

REFLECTION ON THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: PROGRESS IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Summary

It can be said that sustainable development is a goal-oriented process of transformations aimed at improving and achieving the sustainable quality of human life. However, living conditions are sustainable only when living conditions of the other forms of life are preserved. Thus, in general, the preservation of heterogeneity as to the conditions and forms of life on the Earth may be considered to be the cardinal objective of sustainable development. This is a process that is very exacting in an economic as well as temporal manner. It inevitably requires a substantial change in the relation of humans not only nature, but to themselves.

The basis of this process creates transporting the environmental thoughts to the single spheres of economic development, which is generally called the ecologization, and humanization of management in the landscape. This process must compose an integrated whole, they have to cover both the superstructural sphere and the realization sphere of societal development. Thus it is a process to answer the questions of where and how to place human activities in the territory that they are in the least contradiction with the natural conditions. It results in a proposal for the most suitable localization of

required human activities within a given territory (where?) and successively in a proposal of necessary measures ensuring the ecologically correct operation of those activities in a given locality (how?).

1. Introduction

The issues of sustainability are modern and very topical, as they are an inevitable precondition for the future existence of humankind. Their solution is coming to the fore especially in the latest period when cumulated environmental problems (such as the exhausting of natural resources, deteriorating quality of the environment, threat to biodiversity, impairment of the landscape stability, growth of negative psychosocial phenomena etc.) outgrow a purely ecological framework and become existential (i.e. the existential substance of mankind is endangered at present). Thus the research on sustainability problems starts from pragmatic needs. It is simply necessary from the viewpoint of preserving life on Earth. Many professional as well as political events deal with sustainability issues. Out of them, the Rio Summit of 1992 belongs to the most important ones because it gave an impetus to the solution of problems regarding sustainable development at the worldwide level.

2. Heterogeneity of Approaches

Approaches (and then definitions) to the concept of “sustainable development” on a worldwide scale are very numerous and heterogeneous at this time. They are based on a variety of aspects, for instance:

Such a way of the management of natural resources (air, water, soil, mineral resources) and living systems including man, which will ensure the achievement of the highest sustainable quality of life.

Development that accepts the limits of the consumption and utilization of natural resources.

Lifestyle that is approximating the ideals of humanism and harmonic relation between man and nature in a time-unlimited horizon.

Improving the quality of life of man within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.

As life within the bounds of the carrying capacity of biosphere.

Process aimed at ensuring an adequate development of all forms of life not excluding human life in a long-term temporal horizon.

Goal-directed process of changes in the behavior of human society towards itself and also towards its surroundings (i.e. landscape and its resources), which is aimed at increasing the contemporary and future potential for satisfying the human needs and those of other beings considering the possibilities (limits) of landscape and its resources.

As is evident from the above definitions, sustainable development is used to denote such a societal development that regards and respects natural resources. Thus the fundamental goal of sustainability is to harmonize economic development with the protection of nature, natural and cultural-historical resources, and the environment.

3. Explanation of the Concept

All these approaches to sustainable development seem too anthropocentric. But sustainable development does really not concern the spheres outside human society (like plant and animal forms). It is strictly meant as the sustainable development of human society—i.e. man with his interests and needs is the focus of attention. This principle of anthropocentrism has been established also in the Rio Declaration as Principle 1: *People are in the focus of attention of sustainable development.*

However, analyzing thoroughly the proclaimed approach it is necessary to realize that sustainable conditions for the life of other organisms are explicitly a part of sustainable conditions for the development of human life. All forms of life on Earth with their conditions together make up a large system. The impairment of one element may negatively influence all system. Hence we have to understand that our survival depends also on the survival of other forms of life on the Earth. Human life may not be carried out to the detriment of other life forms. The conception of sustainable development implies the aspect of integrated approach to preserving the conditions and forms of life on the Earth. So the conceptions of the long-term development of individual branches (which, of course, exist too)—formulated only on the basis of economic parameters—cannot be considered the conceptions of the proclaimed notion of “sustainable development” as defined at the conference in Rio.

An integrated approach to solving the problems of the environment has been established also in the Rio Declaration as Principle 2 and Principle 4 saying respectively:

The right to development must be met in such way to satisfy equally the developmental and environmental needs of the present as well as the future generations.

In order to achieve sustainable development, the protection of the environment will form an integrated part of societal development and may not be isolated from it.

There exists a wide spectrum of interpretations, often contradictory, in the comprehension and explanation of the sustainability concept. This results, above all, from improper explanations of the term development or from mistaking it for growth. David A. Munro, former Secretary General of IUCN, presents in a work a detailed explanation of the concept of *sustainability*, with which we can identify. He states that there are no serious problems with the explanation of the term “sustainable.” It is understood relatively unequivocally as to sustain for the future, to continue. Antagonisms arise in the grasp of the notion “development,” which is mostly criticized by ecologists oriented biocentrically who enforce rather the concept of sustainable life. According to a D. A. Munro’s view, the development in general does not equal the economic growth only but it is also the advancement of all things improving the quality of life—including the progress in health services, social welfare, education, culture,

political freedom, human rights and so on. Progress in the protection of nature and the environment may be also classified in the category of development. On the basis of these principles, he defines sustainable development as follows: *Sustainable development is a complex of activities from which we can expect the improving of the living conditions of man in such a way that this improving may be sustainable.*

It is evident from the analysis and explanation of definitions that sustainable development has three substantial dimensions:

- *Environmental*, focused on preserving the heterogeneity of the conditions and forms of life on the Earth (viability and diversity on the Earth). It is based on the regulation of human activities in the landscape in conformity with the carrying capacity limits for natural ecosystems;
- *Economic*, laying emphasis on the effective utilization of natural resources. Its substance is the regulation of economic development in accordance with the preservation of the natural resources base;
- *Social*, its cardinal aim is to ensure the “respectable” quality of life for every human being on the Earth. Revenues from resources must be divided evenly among the different communities—between the rich and the poor, the present and the future, etc.

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