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The Promise of a Second Deep Transition

A rethinking of industrial modernity is necessary, given the severe and compounding impacts of the polycrisis on both humanity and the planet. Global warming, mass extinctions, resource depletion, persistent poverty, and rising inequalities all pose existential threats and increase the risk of global conflict and erode democracy. Incremental optimisation of existing systems is insufficient, as today's crises are deeply rooted in the structures established during the Industrial Revolution, I am calling the First Deep Transition. However, the Second Deep Transition does not need to start from scratch—it can build on existing initiatives, knowledge, and momentum for systemic change. Alternative models, such as craft-based production, regenerative agriculture, and ecological water management, have persisted throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, often marginalised but never entirely eliminated. Since the 1970s, the momentum for a Second Deep Transition has grown, driven by the rise of renewable energy, new circular economy practices, calls for sufficiency-oriented consumption, and renewed interest in regional and local economic resilience, stimulated by new security concerns. Nevertheless, the dominant systems of the First Deep Transition remain deeply entrenched

If and when the Second Deep Transition gets more traction, either by design or disaster it needs to usher in a new development paradigm. Since the publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), this paradigm has been framed as sustainable development. Initially, sustainable development carried a radical promise by integrating economic, social, and ecological considerations within a single framework. However, in practice, it often maintained a hierarchical structure that placed economic growth at the centre, relegating social and ecological concerns to secondary roles. A Deep Transition perspective calls for reversing this hierarchy, prioritising social and ecological well-being rather than treating them as externalities of economic growth. Economic development might still occur, but taking a fundamentally different form, one not well measured by GDP-based metrics. Instead, it will emerge from the transformation of socio-technical systems to ensure better access to energy, mobility, healthcare, water, food, communication, shelter, security, and education, while staying within planetary boundaries.

In the first part of the keynote I will examine the role of innovation in the First Deep Transition, arguing that a particular conception of science and technology shaped industrial modernity. This dominant perspective was characterised by three core assumptions: (1) innovation was seen as a necessary and neutral input to development; (2) technological progress originating in the Global North was considered superior and meant to be disseminated to the Global South; and (3) innovation was assumed to be universally applicable, promoting global standardisation. In the second part I will revisit the concept of development and its measurement, critically examining various metrics used to assess sustainable development. I will advocate for a human capability approach that integrates planetary boundaries, demonstrating how it aligns with the Deep Transition framework. In my conclusion I will be proposing converging the Deep Transition perspective with the human capability framework provides a robust foundation for transformative innovation, development policies, and investment strategies that can guide a Second Deep Transition toward more just and sustainable futures. I will argue that this requires a transformative approach to innovation and development that embraces directionality, contextuality, diversity and inclusivity.