

Chapter 20

Sustainable Development—Sustainable Man (External and Internal Conditions for Sustainability)

Wiesław Sztumski

Abstract For several years, the idea of sustainable development has become fashionable and is being implemented. The term “sustainable development” is inflected at all possible ways. One creates the necessary conditions for the implementation of such a development, which is believed to be a panacea for economic crises, environmental degradation and premature full exploitation of material resources of our planet. However, internal conditioning—the role of individuals—their mental and spiritual states, value system and environmental awareness—are ignored. The objective of this article is to draw attention to the fact that the success of sustainable development depends mainly on the internal and subjective conditions, especially from the people who implement it. The concept of sustainable development can be fully realized only by sustainable people.

Keywords Sustainable development · Sustainable man · Contemporary life milieu · Golden rule · Environment · Environment

A Very Short Foreword

Genesis of the concept of sustainable development is well known. This is an idea that was born at the end of the twentieth century in the minds of the intellectual elites, aware of the risks that result from uncontrolled production and consumption as well as from the fact that the finite Earth is not able to effectively meet the infinite needs of human beings. At the core of sustainable development is social consensus on most important matters of human life on a global scale.

W. Sztumski (✉)

Silesian University Katowice, Okólna 89 F, 42-200 Częstochowa, Poland
e-mail: ws34@op.pl

Reaching such an agreement requires consistent attention of the fundamental principles of the human existence, proclaimed by the philosophical environmentalism: the principle of tolerance and the principle of synergy. Respecting of the first principle reflects the desire to live in peace in a rapidly growing condensation of the environment and the second—the striving to realize the fundamental interest of humanity; it is the preservation of life and the survival of the human species in a progressive degradation of our natural and social environment. A lot of publications about sustainable development appeared in the last time. There are likewise many definitions of this development. Here, I refer to most well-known and frequently repeated definitions, particularly to these, which emphasize the balance in nature and society as well as the harmony between these two components of the world. Authors consider predominantly how one can implement the idea of the sustainable development and with which means and activities one could achieve the goals, which are determined by the strategy of the sustainable development in different areas of social life. Nevertheless, they do not research the problem of sustainable human, without which the full implementation of the idea of the sustainable development seems to be impossible. The sustainability of human is for me the most important matter for life in contemporary world, in the ever more changing, unstable, uncertain and unbalanced life milieu. Furthermore, I think there are three conditions necessary for realizing the idea of the sustainable development: balanced people, reasonable lifestyle and enlightened society.

It is true that some authors draw attention to importance of the subject factors and the role of human in the implementation of the idea of sustainable development. This relates above all anti-ecological activities of individuals and their responsibility for unreasonable politics and accelerated economy, for the use of any technical innovations which can contribute to the degradation of the environment of human life, to the deterioration of the nature and to worsening of the quality of human life. They do not see, what is evident: the idea of the sustainable development can be more effectively implemented only by a sustainable individual.

What Is the Sustainable Development?

There are many approaches, dimensions and interpretations of the sustainable development: political, philosophical, anthropocentric, biocentric, economic, ecological etc. Sustainable development can be treated as a political idea. “The idea is working in politics, law, and strategy as well as in political, economic and social programs. It is the center of attention starting from the United Nations by such international organizations as the European Union, the nation-states, local governments and NGOs.” (Papuziński 2011). In the anthropocentric interpretation “Sustainable development functions as a password which snatches up the masses to fight with environmental threats, especially with the growing social

disproportion in respect of income and wealth, which destroys solidarity, and is contradictory to the current sense of justice and humanity. It seems that the leveling this disproportion should make people happy, and the world—more perfect.” (Sztumski 2008). And according to the biocentrists, the sustainable development is “a vision of new human community embracing the whole of humanity. The *differentia specifica* is in ecological awareness, showing to the man his place in the world that is not distinguished and non anthropocentric. The traditional anthropocentric attitude to the environment is replaced by an ecocentric (biocentric) one, which requires treating the man as only one of elements of cosmic ecosystem having equal rights and playing equal part as other elements.” (Gawor 2006). One can quote many other approaches to the concept of sustainable development. Hence, the concept of sustainable development requires a many-sided, multifaceted and multi-dimensional interpretation due to different spheres of life and science. Thus, one cannot reduce it to only one interpretation or to the one system, in which one want to implement it. Therefore, some authors postulate rightly that “The concept and practice of the sustainable development should be seen within the system and spheres in which they operate” (Zacher 2008). Therefore, it would be best to consider sustainable development in a holistic and systemic way. However, as yet—as I know—there is no such systemic approach to the sustainable development.

The conception of sustainable development results from the ideology of consumption and consumerism and it contributes also to the success of this ideology. It aims to reconcile two contradictory interests. On the one hand, it has to ensure the life in balanced and growing prosperity and luxury; on the other hand, it ought to reduce the consumption of material and energetic resources. Thus, it seems to be a solution of the present and future dilemmas:

- How more produce from what is less and less?
- How to be rich, to not become overrich?
- In which way such limited enriching should motivate the people to increasing productivity?
- Could such limitation be the driving force of the economy and the civilization in the future?

In the “Agenda 21”, the sustainable development is defined as a process of developing (of countries, cities, business, communities, etc.), which connects unconditionally the needs of the present generation with the ability to meeting the needs of future generations, as well as the needs of one group of people with the needs of others groups. Sustainable development is defined in Polish legislation as a “sequence of changes, in which the use of resources, the structure of investments, orientation of technological progress and institutional structures have to be realized in such a way that they cause no contradiction between the future an present needs”. (Prawo Ochrony Środowiska 2001). In these definitions, one speaks about “the intergenerational ecological justice,” which was the basis of all international agreements in order to the protection of the environment. All definitions of sustainable development include “uncontradictory of interests”. It relates above all to the time dimension (it concerns the successive generations, starting from today),

that is in the dimension of history, and also the people living in the time of one generation, that is in the dimension of topicality. So, the sustainable development relates to the in the diachronic and synchronic interests of people. It refers also to the spatial dimension because it concerns the compatibility of the regional and first of all the global interests. And common interests of majority of humanity are:

- To be more rich,
- To live in peace,
- To overcome the global environmental threats.

Commonly one accepts well-known definition of 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." Sustainable development is the one that meets today's needs in such a way as to give a chance of life for future generations. This sounds beautiful even if the sustainable development is a very promising idea more for the future generations than for the present one. The goal of sustainable development is to counteract the trend to far-reaching devastation of the natural environment, in order to leave something from it still in the future. Nature does no longer be a system which could itself reaches equilibrium states because its homeostasis is destroyed by the unreasonable activity of humans. Therefore, it is not able to defend itself. On the contrary, it needs human assistance. No one has proven that nature, and the more a society is at the present time a self-regulating system. Instead, one should assume that they are self-deregulating systems in consequence of the increasing growth of chaos and turbulence mainly caused by not reasonable human activities.

The concept of the sustainable development can be interpreted in different ways and it has many interpretations. However, what joins all they, is to care for the equilibrium between all elements of the dynamic social system, in which it ought to be realized. That seems to be main and most essential thought rooted in the ecological awareness of social masses. People, the inhabitants of wealthy countries see at the idea of sustainable development what good is for them, what allows to live further in abundance, and the inhabitants of poor countries see at it a possibility to catching up the wealthier countries. Both of them don't be aware that the equilibrium between the components of social systems which are characteristic for sustainable development needs a lot of renuncements and economical, political and ecological limitation. Functioning under various ecological prohibitions is the fundamental principle of sustainable development. Those prohibitions are not being limited to the natural environment. They are also about the social and cultural environment because they relate to meeting the needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal development, well-being, social cohesion and social inclusion, and creating equal opportunities for all people. The idea of sustainable development is future-oriented; it focuses on the good of the people, which will live in the far future. Hence, no doubt that its implementation requires some sacrifices on the part of people living at this time. Present generation's life quality must be reduced in some degree and this reduction should be higher, the better life condition it wants to create for future generations. In

the balanced world and life as in all nature nothing is for free—one must pay for everything and it is always something for something. It is worth to note that the implementation of the concept of the sustainable development does not transform the contemporary “homo oeconomicus” in the future “homo ecologicus”, but it balances these two human models at best.

A Sustainable Man: Who This Is?

In the ancient Greek concept, sustainable was such a man, in which a healthy body was in balance with a healthy spirit. The “balanced man” was the personification of perfection being in emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually harmony with himself and with his natural, social and cultural environments. Now, the sustainable man is perceived similarly: he lives in inner harmony without too much deviation from any cultural and social standards or norms, he cares for the unity of his body and spirit and he is emotionally stable. The sustainable man is characterized by a high measure of self-control and equanimity. Therefore, the excessive and unnecessary stress is foreign for him. He tries always to find equilibrium between the pairs of opposites, which influence the human life: good and evil, poor and rich, fair and unfair, cleverly and stupid. But that does not mean that a sustainable man has to be an average, standard or indistinctive man. The balanced man can expose his individual characteristics, is *differentia specifica* which distinguish him from all other. The question of finding the balance between all oppositions inside and outside of us is the same as the well-known question on finding the Golden Rule in Aristotle’s ethic: Treat others as you want to be treated. As it turns out, there is an amazing analogy between the ethics based on the Golden Rule and the concept of the sustainable development. “The Golden Rule is a solid basis for a responsible applied ethics in both theory and practice.” (Zecha 2011). It should be added to this statement: in the practice of implementation of the idea of sustainable development in all spheres of the social life. The Golden Rule is in reality a consistency principle that says that our actions should be in harmony with our wishes, desires and expectations. The use of it is a precondition to being a sustainable person. However, to achieve a balance within our interior, we need some rest time, relaxation, periods of silence and the knowledge about what in us is—in our body and soul—as well as we ought to know what the highest value in our life is. And that requires the work on each of us in the calm and contemplation. External conditions, such as for example fixed schedule during the day, contribute to this. One needs time and silence, in order to hear the internal voice—the voice of the heart and the intuition. The normal, i.e., the natural way of functioning of an organism is always optimal, harmonious, balanced and, what is significant, conductive to the health. A really healthy man is mentally and physically balanced men, who found owing to the Golden Rule his internal peace and he friendly (harmoniously) co-exists with his environment. Harmony and order of the external world of a person depend in a rather large measure on the order and equilibrium

of his interior world. A regular and balanced man wants to live also into the same environment. Therefore, it forms his external world like himself as a balanced one. Sustainable development can be treated as a reflection (projection) of sustainable human being on the external world. That is one of the other manifestations of the interdependence between these two worlds. Therefore, the balancing of environment should begin to start with restoring the balance of people's environments—each separately. One should notice: there is no sustainable development of economy and other spheres of social life without the participation sustainable humans in it. In summary, the sustainable person is physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually balanced. Inner harmony, friendly attitude to other people and to the nature are his characteristic features.

But this is not all. The sustainable person is not only an internally balanced person. He cares not only for his own personal sustainability, but also for the sustainable interior development of the persons of further generations; also they should have possibility to functioning as internally balanced persons, as sustainable people. Therefore, he should think, he ought to leave them sufficient environmental reserves—raw material and climatic reserves, as well as own and social reserves. That is to say, as consumer he must be able to be led by the basic rule of thriftiness regarding the natural and social capital; it should be a frugal man. For this reason during his individual development, he has to preserve as long as possible his vital forces for the other—for the family and society, for now and later. And it should be at least in such degrees future-oriented as present-oriented man. However, contrary to appearances, people do not so much care for the future. This is because they live mostly for today and become less and less frugal. Contemporary man—especially in developed countries—is more and more prodigal and wasteful.

Life in the modern world, dominated by the paradigm of the economy, of increasing efficiency and profit, forces humans to manage most economically with the natural resources, social capital, and with the forces of their own organisms. Under the influence of a free market economy aiming at profit maximization, rationality was connected with the economy, and homo rationalis—a wise man—became ever more also homo frugi (frugal man). Not only the economic, but also the ecological rationality should lead to the formation a homo frugi. And people act exactly on the contrary as if guided by the principle of contrariness. On the one hand, thanks to the ecology they know that all resources are limited and they are running out faster and faster with progress of the civilization. Therefore, they have invented the idea of the sustainable development and they promote it. And on the other hand, they behave carefree, as if these resources can be fully rebuilt, in accordance with the illusory principle: what people will destroy, they are able to repair. Meanwhile, resources reduction process, like all natural processes, is irreversible despite the partial renewal of their and recycling. And economic growth based on consumption growth requires increasing destruction of natural and human resources. Thus one of the fundamental contradictions of the modern world develops. From the biological nature of man follows, that he must live only at the cost of his environment. So, willy-nilly, he must exploit environmental resources. If he wants to live, he must destroy their environment. And if he wants to live

better, he must destroy them even more. This causes another contradiction of the modern world: between the pressures on an increasingly prosperous life and the desire to preserve environmental resources. It seems to me that sustainable development is not able to eliminate it in spite of all.

Humans would like to live getting better, and therefore they use everything and itself excessively and in an accelerated tempo and that for many reasons. Because of this, they will consume more and more and in consequence more destroy their environment. Despite the best intentions and different efforts, one cannot be remedied them. As a result of intentional steering of the economy by the ruling elites of the world market, the economy becomes more unstable and dynamic and at the same time less stable. This is proved by the often repeated crises in different countries, even in the most developed ones. The preference of the overconsumption and overproduction guarantees the economic growth, but in the larger degree it contributes to increasing waste. Increasing waste somehow incorporated into the model of the modern economy is a fact and an alarming phenomenon. The sustainable development does not aim to efficient management of energy and material resources, but to the replacing natural raw materials by artificial and traditional sources of energy (coal, wood and oil) by alternative (wind, water, sun). So, it is not about resignation from excessive consumption of energy resources (such as the unnecessary illuminations, advertising) or from excessive consumption of materials for production of more and more superfluous goods. Therefore, it is unlikely that the idea of sustainable development could stop the rush to waste. Prodigality and waste goes hand in hand with the progress of civilization and the increase in living standards. It manifests itself in different forms and concerns a variety of goods. The most visible and outrageous is the waste of equipment footwear, clothing, food and paper.¹ The progress of Western civilization and permanent stupidization caused that modern man is not able to defense himself against the consumptionism and against the economy feeding on overproduction and overconsumption. Thus, foolishly and without a sense of responsibility in everyday life, people squander all that they can and as much as possible to fulfill their cravings and to feel fully valuable. While earlier rationality was connected with saving, today it is associated with wastefulness. A frugal man—the product of a rational economy—already transformed in a wasteful man. This transformation of humans is continued because it does not show anything to it that it will different go, at least in the foreseeable future.

¹According to research due in 2011 by the Swedish Institute for Food and Biotechnology in the international program Global Food Losses and Waste Foot under the auspices of FAO, is lost each year about 1.3 billion tons of food, which accounts for one third of the total global annual production. In industrialized countries, retailers and consumers throw away for various reasons 40 % of food fit for consumption. That could feed 12 billion people. Research due in March 2012 at the University of Stuttgart have shown that in one year in Germany wasted 11 million tons of food, of which 60 % of households, i.e. about 82 kg food per capita. In the last 40 years consumption of the paper in the world has quadruple increased despite—or possibly because of—the computerization.

Conclusion

On the present stage of the civilization progress, our environment and we ourselves are threatened as never before in consequence of the uncontrolled and accelerated overproduction and overconsumption. This is because people consumes too much and lives in a world of increasing number of consumer goods, in the world ruled by a huge increase of needs, stupidity, avarice and greed. It remains for us still 10–15 years time, in order to prove that we as human species are survivable, survive willing and also survive worthy. A lot of people is aware this situation and takes seriously the pessimistic forecasts for the next not-so-distant future. At the present time, humanity stays before the dramatic choice: either to live sustainably or to dead in a short time (Umweltbrief 2013). Therefore, sustainability is more a prerequisite for survival than the wishful thinking of people. However, this condition can be fulfilled above all by sustainable people. Only a sustainable person is able to transform the economy—and in consequence all other spheres of social activity—according to the principle of sustainability following the common sense, but also science, reason, intuition and emotions, as well as the supreme value, which is the preservation of his species. This value is generally due to biological instinct. Therefore, a supportable man is relatively strongly resistant to dictates or stereotypes of the culture and fashion. He cannot allow that culture and artificiality prevailed on biology and naturalness. He should counteract the rapid development and spreading of the stupidity (which is due to the social progress and which is subordinated to the principle of the unlimited economic growth), because this reduces our instinct for surviving to such an extent which can cause probably the premature extermination of the human species. Sustainable person can effectively resist various temptations of consumptionism thanks to highly developed environmental awareness and because he feel his own significance and dominance over what is foolish and ephemeral. One thing is certain: without existence and increased activity of sustainable people, one cannot efficiently implement the concept, principles and recommendations of sustainable development on a global scale. In other words, sustainable development cannot be implemented by unsustainable people.

The sustainable human is not only necessary for the implementation of the sustainable development, but also for economic growth at all. The advantage of such human is also that he is more efficient in the mental work and probably also in the physical work than an unsustainable human. Relevant studies could confirm that an internal unsustainable man and in addition stressed by the work tempo and other factors of the contemporary, enormously dynamic and uncertain environment really does not use fully his production capacities and creativity. There is no doubt that the carnal, intellectual and spiritual inner balance of a man contributes to an increase of human capital no less than the education, health, cultural values, standard of living and other factors (Šlaus and Jacobs 2011, 99). Thus, because of the maximization of the human capital, which is substantial for economic development, one should create such possibilities and social conditions that people could become ever more sustainable.

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