

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - A MAJOR PROBLEM OF OUR TIME

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ABSTRACT

The present work presents concisely the problem of sustainable development making an incursion into its history, definitions, principles and objectives.

The modifications of the sustainable development concept are presented first, followed by the enumeration of principles and objectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

As it is well known for over 30 years, sustainable development is a very important problem of humanity, a problem regarding all human existence, first of all for the issues related to environment and its preservation.

During time, the concept of sustainable development knew various explanations, as it can be seen in the following.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The concept was initially related to the environmental issues and to the natural resources crisis, especially those related to energy 30 years ago. The term itself is a very young one and imposed itself in the summer of 1992, after the Conference on Environment and Development, organized by the United Nations in Rio de Janeiro.

Sustainability emerges from the idea that human activities depend on environment and resources. Health, social security and economic stability of society are essential in defining life quality.

The discussions that led to sustainable development began in the 1970s. In 1972, the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment discussed for the first time the issue of environmental deterioration due to human activities, a problem which endangers the future of humanity itself. In 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), chaired by Gro Brundtland began its activity, after a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

Two years later, in 1985, the Antarctic ozone hole was discovered, and the Vienna Conference tried to find some solutions for the reduction of emissions of substances which have adverse effects on the ozone layer.

In 1987, a year after the Chernobyl catastrophe, came out the so-called WCED (World Commission on Environment and Development), Brundtland Report, entitled "Our common future" which also gives the most quoted definition of sustainable

development („sustainable development”): “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

The Report also admitted that the economic development cannot be stopped, but strategies should be changed so that they would meet the ecological limits offered by the environment and planet resources. At the end of the report, the commission sustained the necessity of organizing an international conference regarding sustainable development.

Thus, in 1992, "the Earth Summit" took place in Rio de Janeiro. Government officials from approximately 170 participated in this event. A lot of conventions regarding climate changes (the control of greenhouse gas emissions), biological diversity (conservation of species) and forest management were made. A plan of supporting the sustainable development was also made, Agenda 21.

The years after the conference from Rio, in 2002, World Summit on Sustainable Development took place in Johannesburg.

Each of us, aware or not, can contribute to sustainable development. We may say we have a sustainable thinking when we dump plastic or paper waste in specially set up places.

At the industrial level, things changed quicker. Thus, many plants use waste as fuel, and there are some areas where are being implemented household heating systems based on waste-burning. The companies were the first to realize the economic importance (and ecological as well) of waste recovery and reuse.

In 1974 Lester R. Brown founded the Worldwatch Institute and he is the promoter of a series of studies, materialized in annual reports regarding the progress of structuring a sustainable society: “State of the World” or “Vital Signs”.

In the work “Plan B 2.0” Lester R. Brown also draws the attention to the conflict between the industrial civilization and the environment and speaks about two aspects: 1. the tendency to deplete natural energy, raw-materials and food resources or 2. the depletion of renewable resources at a higher rate than their renewable ability and the physical deterioration and pollution of environmental factors: water, air, soil, thus emphasizing the importance of waste recycling.

A sustainable society is the society that shapes its economic and social system in such a way that natural resources and life-support systems can be maintained.”

3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEFINITIONS

The word “sustainable (to sustain)” has roots in the Latin *subtenir*, meaning 'to hold up' or 'to support from below.' A community must be supported from below - by its present and future inhabitants. Certain places, through the peculiar combination of physical, cultural, and, perhaps, spiritual characteristics, inspire people to care for their community. These are the places where sustainability has the best chance of taking hold.” - Muscoe Martin, “A Sustainable Community Profile,” from *Places*, Winter 1995.

The concept of sustainable development designates all forms and methods of socio-economic development, whose background is mainly a balance between these socio-economic systems and elements of natural capital. The best known definition of sustainable development is certainly the one given by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in its report "Our Common Future", also known as the Brundtland Report: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

"Then I say the earth belongs to each generation during its course, fully and in its own right, no generation can contract debts greater than may be paid during the course of its own existence." - Thomas Jefferson, September 6, 1789.

"Sustainability refers to the ability of a society, ecosystem, or any such ongoing system to continue functioning into the indefinite future without being forced into decline through exhaustion of key resources." - Robert Gilman, President of Context Institute

"Many people feel it is better to address such problems through a more collaborative and holistic systems approach because such problems are diffuse, multidisciplinary, multiagency, multistakeholder and multisector in nature." - Beth E. Lachman, Critical Technologies Institute, "Linking Sustainable Community Activities to Pollution Prevention: A Sourcebook," April 1997.

"Sustainability is the emerging doctrine that economic growth and development must take place, and be maintained over time, within the limits set by ecology in the broadest sense - by the interrelations of human beings and their works, the biosphere and the physical and chemical laws that govern it. It follows that environmental protection and economic development are complementary rather than antagonistic processes." - William D. Ruckelshaus, "Toward.

A sustainable community effort consists of a long-term, integrated, systems approach to develop and achieve a healthy community by jointly addressing economic, environmental, and social issues. Fostering a strong sense of community and building partnerships and consensus among key stakeholders are also important elements of such efforts. The focus and scale of sustainability efforts depend on local conditions, including resources, politics, individual actions, and the unique features of the community. The sustainable communities approach has been applied to issues as varied as urban sprawl, inner-city and brown field redevelopment, economic development and growth, ecosystem management, agriculture, biodiversity, green buildings, energy conservation, watershed management, and pollution prevention. Many of these issues and other community problems cannot easily be addressed by traditional approaches or traditional elements within our society.

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

From 3 to 14 June 1992, Rio de Janeiro was the host of the first Earth Summit where more than 100 heads of state met. Their main topic was the global warming. The Rio Declaration expresses the political will of all UN member states to take part in the global transition to a sustainable development model.

This Declaration consisted of 27 principles which represent the basis of sustainable development.

Sustainable development principles, as they were set in 1992 Rio Declaration are:

Principle 1: Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

Principle 2: States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

Principle 3: The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.

Principle 4: In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.

Principle 5: All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world.

Principle 6: The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority. International actions in the field of environment and development should also address the interests and needs of all countries.

Principle 7: States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.

Principle 8: To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.

Principle 9: States should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge, and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies.

Principle 10: Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.

Principle 11: States shall enact effective environmental legislation. Environmental standards, management objectives and priorities should reflect the environmental and developmental context to which they apply. Standards applied by some countries may be inappropriate and of unwarranted economic and social cost to other countries, in particular developing countries.

Principle 12: States should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation. Trade policy measures for environmental purposes should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade. Unilateral actions to deal with environmental challenges outside the jurisdiction of the importing country should be avoided. Environmental measures addressing transboundary or global environmental problems should, as far as possible, be based on an international consensus.

Principle 13: States shall develop national law regarding liability and compensation for the victims of pollution and other environmental damage. States shall also cooperate in an expeditious and more determined manner to develop further international law regarding

liability and compensation for adverse effects of environmental damage caused by activities within their jurisdiction or control to areas beyond their jurisdiction.

Principle 14: States should effectively cooperate to discourage or prevent the relocation and transfer to other States of any activities and substances that cause severe environmental degradation or are found to be harmful to human health.

Principle 15: In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Principle 16: National authorities should endeavour to promote the internalization of environmental costs and the use of economic instruments, taking into account the approach that the polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution, with due regard to the public interest and without distorting international trade and investment.

Principle 17: Environmental impact assessment, as a national instrument, shall be undertaken for proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment and are subject to a decision of a competent national authority.

Principle 18: States shall immediately notify other States of any natural disasters or other emergencies that are likely to produce sudden harmful effects on the environment of those States. Every effort shall be made by the international community to help States so afflicted.

Principle 19: States shall provide prior and timely notification and relevant information to potentially affected States on activities that may have a significant adverse transboundary environmental effect and shall consult with those States at an early stage and in good faith.

Principle 20: Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.

Principle 21: The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all.

Principle 22: Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.

Principle 23: The environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation shall be protected.

Principle 24: Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development. States shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development, as necessary.

Principle 25: Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.

Principle 26: States shall resolve all their environmental disputes peacefully and by appropriate means in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Principle 27: States and people shall cooperate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the fulfilment of the principles embodied in this Declaration and in the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development.

Failure to follow these principles has generated and continues to generate problems that call into question the very existence of the human race, that's why involvement can be critical of everyone, including you.

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

5.1. General objectives of the Sustainable Development Strategy of the European Union

- To limit climate change and its costs and negative effects on society and environment;
- To ensure that transport systems meet our society's economic, social and environmental needs while minimizing their undesirable impacts on the economy, society and the environment;
 - To promote sustainable consumption and production patterns;
 - To improve management and avoid overexploitation of natural resources, recognising the value of ecosystem services;
 - To equitably promote good public health and improve protection against health threats.

5.2. Millennium Development Goals

Millennium Development Goals – (MDGs) are the main component of the Millennium Declaration, established in September 2000 Millennium Summit by 191 countries, including Romania. The Millennium Declaration is the only comprehensive development agenda on which there is an agreement at the highest level between most countries.

A mechanism for monitoring the progress on a national, regional and global level has been constituted by each country adopting some targets correlated to the Millennium Development Objectives that were specific to the national context.

In our country the monitoring will be made by the Government with the support of Romanian agencies of the United Nations and NGOs.

- Objective 1 – Reducing the acute poverty;
- Objective 2 – The universal access to the primary education level;
- Objective 3 – Promoting gender equality and the assertion of women;
- Objective 4 – Reducing the infant mortality rate;
- Objective 5 – Improving the health of the mother;
- Objective 6 – Fighting against HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis;
- Objective 7 – Securing environment durability;
- Objective 8 – Creating a global partnership for development.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As it can be observed in the present work, the issue of sustainable development is a very complex one, influencing at large human existence and activity. It has to be mentioned that this still young segment has an extremely promising and important future.

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