

SCENARIO 4 – 100.000 FLOWERS

"Choke Beijing of choke in Beijing!" That was the initial slogan of the massive, grassroots boycott movement against the Beijing Olympics that, from the beginning of 2008, spread via the Internet through most of the post-industrial world. China, they claimed, had no respect for human or workers rights, it was dumping its way into others people's jobs, it was backing up dictatorships in order to get oil, it was becoming the biggest CO2 emitter in the world...

Apparently, the protest had little effect. Only two minor countries officially joined the boycott. The media were there, although its reporters had instructions to look slightly beyond the stadiums. Few large advertisers withdrew their support, and these were quickly replaced by others.

The show went on, unaware that something deeper had begun.

Incredulity

The trouble with the Beijing Olympics illustrated the growing feeling that something was very, very wrong with the world's environment, and that politics and economics were responsible for it. China was only a scapegoat, albeit a large one. Once bloggers, followed by the media, had pieced them together, a series of aberrant climate events all throughout the globe seemed to make sense: Saharan heat and drought in Eastern Europe, tropical rains in Britain, while roofs all around the Gulf of Mexico were blown off by hurricane after hurricane... And the sharp rise in gasoline and electricity prices was hitting everyone on the wallet.

This (and Iraq) was enough to carry a reborn-environmentalist Hilary Clinton to the White House in the beginning of 2009. There was hope. Clinton, France's Sarkozy, Germany's Merkel, joined by a growing number of prominent corporate leaders, were all about the environment. But it quickly became clear that they could not deliver. When tough decisions had to be made, such as taxing pollutant activities including intensive agriculture, discouraging car use or creating windmill farms against the will of locals (some of them "bona fide" environmentalists when it came to the rest of the world), they had either no support, or no courage, or both. Nobody was ready to sacrifice anything in favour of unclear returns, and without the certainty that other communities throughout the world would also commit to the same level of effort.

Sure, funding for environment-oriented R&D, whatever that covered, was more than doubled, and some symbolic projects were launched such as Toronto's solar farms. But one of the most visible projects, the 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games which were touted as the world's first "green games", was quickly exposed as pure "green washing": pollutant activity was just outsourced elsewhere, fuel-powered vehicles were replaced by cars powered by fuel-plant generated electricity, most locals were forbidden to use their cars during the event, etc.

To cap it all, 2011 saw the majority of emerging countries leave the fledgling "Kyoto II" talks, complaining (with some reason) that post-industrial countries were in fact denying them the right to grow in order to protect their own standards of leaving.

Environmentalists, as well as a large part of public opinion (especially in the North, it must be said) watched with disbelief as political institutions and large corporations, sometimes despite their best intentions, proved unable to stir the world into an even slightly different direction. Incredulity grew when scientists in labs and startups started showing significant results in many areas: nanotech crystals for efficient, flexible and cheap solar panels, small-size and safe nuclear plants, cheaper and safer (although neither cheap nor safe yet) hydrogen production and storage, efficient and versatile isolating materials and fabrics, recyclable oil-free plastics, high-yield and low-input genetically modified crops...

It seems that we "*knew*" how to make the world more sustainable. So, why did we not "*do*" it? And without ever deciding it, people started to do it themselves.

Reboot

Blogs and other websites and internet-based networks triggered the change. Some, perhaps most of them, initially focused on the most satisfying task: exposing the bad "eco-practice" of others, especially corporations or celebrities (XposeThem.org), denouncing SUV drivers by name (SUVthepla.net), etc. Others were sharing advice, best personal practices, practical and consumption tips for "greasy" (green and easy) living.

Then an Italian startup came up with cute, portable and easy to use "Ecogotchis", little fun personal carbon-footprint calculators that impersonated all kinds of animals who would choke if you drove, flew or heated your swimming pool too much. These and their many variants, since the design was deliberately open-source, sold by the millions. Thousands of compatible websites recorded Ecogotchi profiles and provided advice and simulations, forums, networking between like-minded owners, etc. Other entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to offer individuals, families and organizations clever and useful ways to reduce their carbon footprint (with instant automated Ecogotchi update): local carbon offset markets in the form of money or community services, open car-sharing mechanisms that paid those who (even very occasionally) took someone else in their car, jobs and places for pooling and sorting recyclable materials...

All this was nice, although very First World and very middle class. It certainly did not change the situation in China, the Middle East or the Parisian suburbs very much. But it slowly changed public spirit. This came to be seen most clearly when, after the deadly bombings that killed 4,000 people on the closing days of the 2012 London Olympics, public opinion clearly rejected the new batch of security measures their governments tried to enforce, and especially those that would restrict travel or impose strong controls over the internet. And things quickly went back to normal, except for the fact that several innovative companies came up with novel ways of organizing teleconferences or virtual workspaces, to teleparticipate in public events, etc.

The network that Ecogotchists and others had formed spanned the globe and included more than a hundred million individuals and organisations. It soon found other uses. After massive floods in Bangladesh killed or displaced millions of people, and while

governments and international institutions were trying to find the money to act in a serious way, a series of grassroots solidarity initiatives on the Net undertook to collect money, medicines, blankets, food, mobile communicators as well as organizing missions for physicians, technicians, construction workers or teachers. Sure, some of these initiatives were so amateurish that they sometimes made the situation on the ground worse rather than better, and a few others were scams – But it had happened, it had helped, and people felt rightly proud about it.

Invention

Some of the technologies that were still in the labs in 2010 started hitting the market near 2015. In affluent suburbs, people would proudly line up their roofs with sick-them-up solar coatings, wear intelligent fabric T-shirts in their isolated interiors during winter, and boast about how few things they owned (as opposed to renting them or hiring specialized help when needed). The cleverest corporations had hired the best and most innovative designers to make sustainable living not only "right", but pleasant, and also an object of pride. Recycling centres became destinations, other products would recycle themselves into useful or funny trinkets. "SharedOne" beacons would broadcast the shareable status of any object, from cars to drilling machines, and families would rate each other by how much they shared.

Innovation was the name of the game. There were several ways of going about it as a company. You could become rich and loathed by coating your innovation with a shiny armour of patents, as BP did with its PersonalHydrogen (TM) system; or you could be loved and not-so-rich by publishing your designs as open-source. A few people managed to be both loved and rich at the same time but eventually, the vast majority would end up one way or another.

This was a time when thousands of new products and services were marketed every month, often with good chances of success. People were eager for "cool & good" novelty, "good" meaning both demonstrably good for the environment, and good for oneself. Biotech firms started selling personal enhancement drugs such as memory, sense or stamina extension, as well as others that would colour your skin or eyes, or make them glow in the dark while improving night vision.

The great thing about these drugs was that the effect was reversible. Or at least, that was the idea. The intense focus on innovation also resulted in excessively fast marketing of untested products, which in some cases killed or permanently injured thousands of their early adopters. However, in general, consumer networks and forums would quickly reveal product flaws, force recalls and compensations and if needed, expose irresponsible firms to the wrath of their readers.

Whether in the proprietary or in the open-source universe, however, most innovation happened in a networked way. People would test something very close from their prototype stage, others would improve or copy, while others still would adapt it to other uses. Networks, both technical and human, became considered a crucial resource, and internet neutrality (the "internet" by then encompassed almost all wired and wireless networks) became constitutional in several countries. Innovation angels, microcredit, local exchange systems and even local currencies such as Linden dollars or Berliners, flourished and established de facto exchange rates "via" internet exchanges. Otherwise

rather closed borders would easily open for individuals with ideas, capital or good connections.

After a slow start late 2007, the "One Laptop Per Child" initiative, since then renamed "One Communicator Per Child" (OCPC), had slowly made progress. By 2018, when the 400 millionth machine was handed to a kid in Botswana, it became clear that, in those countries that had not resisted its clearly American-Democracy, Constructivist-Education slant, OCPC was making a difference. A new class of entrepreneurs, citizens and consumers was emerging in the Third World, self-taught by working with the machine and with others as much as they had been taught by often clueless teachers, reasonably fluent in English since local OCPC translations were so bad and unable to keep up with the new applications. Since they shared a common culture, they were quickly integrated into the global innovation and discussion networks.

This in turn contributed to faster, although still very unegalitarian, development in several countries. Birth rates started decreasing slowly. Literacy soared. CO2 emissions did not rise much because foreign help came under strict conditions, and because customers everywhere around the world had easy means to check on how the products they saw in stores had been produced.

Self-regulation

By 2025, it was estimated that although governments had taken few successful initiatives, CO2 emissions were 30% below their 2010 levels and that the decrease in emissions was becoming faster.

Many people felt that the dynamics that had allowed such sweeping changes in the world's production model should also happen elsewhere. Public education systems were slowly deserted in favour of private schools, P2P schools, networked schools, "de-schools" and other means of education. Public transportation systems became at most an information hub and a network of subway tunnels, whereas vehicles, lines, ticketing, etc. were handled by competing companies. Health systems split into myriad of community or specialized schemes and insurance policies. Full retirement pensions almost stopped being an option: only the weakest and the sickest elderly persons could expect support from the large central pension systems, whereas others would have to look for other resources.

After a series of dramatic incidents with insufficiently tested products, the hundreds of "Eco-labels" that had flourished since 2008 became "Safer Eco-labels". Delivering such labels to an entity or a product was supposed to follow a more or less thorough evaluation of its environmental soundness, worker conditions, and user safety. Not all of these labels were themselves safe, though, since they were run by private companies which competed for the business of labelled firms. But in general, with some help from consumer networks, media and (in the last resort) governments, the system worked.

In the summer of 2023, a series of dirty nuke and bioterrorist attacks on 4 continents made it clear that innovation had also put new, cheap and efficient means of destruction into the hands of groups who either resented the world's changes, or just wanted to take advantage of it. An intense world chase, combining law enforcement agencies and savvy netheads, quickly unveiled a network of post-terrorist and mafia groups. It soon became

clear that, in a world where everything was in constant flux and no control mechanism was foolproof for more than a week, those groups were multiplying and growing. It was even realized that in some cases, they shared training facilities (and maybe more) with some of the private security agencies to which law enforcement had been outsourced in a majority of US states and cities. However, although they did create stronger independent evaluation bodies, governments were no longer in a position where they could go back to running large police forces by themselves.

On a local level, the regulation of most of the urban space was privatized or transferred to communities, which sometimes led to the emergence of barriers or inner-city border, especially between affluent and poorer communities. Most non-privatized public spaces and services fell into disrepair, sometimes to be replaced by innovative commercial or grassroots substitutes, sometimes not.

It was getting difficult to be weak, or illiterate, or chronically sick, or just plain contemplative, in such a world. The most mundane transaction required you to choose between dozens of providers, channels and pricing options. You could rarely expect any solidarity mechanism to work for you except if your community decided you needed to be helped, and – besides supposing that you "*had*" a community to go to – came at a price. A number of religious or traditionalist communities thrived by welcoming those who felt ill at ease in a world without any fixed point.

Acceleration

By 2028, FabLabs, small scale automated workshops capable of manufacturing almost any household or lifestyle product, even some of smarter ones, after the simple download of its model, which had started populating mom & pop stores throughout the world in the 2020s, began to be sold in homes. Among the largest manufacturers, several those who had failed to adapt went down or were forced to sell themselves at a bargain. Philips and Intel were this year's main casualties.

Having already privatized many of the services they used to run, with other public services in disarray for lack of funding and/or of users, traditional governments undertook drastic reforms. Their role was mostly focused on ensuring the transparency and the loyalty of markets, ensuring the performance and neutrality of all networks, and supervising the labelling industry. They were often in charge of law enforcement and disaster recovery and more rarely, of education. The intense scrutiny they were subjected to by citizen networks effectively prevented them from extending their role again, or from thinking long-term. Some governments also reinvented themselves as forums for public discussion and collective decision-making, whereas in other places, it was considered there were better mechanisms to do that.

As supervisors of the "Safer eco-labels" and other labelling activities, governments would also determine which of the most challenging human alterations could only be provided by labelled firms: Cloning, gene editing, high-level augmentations...

With public and private money, the UN was at last tasked with helping bring Least Advanced Countries into the loop through networking, education and market opening. It was about time. While most of the world thrived, whole countries, but also whole population groups even if the richest of countries, were kept or even fell into abject

poverty. Lagos, Kinshasa, Mexico City and whole parts of Los Angeles were under almost official mafia rule. Yet most citizens did not complain, both because it was unwise to do so and because in daily life, any governance was better than no governance.

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By 2030, the world was still in a frenzy of innovation, with some generally efficient checks and balances trying to make sure this mad ride did not run over too many people. Global warming was happening as planned, but although it was growing fast, the economy was no longer making it worse. Alternative energy sources had reduced the demand on fossil fuels, which had grown decidedly unpopular (and fairly expensive). Water was still a problem, but most countries dealt with it by privatizing their sources and for those who had the money, it made for more rational use of a resource become reasonably expensive.

Affluent people were now looking at ways to benefit from this world by living much longer, looking much better, improving their mental and physical abilities in significant degrees and breeding the cleverest, most beautiful and healthiest babies available – while also testing amazingly powerful and (supposedly) harmless psychedelic hallucinogens. Education, affluence and women employment was bringing down birthrates, although the impact of China's de facto abandon of its One-child policy was slowly bringing world population to an impressive 9 billions. Overall, it was a pleasant world. If you could afford it.