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Global Sustainability and the 'Extreme Lands': Economic Policy and Planning at the Edge of the Anthroposphere

Key-terms:

Anthroposphere, Economic Development, Extreme Lands, Global Sustainability, Heart-land, Hinterland, Human Terrain, Rim-land.

Summary:

From the point of view of a purely quantitative global economic growth, the human terrains (Anthroposphere) seem to be divided into three major zones: the affluent urban global hubs of industrial and commercial transactions, the struggling backyards of agricultural activities, and the extreme periphery (the edge of Anthroposphere) with no particular economic significance except for some mineral deposits. If we adopt the point of view of global (planetary) sustainability then the whole picture changes. The extreme lands (highlands, tundra, taiga, steppes, savannah, jungles, swamps and marshes, deserts, arctic and sub-arctic zones...) are far from of the urbo-industrial economic globalization and on the margins of the agricultural backyards. But they are right at the centre of the planet-system; they constitute the global heart-land, the ultimate ground where ecosystems and socio-cultural complexes sustain each other. The developed urban, coastal and industrial zones – crisscrossed by the global transactions – turn out to be the rim-land under strong anthropogenic pressures. The vast rural and agricultural backyards – semi-developed or under-developed – turn out to be the hinterland that serves as the supply zone (and dumping site) of the rim-land.

The extreme lands, the heart of the plant-system, remote and difficult, inhabited by the most marginal communities on the earth, usually transcend the conventional political-administrative frontiers. The extreme lands' communities have served as the human-ecological sentinels and buffer between the 'no-man's-lands' and the over-exploited and exhausted lands. Therefore, global sustainability demands a new global development thinking with a focus on the entire geo-economic axis stretching from the rim-land (urbo-industrial), through the hinterland (peri-urban, rural), and ultimately, to the heartland, the 'extreme lands', where physical conditions are adverse, needs are un-common, citizen demand and accountability are pretty weak, and markets do not function well. The extreme lands acquire a new significance in the context of environmental (and climate) uncertainties and global economic upheavals of the 21st century. The 'extreme lands' represent the metaphor of global sustainability.

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