

(Author chronicle)

The future is in our hands

This is something many of us have believed for a long time. Whether we are contemplating our future under a cherry tree in the Swedish archipelago, or sitting in a Manhattan coffee shop enjoying a fair trade organic latté, or waiting for rain under an Acacia tree in Western Africa. The future is in our hands. But, the fact is, it is only recently that science has proved that this is actually the case for all of us on Earth. This is something new. In the past, we have not thought of ourselves as a global force of environmental change. Now we have all become Earth engineers. Today we face a grand challenge to make a global transition to sustainability. Our goal must be not only to preserve the beauty and richness of nature, so that future generations can marvel at a young orangutan moving through the rainforest or a trio of dolphins racing the bow of a ship, but also to safeguard a prosperous future for humanity. We must shift the focus of our actions from the individual, the household, the community, the business sector, or the nation to the entire world.

Over the past 50 years, humans unsustainable ways of living have begun to put massive pressure on the planetary processes that support our well-being and economic development.

We have become our own geological epoch, the Anthropocene, where we are putting ourselves and our children's prosperity on Earth at stake. This is mind-boggling and disturbingly gloomy. Still, despite all obstacles and global risks, we believe we have reason to be optimistic.

Why? The first reason for hope is knowledge. We are the first generation of humans to know that we have become a threat to our own existence as a modern civilization. Denial and doubt is no longer an option. The evidence of anthropogenic influence is too strong. In a world where glaciers are melting, coral reefs collapsing, species lost at a pace of global mass extinction, our seas rapidly acidifying, our soils and freshwater degrading, and our air being polluted, in such a world, denial fades away and becomes as backward, outdated, and ridiculous as Holocaust denial. We need no more knowledge to act.

The human quest before us is now immense, larger than anything we humans have ever undertaken during our time on Earth. We are convinced that our global dilemma is our most significant asset, because it kicks us into the deep end, reconfigures our brains, opens our minds to a new era, a global window of opportunity.

Now humankind know. The handwriting is on the wall. Business as usual is dead as a strategy. Now the transformative era of the human modern journey on Earth starts, and we are convinced that humanity will enjoy the ride.

In our book we have tried to convey, to the best of our ability, the voice of Earth through the language of science and photography.

Our conclusions are built on the perspective of nine planetary boundaries interactively combined, defined as: climate change, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone, biogeochemical, global freshwater use, land system change, biodiversity loss,

chemical pollution, and aerosol loading. Exceeding these nine planetary boundaries are propelling the human race towards catastrophic risks. We know that action needs to be taken now, in what may be the worst decisive decade in human history. With a fundamental shift in mindset, humanity can succeed in a transition to global sustainability. Our book *The Human Quest-Prospering within planetary boundaries* can help turn the page to that new paradigm.

Despite its emphasis on growing risks, our story is an optimistic one.

New insights can trigger change. We are convinced that the current turbulence in the world can provide a fertile social ground for novel ideas. Crises are often a precondition for change. We also believe that we have found ample evidence of ways to steer clear of many of the global threats we face.

The great quest of our age is to unleash human ingenuity to achieve a grand transition to global sustainability. We need nothing less than this to create a healthy world for generations to come.

The future is in our hands, today.

Johan Rockström, Director Stockholm Resilience Centre and Chair of the 3rd Nobel Laureate Symposium on Global Sustainability

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