

## Risks and Outlooks

### Introduction to Social Change Review Special Issue

Burkhard Bierhoff<sup>1</sup>, Hans-Peter Michels<sup>1</sup>\*

<sup>1</sup> Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg (BTU CS), Fakultät für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften, Musikpädagogik, 47 Liepziger Str., 03048 Cottbus, Germany

The introduction to the preceding edition of the *Social Change Review*, with the title *Risks and Challenges*, already included a substantive overview of the issues which contribute, in two volumes of SCR, to the diagnosis of an epochal problem. In this volume the series of articles continues, with an emphasis on solutions. As part of the solution, a new lifestyle, which distances itself from the predominant economics and its consequences (which include such diverse phenomena as corruption, poverty, exploitation, over-consumption, and environmental degradation), is assumed.

Also, with this second volume, it is the intention of the editors to introduce interesting contributions to a professional scientific community, which looks at the social change from unusual perspectives. Thus, the editors and authors hope for a broad and full of controversy, yet fruitful discussion. In particular, the authors are involved with the contributions that are mentioned briefly in the following.

Wolfgang Bonß contributes to the discussion on risk and how to deal with it in modernity. Risk is a specific type of uncertainty. While Bonß understands dangers as independent from subject and situation, risks are always tied to decisions in which subjects prefer some uncertainty to other uncertainties. Dangers are largely beyond personal choice and responsibility. In contrast, the risks are consciously chosen and, therefore, responsibility must be assumed for them. However, risks can be estimated

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\* Contact addresses: [bmbierhoff@web.de](mailto:bmbierhoff@web.de) (B. Bierhoff); [hp.michels@web.de](mailto:hp.michels@web.de) (H.P. Michels)

only in a restrictive manner. Their future consequences are often unmanageable. This is especially valid for the 'new' risks of complex technical systems (nuclear energy, genetic engineering). With the 'new' risks, uncertainty has become the normal instance of modernity. Bonß considers a new type of actor, who, in disaster situations, sovereignly acts and reacts in a risk-aware manner and is able to look beyond measurability and control, is important in risk management.

Benjamin Barber questions the view that corruption has only destructive consequences. Under extremely unequal social conditions - such as in the megacities and inegalitarian societies and unjust states - the consequences of corruption may be quite advantageous for the poor. They are often under enormous pressure to act directly and must deal with awkward situations immediately. They simply do not have the capability of stepping back to look at the world as people of middle and upper class of rich democratic and constitutionally governed countries, who can take the medium and long-term perspectives for life planning, would do.

Hans-Peter Michels re-examines the underclass discourse and analyzes the conditions and consequences of this approach. He shows that the underclass-approach stigmatizes the poor and outcasts from society, stating that they are to blame for their own hardships. This discourse seems to work in an exclusionary and disciplinary manner in the worsening conflicts of post-Fordist capitalism.

Chandran Nair considers that Asian societies have an obligation to initiate a debate on how a sustainable global economy could be built. The current neoliberal form of capitalism, with its destructive excesses, must be changed. The planet's resources are limited. Consequently, we need an efficient use of our resources with regard to economic activity; so that future generations can live decently. Nair recognizes the need to transform capitalism, based on the distinctive Asian model and to overcome the consumerist growth economy.

The basic problem of the present epoch is the preservation of livelihoods. In his concept of voluntary simplicity, Duane Elgin assumes that

the new modesty and simplicity bring us greater satisfaction than consumerism, which continuously expects sacrifice and renunciation, pushing us to deny our immaterial needs concerning family and community life and our human development. Indeed, this simplicity is not to be confused with involuntary and incriminating poverty. An increasing number of people support environmental protection and sustainable development. Post-material value orientations have begun to increasingly replace the materialistic thinking in monetary terms and possessions.

In a final contribution, Burkhard Bierhoff takes on the discourse about lifestyle and sustainability which is already represented by the contributions of Chandran Nair and Duane Elgin. It includes fundamental considerations on consumer capitalism, which is inseparably connected to the risks in modernity and has sparked throughout the world a destructive dynamism far beyond the Western consumerism. He also refers to a new lifestyle concept that considers post-material values such as simplicity, beauty, empathy, and care as central for an 'empathic' civilization.

Overall, the contributions gathered in this volume represent an addition to the previous volume with the title *Risks and Challenges*. Views and outlooks on necessary changes in lifestyle are taken. Together, they suggest an alternative lifestyle must be embedded in a new global order, in which another economic mode of production is prevalent than in the current 'unfettered' capitalism.