

Preface

In May 2015 three of us got together one warm evening in Fjaerland in Western Norway to discuss the future of sustainable development. Sitting on the edge of the fjord, one could have imagined that it had already been achieved. The discussion then turned towards the progress that had been made, the importance of the Brundtland Report and the role that Norway and Canada had played in defining the agenda and the subsequent need for global action.

Subsequently, our thoughts became more focused on the role that social scientists should play in pushing the debate forwards. Much progress has been made on the science of climate change and reductions in the levels of global poverty, but there was still a clear need for improving our understanding of the processes of change, the impacts of innovation, the means to change behaviour, the different societal value systems and many other aspects of the complexity that constitutes sustainable development.

At that point the core team was enlarged to five people and later to the six editors of this book. It was decided to bring together an international group of interdisciplinary researchers from the social sciences to look backwards at the achievements of the Brundtland Report, to comment on its current relevance and to look forwards to the next 30 years. This was an ambitious agenda, but one on which the group of 21 researchers had strong views. Through a series of intensive discussions over the last two years, initial ideas have crystallized around the three themes that form the substantive part of this book. Each of the participants agreed to contribute a chapter that developed one or more of the themes—negotiating environmental limits; equity, needs and development; and transitions and transformation—and then to have their thoughts subjected to review, debate, discussion and criticism so that their individual positions could then be refined and a much more coherent narrative produced.

This book is the outcome of that process, and it reflects the diversity of views among eminent social scientists on sustainable development. Throughout the process of editing this book, it has been this divergence of views and the acknowledgement of the different perspectives that has maintained the enthusiasm of the group. The debates have often fluctuated between optimism and pessimism, but throughout there has been a willingness to learn from others, and such interaction between the different social science traditions has provided the energy needed to bring this diversity into one volume—we hope that you enjoy reading it.

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