects. What in modern vocabulary is called mitigation or damage control. The new Bali “agreement” is a start of this but still just a weak & late compromise.

And this is NOT enough. By far. The challenge is enormous. We need to rethink and totally change our unsustainable and exponential consumer life style. This will require unprecedented measures. And we need to do the most difficult thing a human being can do. To admit that we have been wrong. Very wrong. And we need to do an equally difficult thing. To change ourselves and to find a new way to a common future.

We need to act - NOW!

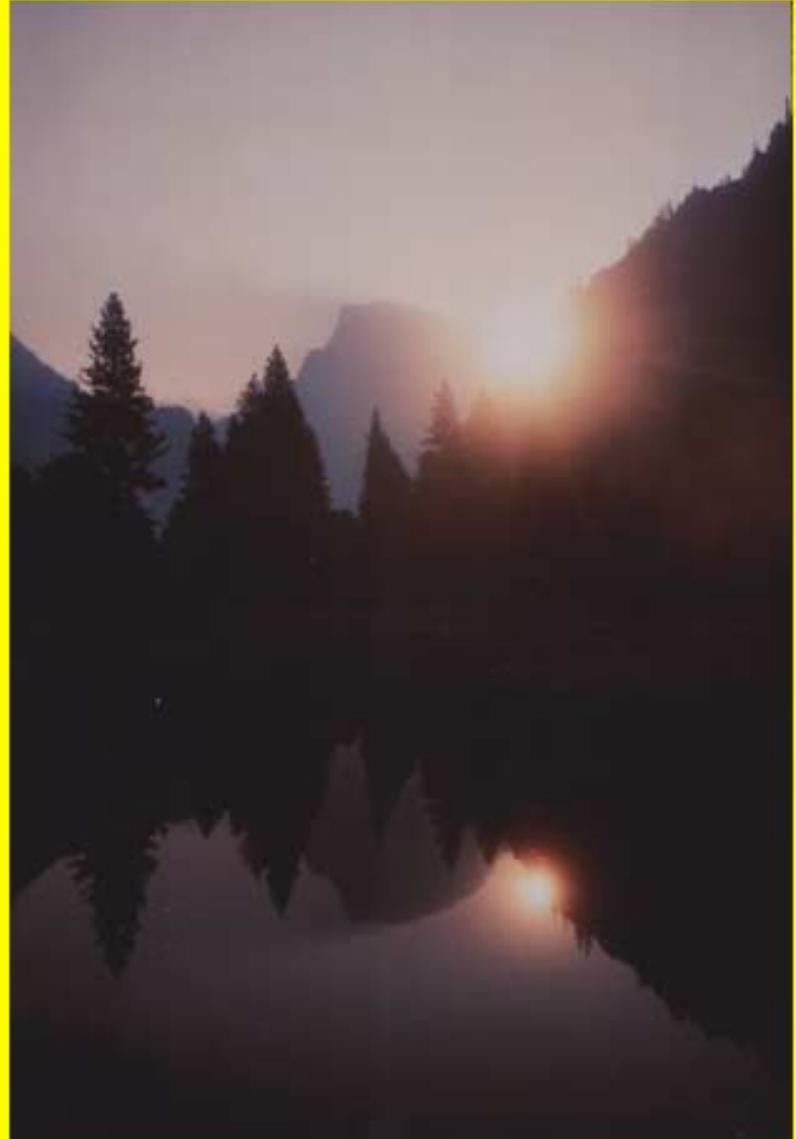
“What a beautiful world”



“What a beautiful world”



“What a beautiful world”



Gaia – our garden of Eden

Independent if you believe in the Bible or Darwin the creation of our living planet is a wonder. And independent if we believe in science that universe was created out of a very small point of energy that expanded or created by God out of nothing, life is a mystery. A beautiful mystery.

Ever since man started to think we have been contemplating this mystery and our own place in the Universe. The natural man such as the natives of America believed in an animated universe where everything was connected and God or the Great Spirit was part of everything.

James Lovelock is an American scientist who first used the name “Gaia” to describe our living planet where everything is connected. All religions and science say the same thing. We are part of a common history and a common future. We are ONE. And independent what we believe we know that we as homo sapiens is in charge, in top of the food chain, as caretaker of Gaia. But what we have not understood is that despite of all our inventions we can never control Gaia and we can never build our tower of Babel up into the heaven to became God. We can destroy Gaia but we can never create Gaia. We are now the most powerful and intelligent creature ever on Earth. But how are we using this power and intelligence?

Everything is connected

Independent if you believe in the Bible or Darwin the creation of our living planet is following the same order. Out of nothing the heavens and the earth was created. Then water & the sky later giving place for land. From this life was created out of carbon as plants & animals. Finally the human race was born. If you believe in science this process took about 5 billion years. Our present human race has lived for about 50 000 years and our civilization is 5000 years old. We re-discovered America 500 years ago.

And it only took us about 50 years to destroy this evolution. Good job!

When this process started the sunlight was much weaker than today because the sun was smaller. The carbon dioxide (CO₂) level was very high and this helped to increase temperature. Then the sun light increased and the plants started to produce oxygen that was needed for the animal kingdom but also consuming CO₂ to regulate temperature. Today there are millions of different species with trillions of individuals who together is creating and re-creating life. GAIA is a self regulating web where everything is connected to everything else in a very delicate balance. The temperature has varied over the different periods and was higher when the dinosaurs inhabited the earth. But nature has been balancing variation in sunlight and concentration of CO₂ with evolution. Until now! In just a few years we have burned up and released the carbon that earth has stored for millions of years. **Going back in time to the Jurassic park!**

What about the weather?

Somebody has said that the only thing you can for sure say about the weather is that it will change. Although we today have satellites and measuring stations around the globe with powerful computers and models we can not for sure predict the weather even within the next 24 hours. The reason is that there are so many factors interacting. The air, the oceans, the sun and all life. But what we do know is the seasonal changes for different regions.

And nature knows this. The birds emigrate in right time. The insects and bees arrive with perfect timing to be eaten by the birds and to pollinate the plants.

And in the ocean the different currents are acting as regulators. The Gulf stream is known to go from the Mexican Gulf to the Northern Atlantic to give warmer weather for Northern Europe but in fact it circulates all way from the Pacific. The engine is the cooling outside Greenland that make the water sink and change direction. If that disappear the current disappear. The weather has changed during thousands of years and so has plants and animals. But the difference with this manmade change is that it is going so much faster than ever before, except in periods of mass extinction.

So this is what is happening. Another mass extinction. We can not even in our worst nightmares grasp this black future. So how the hell could this happen? That is what this Internet book is about. And what we can do about it.

Our common heritage

What we call civilization was born some 5000 years ago between the rivers of Euphrates and Tigris in Mesopotamia. What today is Iraq. And what we with a modern word call “template” of our civilization we have inherited from this region. Farming, irrigation, wagons with wheels, boats, metal tools, staple food, bread, wine, cities, prostitution, banking, trade, books, religion, schools, weapons, wars, cities, empires....and environmental disasters.

The epic of Gilgamesh is our first known book describing king Gilgamesh of Mesopotamia who “had seen all countries and knew everything”. This king, half man and half god, despite he had done everything was still searching for life it self. And in this search he was longing back to what happened before the separation...between man and nature. The Epic of Gilgamesh tells several stories that later is repeated in our Bible and other books. One is about man’s search for eternal life. Another is about the great flood and the man Noah who try to rescue life by building a big boat.

5000 years later today's global Anglo-American empire has conquered Mesopotamia in a war for the remaining oil on Earth. The same oil that is causing the great flood. Maybe this is what C G Jung described as a meaningful coincidence. We still have to understand which one.

A privilege generation

I was born 1949 on the country in Northern Sweden in a small farming community. We had no TV, no car, no paved roads, no shopping centers and we lived from what the local farms, rivers, the sea and local production could offer. For generations my ancestors had been farmers. My parents had a small general store which provided everything else what this small village needed from salt and sugar to horse shoes and tools. Our rural region was self sustainable. I was very fortunate to grow up in a virtual garden of Eden. We had a “green” and sustainable lifestyle with minimum CO2 footprint, recycling and biodynamic food long before these words were invented. “What a wonderful world!” Then the big CHANGE !

1959 the TV arrived and my parents bought their first car. 1969 USA put the man on the moon, the first Boeing 747 took off and the first microprocessor was produced. The same magic Woodstock year I flew to USA. 1979 I worked in Iraq (Mesopotamia) and ever since I visited Babylon I have carried both my camera and my history book with me working and traveling in some seventy countries. Ten years later 1989 I lived and worked in the golden state of California. End of 1999 I celebrated the Millennium in Brazil. I was now part of what we call “globalization”. So what does my life story has to do with the emerging global disaster?.....

Our common 60 years crisis

.....Everything! I am part of this unique and fortunate generation that like Gilgamesh has been traveling the world to learn, see and do everything. But I am also part of the problem. And so are you! We are the problem!

Our civilization is only 5000 years old since it was born in Mesopotamia, today's Iraq. Gaia our planet is almost 1 million times older. We belong to a very long evolution that has created this wonderful world with all its beauty. Mankind has during this development of our civilization more and more disturbed Nature in pace with increasing population. This influence grew even faster with the industrialization and colonization during the last 150 years. But after the second world war something very drastic happened.

This influence became exponential. The increase increased. The massive consumption and pollution grew out of control. Consuming our planet in ONE generation = My generation! My own life coincides with the life of our modern consumer world from its birth 1949. I am one of the lucky ones who got it all. I have had my own personal life crisis like many when we need to question ourselves. Now we are experiencing our worst life crisis ever. Our global sixty years crisis. So we really need to question ourselves. **It is a question of life or death...**For our children and our grand children.

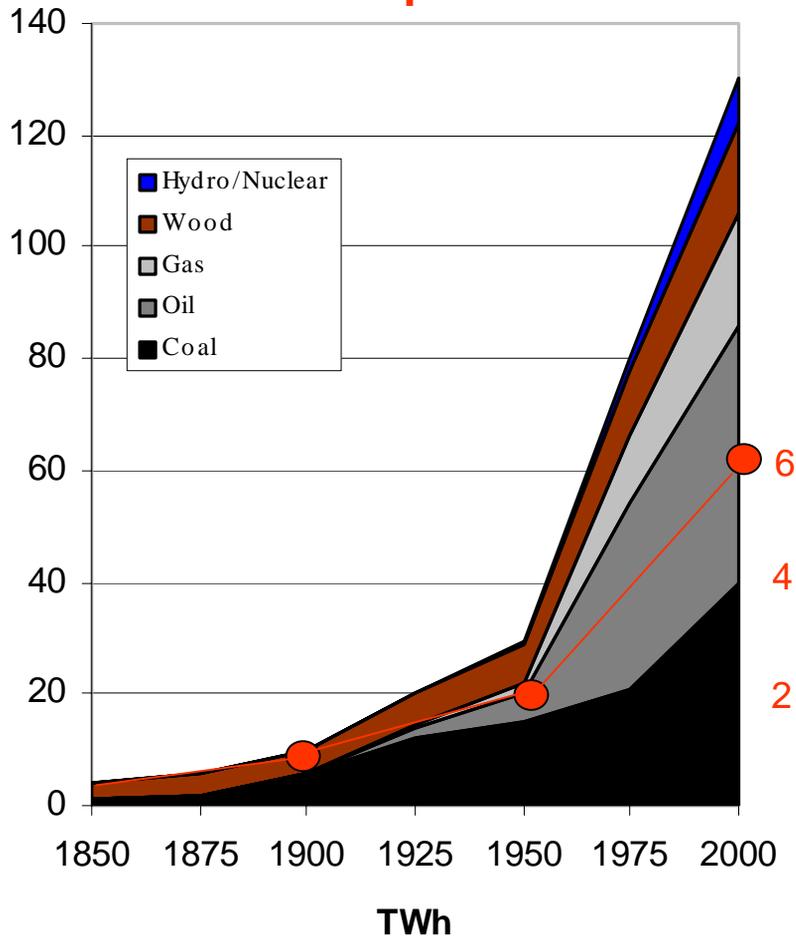
The unsustainable development

There are probably several reasons for this sudden spark. But the absolute most important is the discovery of fossil fuel – the eternal fire from Pandora's box. Coal, gas and oil for our ships, machines, houses, cars, airplanes. Fertilizers, chemicals, plastics.

From 1850 to 1950 we grew in pace with the industrialization. But in just 50 years from when I was born 1949 to the Millennium shift the total world population increased from 2.5 billion to 6.2 billion or 250%. And during the same period burning of fossil fuels increased 500%. The increase increased in what we call exponential growth from 1949 and on.

Just looking at this diagram we should have understood the simple fact that such a development was unsustainable long time ago. This is not any "rocket science". It is a simple conclusion that should not have been a surprise for anyone.

Energy consumption
Population



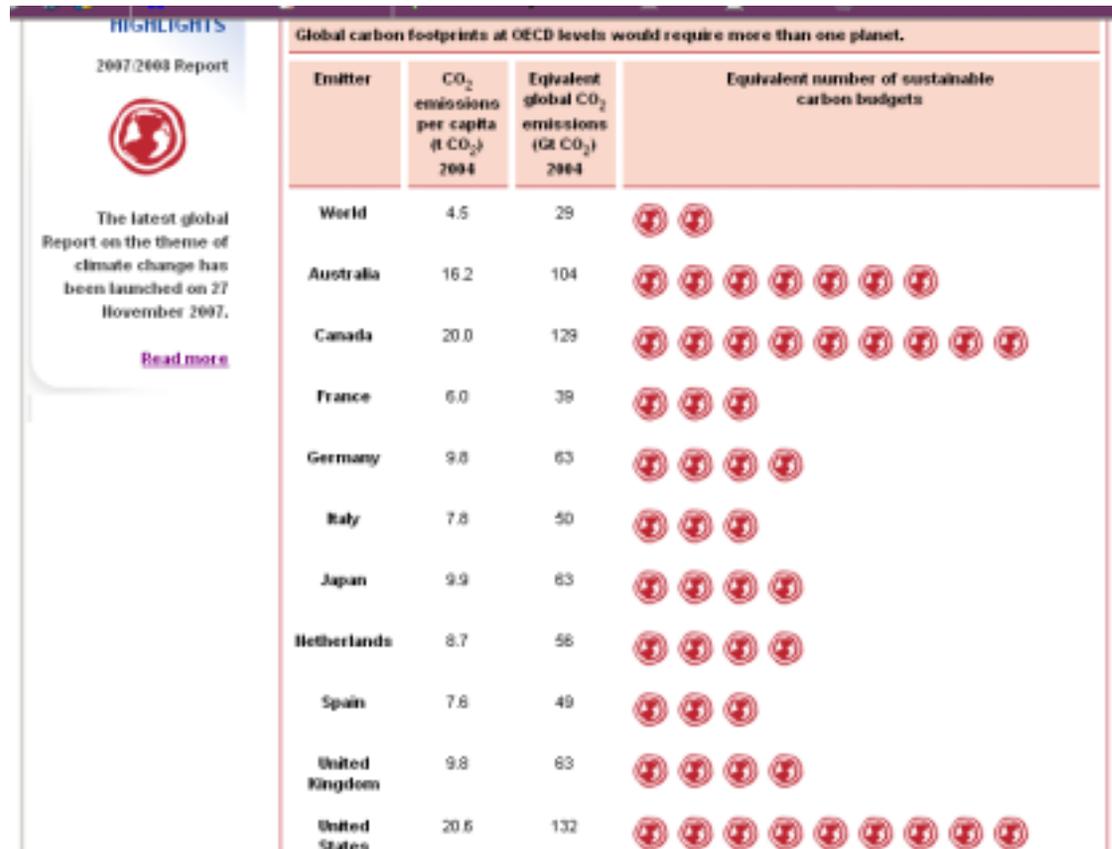
We are consuming our planet

Please consider these facts: We are already consuming two planets.

In Europe we are consuming on a level of three planets.

If the whole world would copy “The American Way of Life”
we would need nine (9) planets.

But we only have one earth. And we only have one common future.



The BIG mystery

The BIG mystery is why we have not seen this coming. It is so simple.

In a few years we consume the worlds stored resources of fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas). Burning emits carbon dioxide (CO₂) that stays in our atmosphere for a long time and acts as a “green house” with increasing temperature.

But this is only ONE of the problems. We are consuming ALL resources in a similar way. Metals, water, land, meat, fish.... We produce enormous amount of waste so we can consume even more. Chemicals, gases, enzymes and now even genetically modified species! And we are he few fortunate now living in the rich world. We are the upper and middle class people in the western world.

Not the poor. They are always, the victims. So who are the real terrorists?

The most alarming thing is that we still have not understood neither the threat or our responsibility. If we had the outcome of the UN conference in Bali end of 2007 would have been something totally different. Because the problem with CO₂ emission is that it continues affecting the earth for hundreds of years. So does nuclear, chemical and biological waste. So does gene manipulation. We are carrying the history with us. Every day counts. So this should be very simple to understand. What is very difficult to understand is how the already privilege people in many of the rich countries still continue to INCREASE the consumption and pollution. **Because this is a crime against life itself!**

But we did know!

1972 the first United Nation conference on the environment was held in Stockholm. This was more than 35 years ago. Alarming reports were presented and discussed. Statements were made about the need to change direction and to find a solution for both rich and poor. 1972 was the time of the Vietnam war and the student protests of 1968 did continue around the world.

I was studying electric power and environmental technology and soon discovered that there was something very wrong with our development. And I was not alone. Many books and magazines published these concerns.

Some of us students formed a group and started to collect data, write reports, books and flyers. We arranged exhibitions and gave presentations. We warned for the dependence of fossil fuel and the risks of nuclear energy. For oil tanker accidents at sea and nuclear accidents and waste. We pointed out that not only the resources are limited but that the environment is limited to absorb waste. We stressed the economic connection between oil corporations and military “interventions” by USA and the west. And we repeated the findings that burning of fossil fuel will give increased carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration and global warming with a risk for global warming and ecological break down.

This was 1972. And ALL of what we said did happen ...and do happen!

But we choose not to know, not to act, not to change – and we still do.

Our crazy consumerism

Our economical model is based on consumption. The more we consume the more the economy grow. We measure this with GDP, Gross Domestic Product. Our economic model is also based on free market competition and the success of different companies is measured by the stock market index. Twenty four hours a day we are staring at these figures as they were God. Our media is filled with advertising that we should buy more. Our cities are designed with more and more shopping centers so we shall buy more. The production of food, clothes, everything is centralized, automated, packed, out sourced, uniformed and transported around the globe so we can buy more and cheaper. And if the economy slows down our governments stimulate consumption with lower interest rates and lower taxes. It does not matter what we consume – we just need to consume more, change models, follow the trend and throw away.

If you compare this “modern world” with the “ancient” world I grew up in with a self sustainable rural region with local production and food supply it is very easy to understand why we are now facing a crisis. This change to accelerated consumption happened in just a few years during our life time. And our leaders are telling us that THIS IS THE BEST AND ONLY MODEL. How do they know? We live in an extremely short moment in time – not even one generation of mankind and we think we know it all. But we have not understood anything!

When is enough – ENOUGH?

Our modern world is based on fossil fuels for our cars, airplanes, air conditioning, plastics, fertilizers etc. But our modern world and economic model is also based on continuous growth. This is the root cause of the problem since all activities from corporations, financial institutions, governments are directed to increase consumption = more use of resources and land = more pollution.

Some of you may know about Abraham Maslow and his theories about the human needs. First our basic physiological needs of food etc. Then we evolve searching for safety, love and a higher meaning with life. But what has really happened with our generation is that we are stuck with filling our basic material needs although we already have everything. Media and advertising is used to “create demand”. Bigger, faster, more cars, gadgets, everything....

In a few years we have changed from a world where our human activities were directed to make life better for all to a world where we are continuously indoctrinated to consume more, and more. To buy our happiness. For ourselves and our children. To compete and get rich and richer. *“Who does not want to become a millionaire”*. The standard of living in the world has been increasing and we live longer. But the gap between rich and poor is increasing even faster. And so has pollution. So the question is = When is enough – ENOUGH?

The ultimate world war

The technological development during the last hundred years is almost unbelievable. We are part of a unique moment of human history. These achievements has given us in the rich world possibilities that our grandparents could not even dream about – But also two horrible world wars.

This development has had a great cost for everybody on earth. We have in a short time used an enormous amount of our common resources and created a devastating quantity of waste that is poisoning our water, soil and atmosphere. We are right now fighting the last world war using the most powerful weapon of mass destruction – OIL. This is a war we can never win because it is against life it self. Still we are increasing our deadly emissions.

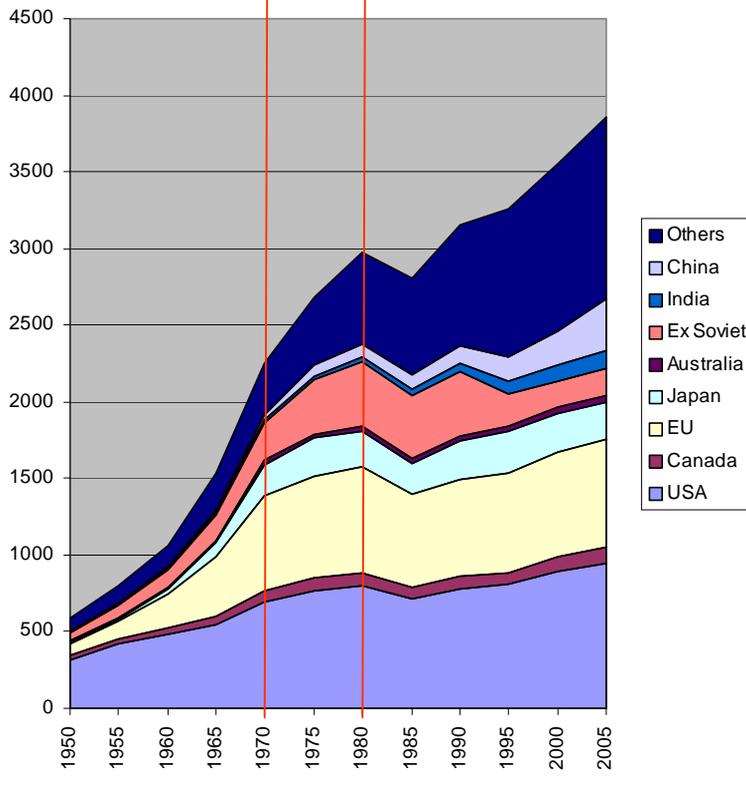
We are the same rich western world who fought the first two world wars. USA alone with only 5% of the world population has been responsible for almost 1/3 of the pollution. Adding Europe and Japan it is 2/3. We have now convinced the rest to follow our example. If Brazil and China would reach the American level they would increase oil consumption twenty (20 times). If India would install as many air conditioners and electrical appliances as USA they need to build 2000 new nuclear power plants. If the world would have as many cars as in America the number of cars would increase with 5 billions.

So what happened after 1949?

Since 1949 the oil consumption in the world has increased 8 times. After the second world most cars and oil consumption was in United States. Many of the other countries were devastated after the war. Europe and Japan were rebuilt with American help and with the new American model. It was the car and toy manufacturing plants that got Germany and Japan rolling. And American airplanes was connecting *“the new brave world”*.

But oil was not restricted to cars and airplanes. Fertilizers, chemicals and machines mechanized the farming. Instead of living on locally grown food we changed to meat and black carbonated coke. All production was centralized and uniformed. Everything was processed, packed and shipped in an increasing number of trucks. Black asphalt became wider and longer roads. Concrete and steel for skyscrapers. And we were all watching this American dream on TV *“Made in Hollywood”*. The American way of life was now becoming the European & Japanese way of life.

Oil consumption Mil. Ton



So what happened after 1969?

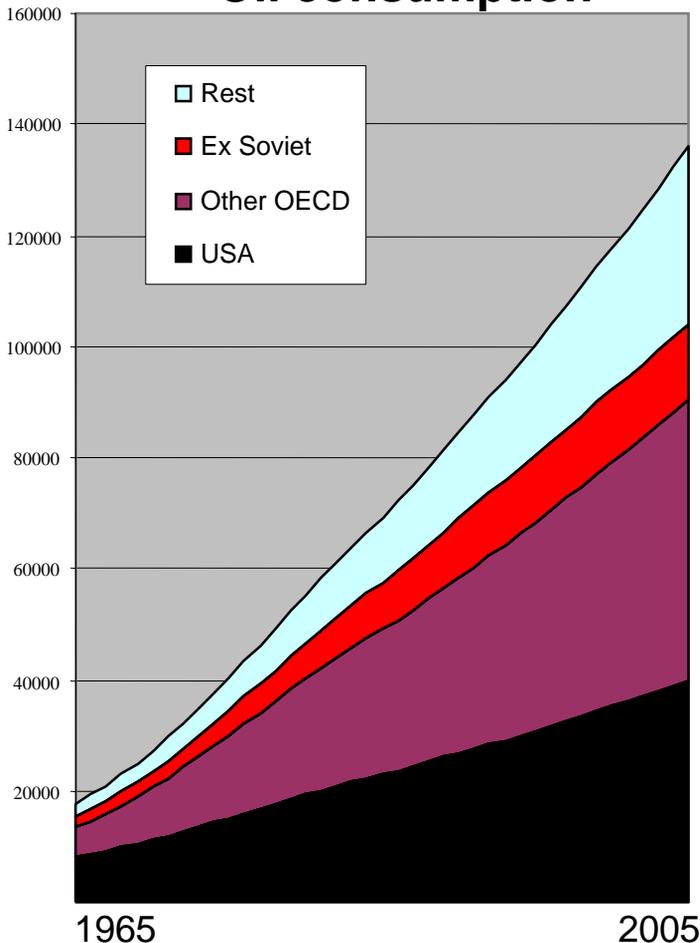
The new American way of living based on consumerism was spreading throughout the Anglo-American sphere but also to western Europe and Japan who was rebuilt after the second world war. A new urbanized world with more cars, processed food and shopping centers replaced the small decentralized society with local farms and entrepreneurs.

The European version had more emphasis on the community and social well fare. Still this new material world with increased pollution, social gaps and suppression of the third world culminating in the Vietnam war sparked the protest movement in the end of the 1960s all over the west. A new young & critical generation was demanding a new and better world with love, peace, solidarity and equality. I was part of that new generation.

But what really happened was that the “capitalism”, “Imperialism” and “materialism” we criticized became the ONLY WAY. The new super capitalism with quarterly profit targets and minute by minute stock index became the dictating rules we called “the free market” that decided everything. State enterprises were sold out. What we called privatization and deregulation became the largest concentration of power and money throughout history. Mergers and acquisitions created huge transnational corporations now also including the media. Branding and advertising increased more than one hundred times and told us 24/7 to consume more. A new generation of young men became multimillionaires on handling other peoples money. The bonuses sky rocketed and so did the income gap. Any sense of proportions disappeared. The MARKET had silently taken over. Greed had become the prime driver. And consumption increased.

The silent revolution

Accumulated
Oil consumption



This silent revolution changed the world to a Monopoly game and Las Vegas casino. We forgot all the protests from the young generation who now became the consumer generation. Consumerism replaced communism in Eastern Europe and China.

All ideologies were dead and basically all political, economic and industrial leaders were shipped the new money theistic religion. To consume more became the ONLY message. Everything was commercialized and for sale. To stimulate higher consumption with lower interest rate & tax cut became the only intervention of the state. The democracy our grandparents had fought for was now reduced to casting a vote every four years but the real power was somewhere else, out of control.

The Soviet collapse “saved us” temporarily since their consumption fell dramatically. But with China and India adding to the Asian “tiger economies” the growth continued. And so did the pollution. Globalization became the new mantra. From the awareness of 1969 we reached the total unawareness of 1999.

But then the global temperature started to rise.....

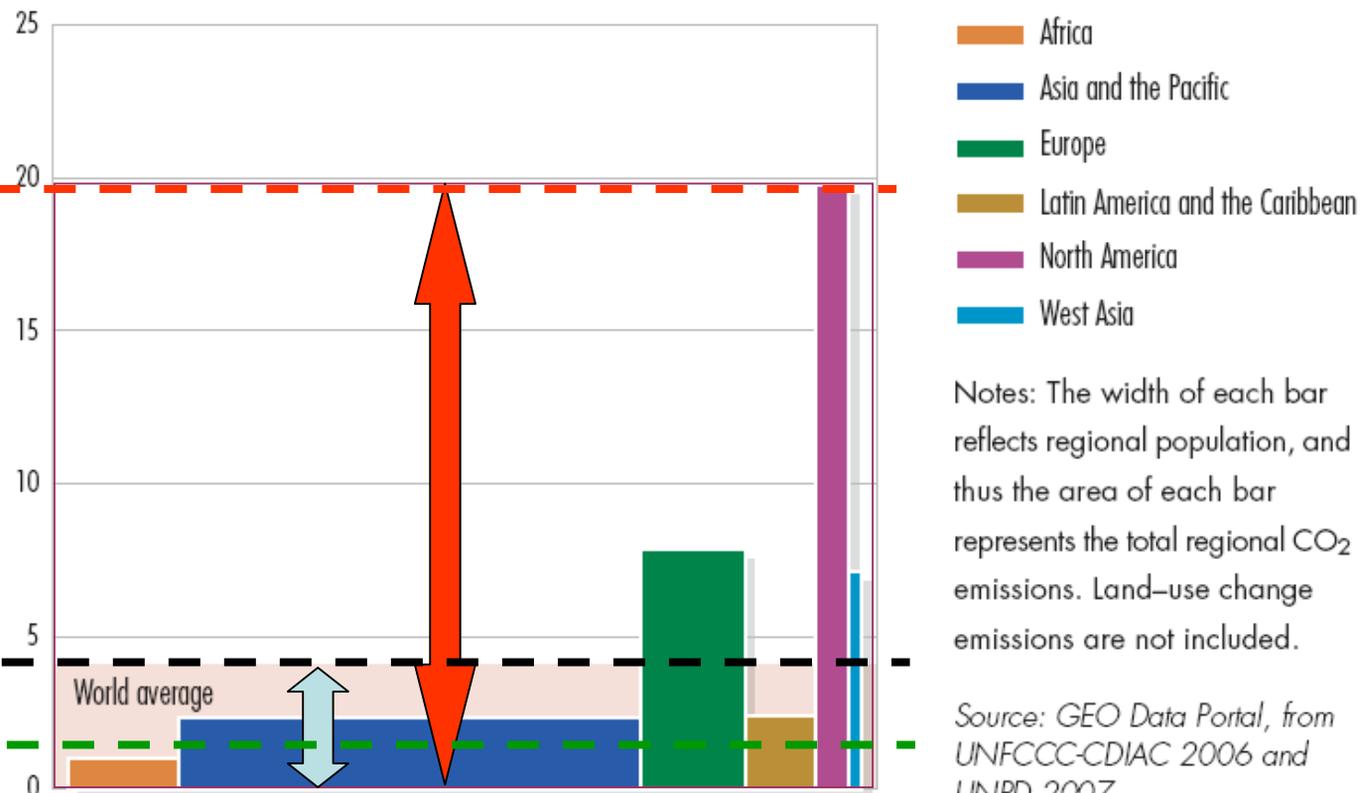


The problem is that the world can not sustain the American way of life

The bucket is already full!

Figure 2.17 Per capita CO₂ emissions at the regional level in 2003

CO₂ emissions in tonnes per capita



The American level

Today

The Sustainable level

The new mass “Culture”

How is it possible that a North American pollute carbon dioxide 3 times a European, 10 times a South American or an Asian and 20 times an African man, woman and child? And for household, industrial and hazardous waste this ratio is even bigger.

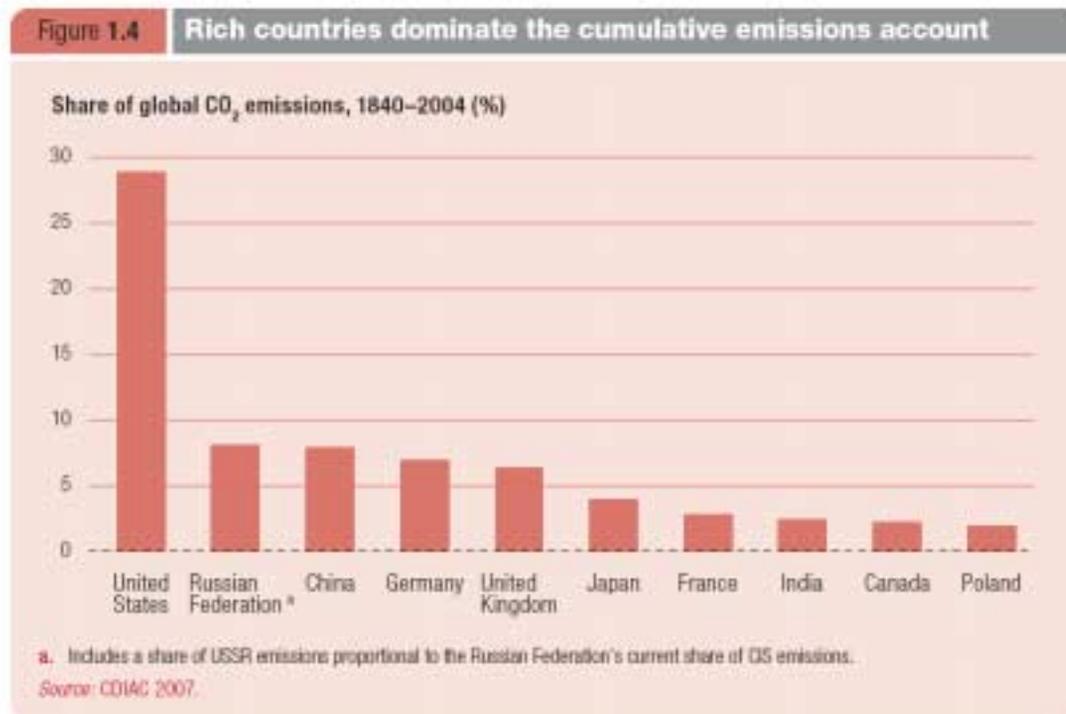
It is because our urbanized consumerism with cars, freeways, shopping centers, drive-through, credit cards, air conditioning, processed food and plastic gadgets was developed in USA. The American dream was built on a new “unspoiled” continent with as it seemed limitless resources for infinite growth.

When I lived in California in the 1980s I experienced the life style that after 5 -10 years had reached the American east coast, another 5 – 10 years reached Europe and not until now is reaching the upper middle class in what we call “the emerging markets”. The other 80% of the world wants to join the party. I also experienced the pollution and efforts to mitigate this – 20 years ago. What has been the Hollywood and Las Vegas dream for fame and fortune for a small and privilege part of our world has now become our global nightmare that our only earth cannot sustain.



We are to blame (US, AU, CA, JP, EU)

It is now a fact that the burning of fossil fuel result in increased concentration of carbon dioxide in the air and this creates the global warming. It is also a fact that about 50% of this pollution stays in the atmosphere for hundreds of years. We are carrying our history with us. So therefore it is a fact that we in the rich western world with USA in the lead are responsible for what is happening now. But what we now call “The emerging markets” in Asia who produces our cheap consumer gadgets but also more cars are catching up! But it is our model, our corporations, our super market and our consumer addiction that is driving this.



EU Total

Another International Conference

Stockholm was in April 2008 once again hosting a huge international conference on the environment called Resilience 2008. Hundreds of scientists once again gave hundreds of presentations. And the conclusion was the same:

"The pace of climate change seems to have been underestimated by researchers to date. This is compounded by the growing risk of critical threshold effects in the world's glaciers, forests, soils and seas, which can exacerbate the climate effect. Deep-rooted and overall social, economic and ecological changes are needed. We really need to strengthen the resilience of the world's societies and ecosystems, says Brian Walker, Director of the international network of scientists Resilience Alliance."

"For the first time in the history of mankind, the research community see signs that global environmental changes are seriously threatening the wellbeing of our societies. Climate change, deforestation, soil destruction, declining freshwater resources, loss of biological diversity and depletion of the world's oceans are acting together in such a way that researchers cannot rule out catastrophic threshold effects, which risk fundamentally altering the living conditions on Earth within a few decades."

By coincidence this press release came on April 17th the same day President Bush said that USA will continue to increase CO₂ emissions until 2025.

And NO change

"One of the world's leading climate researchers, Dr James Hansen at NASA, now believes that restricting the concentration of greenhouse gases to 450 ppm is not enough and that we must aim for 350 ppm. This is because new research shows that a doubling of the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere risks leading to a 6 degree increase in temperature, not a 3 degree increase as previously thought. A 6 degree increase in temperature would fundamentally affect the conditions for life on Earth and would be no less than a global disaster. Unfortunately other research shows that we are rapidly approaching a doubling compared with the pre-industrial level of 280 ppm.

During the past 150 years, ecosystems have absorbed around half the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by human society — as a gigantic free service to society. However, research now shows that the ability of the seas to buffer mankind's climate debt is declining and that forests, soils and wetlands risk collapsing under the pressure of human exploitation and temperature increase and suddenly changing their role from absorbing greenhouse gases to releasing them.

So am I pleased that basically all scientists now agree that we are facing a disaster?

And that conference after conference is discussing this and what we should do.

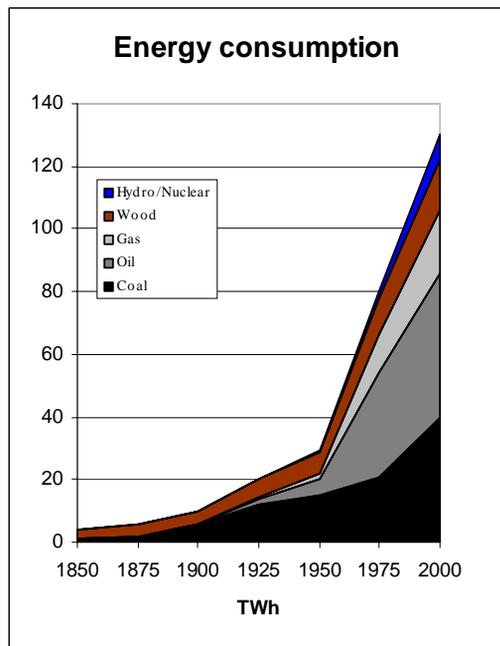
No I am not. We knew this already 1972. Instead I am very ,very tired of listening to the same thing but not addressing the real core of the problem. Our life style. You and me!

That we have to change our very model based on increased consumption! NOW!

Our blind system failure

So once again. It is very simple. The exponential consumption growth during the last sixty years has since the long passed a sustainable level. The limit of growth was known already 1972. We cannot grow for ever.

We have only one planet. Our blindness to this simple fact is our largest failure. But we are still preaching this in our globalization mania. Some of the growth is due to the increased population covering basic needs. But the big increase has been the rich world with US, EU and Japan becoming “richer”. We have bigger cars and bigger shopping malls and now the gadgets comes from India and China. We feed our cattle with corn so we can eat more meat. Now we are running out of oil and causing global warming so we need to grow bio fuel. But our food prices are skyrocketing. We are running out of land. We have in the same way increased our ocean fishing so this is now on the brink of collapsing. And still with all these problems our political and economical leaders are telling us that we need to stimulate the consumption to avoid a recession. How can we be so stupid?



Our Sixty Years Dead End Street

We are traveling with an increasing speed in the wrong direction but when we notice the road is getting rough we do not even consider to slow down. Instead we are discussing how we can fix the road so we can go even faster – in the same direction. We are blind but we are also mentally brainwashed.

Not by a cruel dictator but by our holy market. When I grew up we called the poor countries of the world – underdeveloped countries. Then this was changed to developing countries – Now they are called “Emerging Markets”.

When I grew up we talked about solidarity, equality and a democratic society for all. Now we hear “liberalization”, “privatization”, “deregulation” and “globalization” as the new “buzz words” in the “New World Order”.

We are now preaching this as “Freedom” to the rest of the world. But this result in larger transnational corporations with more super rich billionaires with even more power. So for whom is this “freedom”? And where are they taking us?

In order to change we need to completely revise our present direction.

Holistic balance instead of linear growth. Long term ecology instead of short term profit. Cooperation instead of competition. Female values instead of male dominance. Local biodiversity instead of uniform globalization.

Although we now FINALLY have discovered the crisis we have NOT understood that this crisis is a result of our way of living and model.

And we have not understood the urgency to change.

Our Guilt and Responsibility

The fact is once again that it is our generation living in the rich western world who are “the guilty ones”. And some are more guilty than others. USA, Australia, Canada, Japan and EU in that order of “guilt”. The simple fact is that the more “successful” economical growth you have the more you consume and the more pollution you create. Which means that there is also different guilt within these countries. The richer you are the more you consume and the more responsible you are, or?

Here comes the problem with the United Nation environmental negotiations now going on for 35 years. The guilt and the responsibility. This year Al Gore and UN IPCC* shared the Nobel Peace Price because of their work to get the global warming on the agenda. I really admire them for this but the fact is that the real situation is much worse. So why did they not say this?

The reason is that the IPCC report is a compromise between more than 100 countries including the rich. And Al Gore although a brave man does not dare to point the finger on the American way of life because then he is political dead in USA. The main problem is that our present system is based on continuous growth by increased consumption. And this is what increases the pollution and causes the global warming. * (International Panel on Climate Change)

My Personal Guilt and Responsibility

After Al Gore got the Accademy Award (Oscar) for his “Slide Show” the main discussion in the rich western countries was about some “facts” that were not 100% correct. When Al Gore was interviewed by CNN after he got the Nobel Pace Price most of the questions was about him and his “personal guilt”. Not about the real problem and what we need to do about it. In Bali USA, Canada, Australia and some European countries tried to shift the focus to the countries with diminishing rain forests like Brazil and with emerging economies like China and India. Also very important problems but not reducing our own guilt.

When we are accused to have done something wrong – or our country has done something wrong, most of us respond with refusal and maybe anger. “Me, we, us - oh no”. “You, they are equally to blame. Or more”. It is very, very difficult to admit being wrong. And it is even more difficult to change.

I have lived or my children have lived in USA, Canada, Australia, Europe and Brazil. I have been flying around to most emerging economies including China & India. So I am guilty as hell. So are you. And I have not been able to change.

Neither have you. This is why we living in the rich world now have to accept this guilt and start the changing process NOW for ourselves and our own societies. And in addition support the rest of the world we have been living on.

It is pay back time!