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Worldviews and the Transformation to Sustainable Societies

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Worldviews and the transformation to sustainable societies addresses one of the most challenging questions of our time. Its unique vantage point is based on the recognition of the crucial importance of worldviews vis-à-vis the urgently needed transformation to sustainable societies. Its purpose is to contribute to such transformation, by generating insight into the nature and structure of worldviews in the contemporary West, and their interface with goals and issues of sustainable development.

This dissertation carefully argues why worldviews are understood to play a major role in addressing our complex sustainability issues from four different disciplinary perspectives: philosophy, psychology, sociology, and political science. It also elaborates on the author's 'research worldview,' and contextualizes the chosen mixed methods research design therein. The concept of worldview is then explored in the history of philosophy in order to define and operationalize it. Using quantitative and qualitative studies in combination with extensive literature reviews, the *Integrative Worldview Framework* (IWF) is developed. This framework operationalizes worldviews into five constitutive, interrelated aspects—ontology, epistemology, axiology, anthropology, and societal vision—and differentiates between four major, ideal-typical worldviews, namely traditional, modern, postmodern, and integrative ones.

Next to shedding light on these worldviews, this dissertation demonstrates that there are significant differences between them in terms of environmental attitudes and sustainable lifestyles. Notably, while the modern worldview is frequently associated with a stance of 'technological optimism' and generally less sustainable lifestyles, the postmodern and integrative worldviews tend to be related to a sense of connectedness with nature and more sustainable lifestyles. Several phenomena, such as the culture of contemporary spirituality, the recent emphasis on nature experience, and the emerging integrative worldview, appear to be of particular relevance for sustainability, and are therefore further explored and analyzed.

Finally, the resulting insights are applied to sustainability policy and practice by arguing that the IWF has the potential to serve as: 1) a heuristic for psychological, cultural, and policy reflexivity; 2) an analytical tool for understanding worldview-dynamics in society; and 3) a scaffolding for effective sustainability communications and solutions. This dissertation may thereby contribute to the important tasks of public communication, policy-making, and large-scale mobilization for addressing our urgent global environmental challenges.

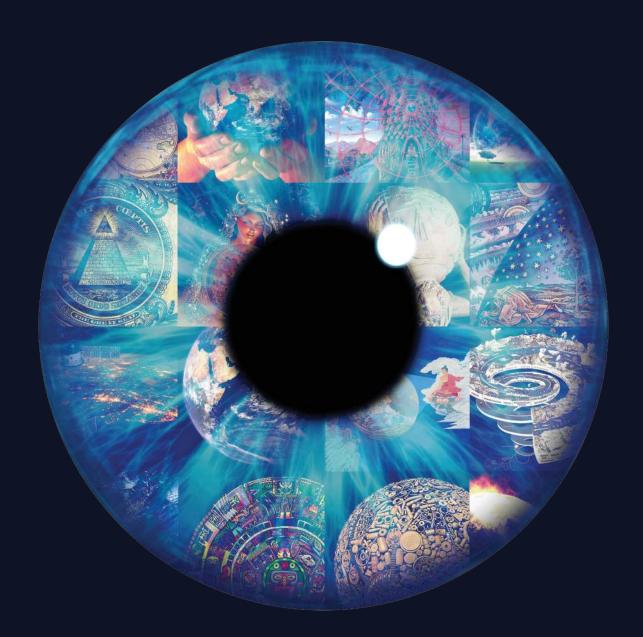
Annick Hedlund-de Witt, Ph.D., specializes in the relationship between worldviews and sustainable development, including social-cultural change, environmental behavior, communication, and policy-making. Currently she is a post-doctoral fellow in the Biotechnology and Society section at the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands. She holds an interdisciplinary Master's (*Cum Laude*) in the social and policy dimensions of the environmental sciences. She has published widely, ranging from popular columns and opinion-articles to academic research reports and articles in international journals, such as *Ecological Economics*, *Environmental Ethics*, the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, and *Worldviews*.

Worldviews and the transformation to sustainable societies

Annick Hedlund-de Witt

Worldviews and the transformation to sustainable societies

An exploration of the cultural and psychological dimensions of our global environmental challenges



Annick Hedlund-de Witt