



Review of the Book “A Bright Future: How Some Countries Have Solved Climate Change and the Rest Can Follow” by Joshua S. Goldstein and Staffan A. Qvist, New York Public Affairs 2019, ISBN: 978-1-5417-2410-5

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Energy transition and climate change are inextricably linked processes that are stirring global politics. This has led to discussions, new ideas, and doubts about the best solutions to curb unfavorable climate trends while simultaneously maintaining economic growth and prosperity. Given current challenges, sustainable development is not just an empty slogan, but a direction for change. This book by Joshua S. Goldstein, an American political scientist, and Staffan A. Qvist, a Swedish energy engineer, attempts to identify some solutions, at the same time debunking several myths about energy. Although published in 2019, the book remains relevant today. In the words of George P. Shultz, former Secretary of State, as stated on the book's cover: “A Bright Future comes along at a critical time for our planet. Its key message: the climate is changing, the consequences are serious, and we can and must take action”.

As the authors emphasise, humanity's most important task is decarbonisation and the transition to clean energy. To achieve this, carbon dioxide pollution would need to be reduced by about 30% per decade (50% would be better, but this is unlikely). Relying on renewable energy sources (RES) cannot be an effective solution as they are dispersed by nature, and what is more, variable and unreliable, unlike concentrated nuclear and coal energy sources. This is especially true since the approach to these energy sources is different. On the one hand, between 2001 and 2006, China doubled its coal consumption. In turn, US President Donald Trump announced already in his first term that the 'war on coal' should be ended (p. 16). Such trends will not contribute to the introduction of rapid changes and decarbonisation. On the other hand, contemporary environmentalists promote unrealistic slogans such as "We don't need nuclear energy, we can have 100% from RES" (p. 73). The authors prove that such a concept cannot succeed for several reasons, but above all, show in the figures presented in an accessible way, their claim that what the world can achieve in 10-20 years using nuclear energy would take 100 years using renewable energy. Hence decarbonisation cannot accelerate without relying on nuclear energy.

This does not mean that green energy should be abandoned, but, as the authors point out, its shortcomings must be remembered. Hydropower accounts for two-thirds of the world's renewable energy, whilst it does reduce carbon dioxide emissions, yet it also threatens the ecosystem. For example, the construction of numerous hydroelectric dams on the Mekong River in Southeast Asia threatens one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on Earth, whereas wind energy generates electricity at a relatively low cost but does not power most cities (with the exception of seaside resorts). Offshore winds are generally more stable than onshore winds, but the number of prime locations is limited (the seabed in California is quite steep compared to the seabed in the UK). Generation costs vary because the wind is variable, its strength depending on the season. Days/years, but also summers, can be more or less windy. Solar energy, however, is unavailable for most of the day, and in northern countries it can even be unavailable for several months. Globally, it accounts for only about 1% of global electricity demand.

The authors argue that the model solution is to use an energy mix, i.e. nuclear energy and renewable energy sources wherever possible. They describe two energy transformations, one of which can be a model for other countries, while the other one may not. The first of these countries is Sweden, which halved its total CO₂ (carbon dioxide) emissions between 1970 and 1990. The Swedes built numerous nuclear-powered power plants and also developed renewable energy sources. The second country, Germany, chose a different path, relying on pro-environmental policies. In 2016, Germany achieved the goal of supplying over 25% of its electricity and almost 15% of its total energy from renewable energy sources, while reducing nuclear energy production. but without abandoning coal. According to the authors, when "the whole world should start decarbonizing the atmosphere as soon as possible, it will be a lost time for Germany" (p. 46). After Fukushima, in 2011, the German state began to withdraw from nuclear energy [or rather, it did not withdraw from the idea of closing all nuclear power plants,

because this process of anti-nuclear policy of Germany began earlier – with M.S.]. At the same time, lignite is still the source of 25% of German electricity. Interestingly, the power plant in Janschwalde using this fuel is among the ten most polluting power plants in Europe.

The book consists of four chapters and is written in a very accessible manner. It is based on extensive data and calculations from various parts of the world. Due to the topic under study, the authors employ various technical terms related to electricity measurements, but they explain these concepts in the introduction. Thanks to this and the interdisciplinary approach, it is accessible to every reader, not just those involved in energy and climate issues. It can also serve as a guide for politicians to ensure that the energy transition is not too tortuous and 'bumpy', and above all, very costly to society.