Introductory remarks

We are currently living in the Anthropocene. Whether one belongs to those who agree or to those who do not like this term – a crucial question is whether and how the future can become a good age, good for the environment as well as for our fellow human beings. Can future development, despite many fears to the contrary, not also become a *good Anthropocene,* a time of "peace with nature", as Klaus-Michael Meyer-Abich wrote already in 1984, as well as of justice among people and between generations?

As presumptuous and illusory as this may currently seem in the face of multiple crises, setbacks in efforts to establish a multilateral and just world order, and the diverse resistance to substantial climate protection: this is precisely the goal of the guiding principle of sustainable development. According to the well-known definition of the Brundtland Commission, development is sustainable "if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (cf. Hauff 1987, p. 46, our translation). Because this utopia of a just human culture is inconceivable without "peace with nature", the guiding principle of sustainable development fits the vision of a good Anthropocene.

Yet how can we make progress along the way? How can things be changed that have been developing over decades, sometimes centuries: infrastructures and technology, business models and value chains, but above all cherished habits and beliefs? Answers remain controversial and full of conflict. How simple it would be if there was a clear definition, a kind of recipe for sustainability, a checklist that merely had to be worked through so that everything would come to a good end.

As we know, there is no such recipe. Instead of lamenting about it, however, it is important to understand this situation as a challenge that corresponds to the *conditio humana.* This includes the openness of the future and the realisation that the future depends on decisions made today. A recipe for a good Anthropocene would be convenient but also somehow unworthy: not appropriate to the freedom and responsibility of the people, and mere execution without freedom to shape the future. Rather the indeterminacy and openness of sustainable development are precisely what encourage active and creative shaping of a good future, however arduous this may be.

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Of course, freedom must not end in arbitrariness, and openness must not end in endless disputes or helplessness. To spell out sustainability again and again without a fixed recipe, to relate it to contexts and new situations, to carry out complex considerations in a comprehensible and transparent way, not to succumb to the pressure of interest groups and lobbyists – all this is highly demanding and often exhausting.

The authors of this guide have set out to systematically support precisely this, a thoughtful but non-prescriptive pathway towards more sustainable development. No supposedly ready-made solutions are offered, as is so often the case when it comes to sustainability. They do not proclaim what needs to be done urgently. Instead, their goal is to support the ongoing search for viable solutions by systematically explaining the difficulties that inevitably stand in the way of this quest – difficulties that are due to the subject matter and its complexity and not to the inability of science, politics, business or civil society. This guide does not relieve anyone who wants to commit to sustainability from thinking for themselves but aims to serve the contextual and creative search for good solutions – support for individual thinking, empowerment of the many who set out on the pathway of sustainability.

As the title already indicates, this is done on the basis of dilemmas of sustainability. This may sound unwieldy or academic, but it makes it immediately clear that in the field of sustainability, any desire for simple solutions is misplaced. Indeed, anyone who waits for or relies on simple answers has already lost the struggle for sustainable development. Theory is needed, but it must serve practice and not become an end in itself. The guide makes clear how theoretical reflection can be useful in practical terms. Thus, abstract thoughts can develop into very practical questions, dilemmatic structures and criteria as to what to pay attention to in efforts for sustainability and transformation. The guide presents, I would say metaphorically, a systematic and comprehensible map of the many difficult questions that are relevant to efforts for sustainability. Due to the tensions, a simple recipe for sustainability cannot exist. Precisely for this reason, however, the tensions are decisive for an open and good shaping of the future, or, to take up the idea at the beginning, of a good Anthropocene.

This guide faces up to the toils of the plains (*Mühen der Ebene*, Bert Brecht) and avoids offering quick solutions. This approach corresponds to the *conditio humana* in the 21st century: no rash reduction of complexity but rather reflected and informed action amid complexity. Or in the terminology of the guide itself: it is not a matter of coping with or overcoming

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the dilemmas but of living and acting wisely within them. To this end, the guide is a timely, perhaps overdue handbook which I hope will be widely received!

Armin Grunwald

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Foreword 13

1. Introduction: Why another guide? 15

2. Instructions for use 23

3. Sustainability and dilemmas – Theory for practice 25

3.1 Sustainability – Analytical understanding of sustainability 25

3.2 Dilemmas – On the basic structure of practical dilemmas 27

3.3 Dilemmas – Determinations of dilemmas of sustainability 29

3.3.1 Conflicting goals as a potential cause of dilemmas 29

3.3.2 Conflicts of time as a potential cause of dilemmas 29

3.3.3 Conflicts of interest as a potential cause of dilemmas 30

3.3.4 Conflicts between different forms of knowledge as a potential cause of dilemmas 30

3.3.5 Conflicts between different understandings of sustainability as a potential cause of dilemmas 31

3.3.6 Conflicts over responsibility as a potential cause of dilemmas 32

3.3.7 Dilemmas as a touchstone for the feasibility of norms of action 33

3.4 Early recognition: areas of tension with potentials for dilemmas 33

3.4.1 Implicit assumptions in the project context 34

3.4.2 Cooperation and participation in inter- and transdisciplinary research projects 36

3.4.3 (Transdisciplinary) research in structures of funding and science 37

3.4.4 Research in the context of social framework conditions 39

3.5 Clarification: Strategic assertion and denial of dilemmas 40

3.6 Processing of dilemmas: Between win-win and trade-off 42

3.6.1 Two basic prerequisites for overcoming dilemmas 43

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748918620-5 - am 21.01.2026, 16:10:30. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

3.6.2 Processing of dilemmas at the level of obvious objective conditions for action (technical solutions) 45
3.6.3 Processing of dilemmas at the level of obvious subjective premises (justification of trade-offs through rules of prioritisation) 45
3.6.4 Processing of dilemmas at the level of underlying objective conditions for action (change of fundamental social institutions and structures) 46
3.6.5 Processing of dilemmas at the level of underlying subjective premises (change of fundamental values and norms) 46

4. Metacriteria of sustainability 49

4.1 Metacriterion 1: The understanding of sustainability used in the project is reflected upon with regard to its possibilities and limitations. (Block A) 50

4.2 Metacriterion 2: The description of the problem and the objectives are reflected upon by all participants as a framework for action. (Block B) 53

4.3 Metacriterion 3: The forms of knowledge underlying the project with their opportunities and limitations are reflected upon. (Block B) 55

4.4 Metacriterion 4: Basic decisions and implicit assumptions are reflected upon in the project. (Block B) 58

4.5 Metacriterion 5: The processes and possible tensions of inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation are reflected upon. (Block C) 60

4.6 Metacriterion 6: The policies with regard to time in the project are reflected upon. (Block C) 63

4.7 Metacriterion 7: If attributions of responsibility exist, they are actively reflected upon in terms of their justification, their limitations and their effects. (Block C) 65

4.8 Metacriterion 8: A use of the term “dilemma” is actively considered. (Block A) 66

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748918620-5 - am 21.01.2026, 16:10:30. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

5. Additional guiding questions for funding organisations 69

Literature 73

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748918620-5 - am 21.01.2026, 16:10:30. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

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