

Gregory A. Norris

Healing Handprints

The New Development Paradigm (NDP), like Buddhism itself, seeks to promote the well-being and happiness of all beings. Each of us offering our own perspectives, like each of those blind men shouting out his account of the elephant, offers up an aspect or guiding principle for development which we strongly believe would, if well-implemented, promote the well-being and happiness of all beings.

I'm a person whose professional practice has focused, during the past 2 decades, on helping individuals and organizations estimate the full chain of consequences of their consumption-related and production-related actions on the world. My field of "Life cycle assessment" (LCA) provides estimates of our actions' consequences in great environmental and human health detail, and more recently with additional information about social impacts. We use large and globe-spanning databases of empirical data compiled by literally millions of painstaking person-hours of work. These databases and our LCA models stitch together information collected in thousands of different studies, in order to paint case-specific portraits of the pollution, resource consumption, human health and social "ripple effects" of any production or consumption-related decision. The results are used by policy-makers, companies, and those seeking to make production, consumption, and development more sustainable.

The news from our work is generally not good. Nearly every day in the life of nearly every person on earth is responsible for adding more pollution to the air, water, and land, while consuming more non-renewable resources, converting more land from natural to human-altered conditions, and placing more of our fellow human beings at risk of poor working conditions. These impacts we call "footprints", and the news from LCA is that every person, family, village, city, and country has a damaging footprint every day, all year long, year after year.

In part this news brings necessary cautionary information and guidance to all of us working to minimize such footprints, for the sake of people and planet. But at the same time, the news is all bad because it can only collect bad news. From the perspective of footprints, the best we can do is to reduce our activity towards nothingness, thereby almost achieving the ultimate goal of zero footprint. Is this truly the best we can do?

Thankfully, beautifully, no! The frame of the NDP, when combined with LCA, points the way to a transformative shift of thought, perspective, and action. The ultimate sustainability goal is to become *NetPositive*: to give more than we take, to be life-giving and life-healing on a daily basis, personally, in community, and ultimately as a species. Being NetPositive means that the *positive* ripple effects of our actions in the world (our "handprint") are greater than our footprint, on as many dimensions of impact as possible.

Although the goal of NetPositive is increasingly appreciated as promising, a clear definition of NetPositive and a solid framework for credibly assessing and reporting positive sustainability impacts of persons and organizations has been missing [1]. A new approach, called Handprint accounting, has been developed which rests squarely on LCA and existing standards of footprinting, so that positive impacts can be directly compared with, and subtracted from, negative ones in order to guide progress toward

NetPositivity [2]. Perhaps the central innovation in handprinting is that it shines the light of assessment on a host of influence pathways which were missing from footprint assessment. Thus, it opens up new ideas for constructive, healing actions by people and organizations.

Initial results from application of this framework indicate that it stimulates unprecedented engagement to create and drive adoption of innovations for sustainability across supply chains and spheres of human action. The goal of reducing our footprints remains important in this new frame; but footprint reduction faces diminishing returns and can never be fully achieved, while handprint creation is unlimited in its potential.

Handprinting and the NDP are natural and synergetic partners. The NDP widens our perspective on the impacts that matter, enriching handprinting's attention to physical, health, and macro-social impacts by consideration of fuller measures of human well-being. An NDP-expanded Handprinting can shine the light of assessment on our global ripple effects, both negative and positive, to help guide individual and collective actions which fulfill the NDP goal of promoting the well-being and happiness of all beings.

Resources

Green Monday. 2013. Net Positive: An expert crowd's view of Net Positive business strategies. Available via http://www.greenmondays.com/region/information_news_full.php?newsItem=82&newregion=1

Greg Norris. 2013. "The New Requirement for Social Leadership: Healing." In S. Groschl (ed.) 2013. *Uncertainty, Diversity and the Common Good: Changing Norms and New Leadership Paradigms*. London: Gower Publishing.

<http://www.handprinter.org>

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2108015,00.html>

<http://danswin.wordpress.com/2012/05/20/carbon-handprints-not-footprints/>

<http://chge.med.harvard.edu/shine>