PERSONALISING CONSUMPTION?

The legitimacy of an individual carbon quota scheme in the UK

by

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Thesis Abstract

Current UK lifestyles are largely natural resource depleting, CO_2 emitting and therefore unsustainable. It is in part through institutional and social norms that people are 'locked in' to this behaviour. This paper focuses on current consumption patterns and the concept of governance to analyse the possible introduction of an individual carbon quota (ICQ) scheme as a sustainable consumption policy for the UK.

Criticising 'economism', the thesis explores the legitimacy of an ICQ scheme, and investigates how such a scheme could personalise the climate change problem. With an individual carbon quota it is possible that people would be more connected to and involved in national global warming mitigating actions through personal management of their carbon allowance.

Given the expected strong resistance towards an ICQ scheme, addressing the political feasibility is important. Interviews with pre-selected British professionals have therefore been conducted in order to add further insights.

The research concludes that an ICQ scheme could be a successful sustainable consumption policy for the UK, but this will depend on it being framed in a way that enables the British public to perceive it as fair. A strong case must be made for such a scheme.

Key words:

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The finite planet upon which we live has certain environmental boundaries[1]. If the ecological integrity of the planet is to remain intact it is crucial to aspire to a more bounded existence. Limitless pursuit of affluence and material acquisition by humankind is unsupportable by the planet. This is the case at present when only a fraction of the world live in extreme affluence. If all the earth's human population lived this way, environmental catastrophe would hurriedly be ushered in. It would be necessary to have three planets to cater for all for the people on earth living a European lifestyle, and six for the American lifestyle[2]. Accordingly *"change is essential"* [3].

Several academics have argued that it is not enough to change patterns of consumption – consuming greener – and claim that we will probably need to address actual levels of consumption, which entails consuming less, and ensuring a fairer distribution of consumption of resources at the global level[4]. Among numerous others, the Lithuanian Nobel Prize winner Aaron Klug has stressed real urgency in the need for *"major changes in the lifestyles of the most developed countries - something that none of us will find easy"*[5].

However, while 'greener' consumption may fit into current societal paradigms and may be accommodated within the current market paradigm, the ideas of slowing down, or even reducing consumption levels challenge this reigning market paradigm, and such policies would be challenged by strong vested interests. This means that policymakers tend to be cautious in their approach when discussing consumption policies. UNEP has stated that *"sustainable consumption is not about consuming less, it is about consuming differently, consuming efficiently, and having an improved quality of life"* [6]. In criticism of this definition, an actual curb on consumption to reduce levels themselves might in fact be necessary. For some, to be genuinely green and take environmental responsibility as a consumer requires consuming less in material terms[7]. By stating that the solution to our environmental, as well as other social and economic problems is not about consuming less, institutions and authorities are avoiding the issue and the controversy of advocating the need for a fundamental attitude change.

Whether reduced consumption levels means reduced human welfare, or whether less consumption could – in the right circumstances - actually increase human welfare, is a debated topic[8]. As it can hardly be expected that people will switch over to more sustainable

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1 e.g. limited natural resources and space to sink pollutants

2 Walter and Simms, 2006, as quoted in Fournier 2008

3 Sustainable Development Commission (henceforth: SDC) report (2009) pg94

4 Jackson (2005); Mont and Dalhammar (2008)

5 Foreword to Royal Society (2000) report

6 United Nations Environment Programme (1999); as quoted in SDC (2003) report

7 e.g. UK Sustainable Development Commission, Environmental Change Institute

8 e.g. Jackson (2005)

consumption patterns voluntarily[9], institutional support is required. That means that positive top-down action could be warranted. For Mont and Dalhammar *"addressing consumption will probably mean that the role of governments needs to change"* [10]. Dealing with consumption policies requires new government approaches[11].

The over-consumption of natural resources and carbon dioxide (CO_2) emitting products in the UK is damaging to the environment, and currently the UK is far off its sustainability targets, especially in the area of climate policy. The country should act to solve its national problems. Accordingly, actions should be taken to reign in these high levels of consumption. In recent years there has been discussion regarding the potential introduction of an individual carbon quota (ICQ) scheme in the UK. The basic principle is simple: If there is a limited amount of CO_2 each individual can emit then there is a limited amount of environmentally harmful consumption that can take place, hence lending support to the goal of sustainability. The ICQ is an example of the kind of policy instrument that we may need in the future when we must maintain the ecological integrity of the planet while still coping with population growth. For the UK to meet its CO_2 emissions targets; addressing climate change and attempting to restrict global warming by only 2-3°C this century, the government may need to adopt an ICQ scheme. This will be controversial because it may require lifestyle changes[12] and potentially infringe individual liberty.

The remit of this thesis project is to ground the ICQ scheme as a sustainable consumption policy in a philosophical legal and political context. Also, the scheme could be presented as a sustainable consumption policy with the potential for reshaping behaviour.

It is relevant to frame the ICQ topic within the larger context of the need for sustainable consumption policies. The ICQ scheme is an example of those policies that may be needed in the future, tackling actual levels of consumption where individuals are restrained by the quotas assigned.

Therefore, this is a thesis to address possible attempts by the UK to best manage climate change with a long-term vision. An exploratory study into the potential for an individual carbon quota scheme is undertaken, considering such a scheme to be a possible solution by addressing the broader problem of unsustainable lifestyles and excessive consumption levels.

1.1 Objective & Research Questions

The current research is lacking a more philosophical or theoretical exploration of the potential to regulate against carbon intensive consumption trends in the UK. The main

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9 Sanne (2002)

10 Mont & Dalhammar (2008) pg3

11 SDC report (2009)

12 such as less travelling

objective of this research paper is to explore the potential moral justification, in terms of political and public feasibility, of an individual carbon quota scheme in the UK.

The following research questions have guided the research project:
(a) To what extent can it be considered morally legitimate for the UK government to legislate to introduce an individual carbon quota (ICQ) scheme?
(b) How could actions to intervene in consumer sovereignty of citizens be justified?

Exploration is made into the proposition that sustainability is achievable only if government takes decisive top-down action. The intention is to introduce the idea of an ICQ as potentially utilisable and perhaps pivotal in fostering requisite levels of environmental responsibility in UK citizens. Government intervention may be justified on the grounds of being necessary for the citizen's well-being.

Ideas about how best to introduce a sustainable consumption policy, necessary for the UK to reach the stated emissions targets committed to in the Climate Change Act 2008[13], merit further analysis due to this being a relatively under-researched area. This calls for a qualitative, exploratory research approach. Such an approach makes it necessary to pay attention to available legal tools, but also to look at the political and social context where law is interpreted and implemented so as to analyse how the institutional setting influences the outcome.

This thesis project is primarily grounded in environmental sustainability. However, the exploration raises issues in the areas of social and economic sustainability: through the concept of governance as requiring greater stakeholder participation, and through focus on the demand side of the economy.

1.2 Methodological overview

The epistemological position taken here is situated between positivist and phenomenological paradigms. The researcher is influenced by 'Critical Theory'[14] and the proponents of a more 'reflexive' research process. I am not isolated from the object of study, so simultaneously influence how reality is framed and studied. My thesis seeks to describe reality but also, when relevant, discuss social constructions of this reality.

1.2.1 Research process

The first stage was identification and examination of available literature, which included the reading of government reports, independent research documents, academic articles, and the content of some websites[15]. Whilst there is research available about individual carbon quotas

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13 2008 (c.27)

14 Geuss (1981)

15 e.g. RSA Carbon limited; Tyndall Centre: Online Ref. 1 Appendix C

(tending to be called 'personal carbon allowances' or 'PCA') more generally, there is little written specifically on the issue of the moral legitimacy of such a scheme.

I have focused on the literature that appears most suitable for the topic. In order to reduce personal bias when selecting literature, ideas and theories, I have relied on well-known literature in the field of sustainable consumption and environmental governance for guidance, and also personal contacts with researchers in the field.

The second stage was to structure the thesis so as to pull together the literature and ideas extracted to begin to make an exploratory case for the possible justification of a mandatory individual carbon quota scheme in the UK.

The empirical section was undertaken so as to speak with those who would be working with the hypothetical ICQ scheme. The main interview objective is to discover what themes and issues the respondents stress as vital. Thus, the interviews introduce a 'real-world' element to the research. The literature analysis provided themes for the interviews. More on my methodology for this is in SECTION 4.

1.2.2 Structure of the Thesis
There are five main sections:

SECTION 1.
The concept of sustainable consumption forms a starting block from which criticism is leveled against economism[16]. After this the concept of ecologism is discussed.

SECTION 2.
The role of governments, the role of the individual and the role of the individual as part of a broader collective is analysed. Some discussion of the developments of rights is included as prelude to a subsection about the nature of freedom. The concept of governance is discussed, broaching the possibility of establishing a new managerial role for government as a facilitator of stakeholder dialogue. This is followed by a discussion regarding whether paternalism is appropriate in the environmental sustainability context. Here some of the ideas from 'Nudge'[17] about neuro-economics and choice architecture are presented.

SECTION 3.
The ICQ scheme is further elaborated upon. This includes some design considerations, comparisons between a carbon tax and a carbon quota scheme, as well as between a voluntary or mandatory ICQ scheme.

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16 i.e. the prevalent prioritisation of the needs of the economy over those of society more generally or the environment itself.

17 Thaler & Sunstein (2008)

Contains the results of interviews conducted with British professionals. This research serves to add some further 'real-world' insights to the project, given the likely political and public resistance to such a scheme.

Makes the final concluding comments and highlights how this research could continue.

1.3 Limitations

An explorative, qualitative research project such as this one will always entail a number of limitations, especially given the restriction of time and space. One limitation concerns the depth of philosophical analysis given to some of the core themes, such as freedom and the issue of justified restraint of the individual for the sake of the collective, because of the desire to keep the project at a 'pragmatic' level. Taking a policy-maker's perspective, the author considers it as most valuable to ground the thesis in possible real-world application as opposed to attempting resolution of largely irresolvable and ultimately subjective issues, such as freedom. Thus, while theories on the nature of freedom and the role of governments are utilised, the thesis seeks to use this knowledge and relate it to the legitimacy of consumption policy and more specifically an ICQ scheme, rather than to examine these theories per se.

The final section of the thesis contains some empirical research findings. This section is limited due to resource and time constraints, of both the interviewer and those interviewed. The methodology and limitations of this particular section are elaborated further therein.

This exploration requires discussion of controversial and value-laden concepts. Although a researcher may attempt to be absolutely objective, there are inevitably some preconceptions that will influence the study process. Where it is accepted that research generated will always contain some element of subjectivity, then the definition of objectivity shifts from one of an 'absolute' objectivity towards self-awareness in the researcher. Philip[18] calls this 'objective subjectivity'; where self-criticism and reflexivity may be used to increase the researcher's understanding of 'pre-understandings' involved. Jamieson states that, "*Rather than seeking to achieve a false sense of objectivity and academic distance in relation to the topics that are under investigation, we should instead try to develop a more conscious sense of our own intellectual engagement, combining the detachment of the scientist with the passion of the participant*."[19]

In this thesis I am aware of my own position and the need for transparency when considering how this may influence the research. More specifically, my personal bias will to some extent

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18 Philip (1998)

19 Jamieson (2001) pg40

influence the theories and literature that I have focused on in the research process. I have tried to overcome this bias through seeking advice from a large number of people with different ideas and experiences, and through consulting the academic literature. It is hoped that my own position does not unsettle the research contribution more generally. With this objective subjectivity stated and elaborated we now proceed.

1.4 Intended Audience

What follows is discussion of a relatively new idea, presented as guidelines for actual application. The author tried to adopt a policy-makers perspective in dealing with these issues. By taking a policy-makers perspective, the author chooses to concentrate on the issues that a policy-maker must deal with when introducing an ICQ scheme, and especially the issues relating to the legitimacy of a scheme. Therefore the intended audience is primarily those who would be instrumental in the introduction of an ICQ scheme, if deemed necessary into the future.

The project is also aimed at anyone interested in the broader justification of an individual carbon quota scheme.

2. CONSUMPTION, ECONOMISM & ECOLOGISM

This thesis project addresses the problem of the current lifestyle 'choices' made by the British public, in particular the already high and growing levels of materialism that UK citizens as consumers aspire towards. It is argued that the present trends are unsupportable by the planet.

The purpose of this project is not to rehash the age old debate, trying to establish to what level it is legitimate for a government to intervene in the lives of those it governs but this time with ecological motivations for sustainability. Rather, the immediate purpose is to explore the potential for an ICQ scheme as a means to develop environmental values in the UK by addressing the prevailing system itself. It is considered necessary to shift focus from the public as consumers to that of citizens. The idea is that the government is in a position to encourage the development of values that the society possesses, and it does so by subsidising norms that it supports.

2.1 Consumption

At its simplest, consumption is the use of commodities to satisfy needs and wants.

2.1.1 Introduction to the Consumption Problem

Prioritisation of material consumption, the source of stability in our society, means that the economy, political institutions and even the popular media all serve the task of continuous economic growth. This operates to make the public believe that the pursuit of higher material prosperity is the expected behaviour or even a patriotic duty[20]. For Mont and Dalhammar, the "clear tendency towards increasing incomes, lending to the growing purchasing power of individuals stimulated by the advertising industry and market push and being guarded by the sovereignty [of consumers] principle leads to increasing consumption"[21]. However, greater consumption levels does not necessarily equate to greater well-being[22].

An ICQ scheme could go some way towards conveying to the British public the necessity for personal behaviour change. The ICQ scheme could also address important questions about the scale of consumption, the nature of consumer behaviour and the relevance of lifestyle change; all important aspects of the sustainable consumption debate[23]. On a deeper level, serious examination of the sustainability ideal involves questioning fundamental assumptions about the way modern society functions. One major barrier to serious committed discussion on the subject of sustainable consumption is the threat that this

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20 e.g. Beckmann et al (2001); Princen (1999)

21 Mont & Dalhammar (2005) pg5

22 e.g. Roepke (1999), Kasser (2002), Max-Neef (1995)

23 Sustainable Development Commission report (2003) pg4

represents to numerous very powerful vested interests. There are many who stand to gain, or rather are currently gaining under the present system. They will stand in staunch opposition to any shift in consumption and consumer practices.

There are various definitions of the term 'sustainable consumption', which propose that it will be vital for people to start consuming: (a) differently, (b) responsibly, or (c) less in quantitative terms[24]. As already stated, it may be necessary to actually curb consumption, as the last option proposes.

2.1.2 The Individual and Consumption

Given that 40% of the UK's carbon emissions come directly from the domestic sector[25], it seems evident that this area must necessarily be targeted for control and reduction if the country is to have any hope of achieving the desired emissions level as specified in the recent Climate Change Act[26], or before that as set out in the Kyoto Protocol[27]. Here 'domestic sector' means the contribution by households and from the general public at home. However, it could be claimed that almost 100% of the UK's carbon emissions come from activities for the domestic sector and the British public at large: an indirect contribution or even a motivation for production. This only strengthens the call to target this area and the ensuing high levels of carbon-intensive consumption.

Consumption is essentially an act to provide wellbeing by meeting human needs and wants. However, it is possible to view consumerism as a social and psychological pathology – it doesn't really make people 'happier' and yet they will keep doing it nonetheless[28]. Here some discussion of prosperity is apt. The most recent Sustainable Development Commission report expounds that the *"ability to participate meaningfully in the life of society[29]"* is a key attribute of prosperity, defined as human success and wealth in broad terms[30]. There is also a documented weak correlation between economic growth/GDP and reported happiness in rich countries[31], where materialism is not conducive to wellbeing (except arguably for the very poor)[32]. There is some sense of great tragedy in the destruction of the natural environment for the pursuit of a lifestyle that does not seem to accomplish the intended goal of a better life.

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24 ibid pg14

25 House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (2007-08)

26 as above, footnote 13

27 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

28 SDC report (2003) pg26

29 foreword to SDC report (2009)

30 SDC report (2009) pg7

31 e.g Max-Neef hypothesis: Max-Neef (1995)

32 Kasser (2002); Kasser (2007) for SDC report (2009)

This idea of consumer 'lock-in' demonstrates how factors such as convenience, habits and norms influence people's behaviour. A powerful case has been made demonstrating that citizens are often 'locked-in' to unsustainable consumer practices by the social and institutional norms and even the structures themselves[33]. On this perspective, it is vital the government shift the institutional architecture of consumer 'lock-in'. Elsewhere it has been argued that, "*infrastructure...can be designed to prompt consumers into more sustainable behaviour or to lock-in consumers to very unsustainable actions*[34]. There is necessity for governmental coordination of mass social change, and some of Thaler & Sunstein's ideas in 'Nudge' about choice architecture are relevant. Past choices, technology, economic incentives, institutions, personal psychology, alongside the existing culture and social systems are all important in appreciating why the UK[35] is locked into its current consumption trends.

Consumption also has a symbolic role for display and status seeking. For some, construction and reconstruction of identity through consumption is a defining feature of modernity[36]. Consumption forms part of the search for belongingness, statement of affiliation, group identity, allegiance to ideals and distancing oneself from other ideals. Simplistic appeal to cease the current form of consumption will not work. Consumption is incredibly intricate and complex. The consumption literature often separates 'needs versus wants', where the latter can be seen as relative needs arising from comparison with other people[37]. Relentless material display and status competition is a problematic necessity of this prevailing lifestyle. For the Jackson report this is referred to as 'novelty' and is what drives the economy[38].

It is clear that there are many motivations and underlying explanations of current consumption practices. Where it is accepted that the current trends are ecologically unsupportable then positive action must be taken if the UK is to become a sustainable society.

The majority of UK citizens profess to share a concern for social and environmental issues but place a low priority on these in their current consumption choices39. This gap between attitudes and action40 is one of the points that this thesis intends to address: Why does this anomaly exist – is it hypocrisy? The argument is no, and rather that people in the UK exist as both citizens and as consumers. The values they have as citizens cannot be realised by them

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33 Sanne 2002, Mont & Dalhammar (2008)

34 Mont & Dalhammar (2008) pg5

35 or indeed any country

36 Bocock & Thompson (1992)

37 Jackson (2005)

38 SDC report (2009) section 'Confronting Structure' pg60-66

39 SDC report (2003) pg7

40 Vlek et al (2000)

as consumers due to prevailing social forces and the 'lock-in'[41]. This is why top-down action is imperative, giving guidance and support to community initiative undertaken by individuals in pro-social and pro-environmental co-operation[42].

For Vlek et al[43] the necessary individual action of citizen consumers towards securing the ecological integrity of the planet requires convergence of 'needs', 'opportunities' and 'abilities'. It needs to be possible to realise ones values. This is another example of consumer 'lock-in' and the resultant need for positive government action.

2.1.3 Government and consumption

There is much in the academic literature about a changed role for government institutions in a post-traditional, globalised society from one of directional command and control to one of change management[44]. The role for national government is evolving towards one of facilitator in a broad social debate. Government shapes cultural context through its influence on technology, market design, institutional structures, the media, and even the actual moral framing of social goods – that is, what is construed as 'right' in society.

2.2 Economism

The UK's Sustainable Development Commission recently published a new report[45] addressing the possibility of complete reshaping of the traditional understanding of the economy. This is particularly pertinent in this time of financial disturbance when it is necessary to 'fix' the economy. Perhaps it should be done with a longer-term vision.

In the report's section about redefining prosperity, Tim Jackson argues that an *"important component of prosperity is the ability to participate meaningfully in the life of society"*[46], which has much in common with Amartya Sen's vision of development as 'capabilities for flourishing'[47]. It is important to note that these are not simply some set of disembodied freedoms, but rather a range of 'bounded capabilities' necessary to live well - the 'Good Life' within clearly defined limits.

It is stated firmly in the SD Commission's report on making a transition to a sustainable economy that a failure to take seriously the dilemma of growth may be the single biggest threat to sustainability[48]. In asking whether continued economic growth is a necessary

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41 Sanne (2002)

42 Berglund & Matt (2006)

43 Vlek et al (2000)

44 e.g. Stoker (2004); Fisher (2008)

45 SDC report (2009)

46 SDC report (2009) pg7

47 Sen (1999)

48 SDC report (2009)

precondition of lasting prosperity, it is found that economic resilience is certainly important, indeed vital for protecting jobs and securing livelihoods. Does this require continued growth? It is here suggested that although unconventional, the answer is 'no'. Neither Mill nor Keynes believed growth would continue *ad infinitum* … [49]

A green stimulus package in the UK seems like an entirely sensible response for the UK to take to the current economic crisis, after the collapse of the market at the end of 2008. The benefits are considerable, and numerous;

- short term – creation of jobs and economic recovery,
- medium term – energy security and technological innovation,
- long term – sustainable future.[50]

However, such measures remain within the conventional frame, the problematic and essentially unsustainable paradigm. Something more is needed. Companies strive to ensure consumers for their products, and consumers strive for novelty in products they consume[51]. The resulting GDP growth is the basis for stability in our society, but it is argued that the cost - in environmental and social terms - is too high.

2.3 Ecologism

'Ecologism' is an ideological position proposing a radically different society. The thesis now expounds Dobson's take on this philosophy[52]. His description makes definite statement that a *"sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life"*[53]. This can be contrasted with environmentalism, advocating *"a managerial approach to environmental problems"*[54] of the conviction that it is unnecessary to alter the fundamental manner in which humans exist on the planet and utilise natural resources. Environmentalism so construed also sees no need to modify the way we view our relationship with the natural environment. Basically, with such a light green position of weak sustainability[55], humans could continue current levels of production and consumption, making no shift in values that underpin the present prevailing societal structures.

Using Dobson's concept of political ecologism, the problem of over-consumption resulting from the current economy-focused lifestyle practices could be tackled. These practices have

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49 all SDC report (2009)

50 ibid section 'New Green Deal' pg67

51 ibid section 'Confronting Structure' pg59

52 Dobson (2007) Green Political Thought

53 ibid pg3

54 ibid pg2

55 O'Neill et al (2008) pg187

contributed to pathology and mere illusion of improved well-being for people seen primarily as consumers[56]. There is desperate need for the consumer to reclaim the badge of citizen; as stated by the contemporary British writer Ben Okri, *"we must put back into society a deeper sense of the purpose of living"*[57].

After the Limits to Growth report it was believed that "an unexpectedly large number of men and woman of all ages and conditions will readily respond to the challenge and will be eager to discuss not if but how we can create this new future*[58]*". However, we have not seen such action geared towards change, begging the question: why not? Part of the answer could come from the fact that the issues of environmental concern, including global climate change, are collective action problems. What this means is that if action is not undertaken altogether then individuals (and individual nations) could disadvantage themselves by taking action when others do not do so.

One of Dobson's ideas for better environmental practices, and particularly pertinent for the purpose of this thesis, is that of ecological citizenship. One of the main reasons for pushing an individual carbon quota over a carbon tax as the preferred solution to reducing UK's carbon emissions is because of the double dividend, (a) removing the failed frame with its blind economism pandering to the false conception that growing material prosperity leads to better standard of living[59]; but also, (b) fostering a sense of connectedness with our environment as if humans are stewards of our planet, empowered to make the best choices with a much longer time perspective, using but not misusing the earths resources.

The political will to bring about the necessary change perhaps requires nothing short of environmental catastrophe, it being naive and unrealistic to expect people would *"choose simplicity and frugality except under ecological duress"*[60]. Maybe the impending doom is enough: surely humanity aware of its precarious situation, the threat to its very existence would be motivated to act in its best interests. This is not necessarily so. There is risk of a bit of a 'devil may care' attitude. Even James Lovelock, who popularised the GAIA hypothesis, is quoted saying, *"if we are all doomed, enjoy it while you can."*[61]

The point is that if the UK government is committed to sustainability then it might be necessary for the government to co-ordinate collective action.

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56 SDC report (2009); Roepke (1999); Sanne (2002)

57 Okri (2008) as quoted in SDC report (2009) pg85

58 Meadows et al (1974) pg196

59 For instance, a tax would continue to lend credence to the theory of humans as self-seeking, individualistic rational actors, interested only in their own ends as opposed to having a sense of belonging and participation/responsibility to a wider community.

60 Daly (1977a) pg170, as quoted in Dobson (2007) pg103

61 Telegraph newspaper 15th March 2009

3. GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Defining governance as 'the act, process, or power of governing; government'[62] is too narrow. Nowadays in academic literature it is conceived of as going beyond this; of being the government and administrative bodies working together in partnership with all stakeholders.

3.1 The Role of Government

The 'proper' role and purpose of a national government needs to be addressed. Government can be seen as having a dual, possibly irreconcilable role within society. Having responsibility for the present and the future are two aims that can easily be in conflict. It seems that the priority is the present. Ensuring the nation's stability now, in a macro-economic sense, is undoubtedly of great importance. But protecting immediate interests ought not to trump the other role of government, which is to protect and secure the future of the society it governs[63]. The government of a society should deliver social and ecological goals and protect long-term interests. The trend for *"narrow pursuit of growth represents a horrible distortion of the common good and of underlying human values"*, which may actually undermine the legitimate role and justification for government itself[64].

Michelman defines 'government' as, "a hierarchical organisation widely regarded as having the legitimate authority to inflict detriments on persons (within their jurisdiction)"*[65]*. Inflicting detriments is within the legitimate action of government, but only when this is considered to be appropriate in terms of the broader public interest. If sustainability is a goal for the UK, protecting citizen's interests and natural areas now and for the future, then steps need to be taken to change the apparent priorities. In other words, acting to promote the other pillars[66] for people and planet, not simply 'profit', is of great importance. This would entail some serious redefinitions, as almost everything is measured in financial terms.

Rules are essential because they serve to set the context for an individual's strategic choices. Rules either permit or prohibit certain types of behaviour and do so whether they are legally binding or not - what is required is that they carry enough weight to be adhered to. The government is not the sole but it is the dominant controller in terms of rule making and setting out the behaviour that should be observed in society. In light of this fact, it has an important role with considerable influence and power.

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62 Free online dictionary (*1): Online Ref. 2 Appendix C

63 as much as is possible or realistic

64 SDC report (2009) pg11

65 As quoted in Ellickson (1991) Chapter 7 'Theory of Norms' pg127

66 environmental and social - not just economic