

Comments by Dr. Friedrich von Kirchbach

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Sustainability is seen by many and for good reasons as a key word for the 21st century. Yet the bite of this central notion has been undermined by at least three factors, namely its inconvenience in the sense of Al Gore's inconvenient truth; its acquisition of political correctness and hence loss of authenticity, and the fragmentation of its meaning and in particular the reduction to a technocratic concept at the expense of its cultural depth. What is required is to bring back freshness, depth, and operational dimensions to this key notion. It is against this background, that the book by Bardy, Massaro and Rubens makes an important contribution.

Let me comment on the three aspects cultural depth, my experience with sustainability in the international organizations and indicators.

1. The notion of sustainability has a long and colorful history. It was coined actually three centuries ago in Saxony by Hans-Carl von Carlowitz in his major work *Sylvicultura Oeconomica* of 1713 which laid the cornerstone for sustainable – in German: nachhaltige - forestry and wood production, responding to major concerns about wood supply and prices which threatened Saxony's crucial mining sector after the 30-year war and before the era of fossil fuels began in the 18th century.
2. My experience in the International Trade Centre suggests that it proved to be more difficult to factor in ecological sustainability into ITC programmes than poverty and gender considerations. The major reason has probably been the absence of convenient standardized indicators, a point developed in the book.
3. The lack of appropriate and widely applied indicators limits the operational value of the notion of sustainability. Although there has been a proliferation of private labels relating to sustainability, what is required now is a generalized and simple sustainability indicator, which summarizes from a consumer perspective how sustainable products are. ITC's work on Trade for Sustainable Development and its Standards Map provides a base, but needs to go beyond its current reach.