

Theory of sustainable development and social practice

Teoria zrównoważonego rozwoju a praktyka społeczna

Stefan Konstańczak

*University of Zielona Góra, Faculty of Humanities,
Institute of Philosophy, al. Wojska Polskiego 71A, 65-762 Zielona Góra, Poland
E-mail: S.Konstanczak@ifil.uz.zgora.pl*

Abstract

The paper shows, that the hopes associated with globalisation, which were also supposed to overcome the effects of the ecological crisis, have not been fulfilled. This situation is associated with the fact that nowadays the biggest influence on the functioning of the global ecosystem is by man himself, who exists simultaneously in two environments: social and cultural. According to the author, all crises are global and furthermore embrace both environments in which man functions. Therefore, people are most at risk to pay for every crisis, including the ecological one. Human communities would be able to function in any environment, if they accept and implement sustainable development, which includes the functioning of the anthroposphere and the biosphere at the same time. Communities which were unable to do so, collapsed and even disappeared. In conclusion, the author claims that even today there is such a requirement. Today's advocated sustainable development ensues from our species' historical experiences. The implementation of sustainable development could provide the best optimal development conditions for both mankind and the natural environment.

Key words: eco-development, sustainable development, anthroposphere, biosphere, ecological crisis, safety, strategies of crisis' overcoming

Streszczenie

Autor wskazuje, że nadzieje związane z globalizacją, która miała doprowadzić także do przezwyciężenia skutków kryzysu ekologicznego, nie spełniły się. Taki stan rzeczy wiąże z faktem, że współcześnie największy wpływ na funkcjonowanie ziemskiego ekosystemu ma sam człowiek egzystujący równoległe w dwóch środowiskach: społecznym i kulturowym. Zdaniem autora wszystkie zjawiska kryzysowe mają zasięg globalny, a ponadto obejmują oba środowiska, w których funkcjonuje człowiek. Dlatego każdy kryzys, w tym i ekologiczny, jest dotkliwie odczuwalny zwłaszcza przez ludzi. Społeczności ludzkie potrafiły funkcjonować w każdym środowisku, jeśli były w stanie przyjąć i realizować jakąś postać zasady zrównoważonego rozwoju, która obejmowała zarazem funkcjonowanie antroposfery i biosfery. Społeczności, które tego nie potrafiły, upadały a nawet ginęły. Autor w konkluzji stwierdza, że również obecnie istnieje taki wymóg, a zatem propagowana współcześnie zasada zrównoważonego rozwoju jest konsekwencją doświadczeń historycznych naszego gatunku i najlepszą drogą dla zapewnienia optymalnych warunków rozwoju zarówno dla ludzkości jak i środowiska naturalnego.

Słowa kluczowe: ekorozwój, zrównoważony rozwój, antroposfera, biosfera, kryzys ekologiczny, bezpieczeństwo, strategie pokonywania kryzysu

Introduction

It was widely anticipated that after the fall of the Berlin Wall the world would become a safer place and the international community would finally be able to resolve the global problems afflicting humanity. It seemed then that the most important and indisputa-

ble task would be to overcome the consequences of the ecological crisis. However, these hopes were quickly dispelled on 11th September 2001. In the face of the crisis afflicting the whole world today, the hopes of that time seem even more remote, and this is accompanied by a noticeable drop in social sensitivity to ecological problems. The change in senti-

ment is undoubtedly well reflected in the motto *Zmierzch epoki ekologii (Twilight of the ecology age)*, chosen for the wide-ranging discussion carried out on the pages of an influential Polish monthly magazine *Znak (Sign)*. However, it is worth considering whether in fact social priorities have changed. It is the author's belief that it is only an illusion related more to the patterns by which the mass media sphere is guided, than to social practice. In order to explain this phenomena, the problems of our civilization should be considered from a different perspective, than the one presented by the media. Knowledge of the rights governing the development of civilisation has an interdisciplinary nature, which is provided by all sciences without exception. Taking care of the state and the future of our planet is the most important issue for science. In this task, philosophy plays an important role, since *the modern world is faced with the problem of formulating a new, more sustainable vision of the development of human civilisation (and perhaps even survival), which would reconcile social aspirations, but at the same time maintain the threatened geo-ecosystems – the basic elements necessary for the existence of civilisation on the unique 'spaceship' called Earth* (Pawłowski, 2011). Indeed, not only does philosophy have the possibility, but it also has the obligation to make such a synthesis. Nevertheless, this task does not necessarily mean the creation of projects targeted with major rebuilding of our civilisation, as it will most likely be sufficient to rationally use past experiences and unrestricted access to information concerning the condition of our planet, including our own species.

Conditions for the development of civilisation

For science, a difficult question to answer is why the crisis, one of many which humanity had experienced in the past, challenged in some way the implemented development model of our civilisation? After the experiences of recent years, it has turned out that the answer to this question will not be provided by economics or political science. However, knowledge drawn from philosophical anthropology might turn out to be helpful here. In fact, a man lives simultaneously in two environments, a natural hitherto found biosphere, which is developing relatively independently of a man but of which he is an integral part; and an anthroposphere, an environment created by a man himself (an artificial environment). The latter environment is created exclusively for humans, and hence the presence of other living organisms is strictly controlled. However, from the moment when living conditions deteriorate, people try to compensate for the associated losses with an increased exploitation of natural resources. Highlighting the events of the crisis in only one sphere is therefore a misguided treatment for the reason that human exist-

ence is already dependent on the state of both the biosphere as well as the anthroposphere. In this context, a purely ecological or a purely economic vision of the crisis does not seem to be accurate. In fact, we are dealing with a growing general crisis which affects all people, regardless of whether they have contributed to it or not. Therefore, the undertaken deliberations do not only apply to the symptoms of the social crisis, because it is expressed in the same terms, in which the ecological crisis is expressed. A characteristic of any crisis is a decline in an individual's sense of security. It does not matter whether it is a crisis in the anthroposphere, or the biosphere. In this context, an argument should be put forward, that sustainable development should be associated with an increase in the overall sense of security for the inhabitants of our planet. Therefore, the idea of sustainable development appears to involve the balance between environmental security and social security. Mankind has gained this type of knowledge and experience over the millennia, which is reflected in the sustainable development concept. There is no need to study scientific research papers to become convinced, it is sufficient just to look in the documents issued by the United Nations, which have been accepted for implementation and are dedicated to provide all humanity with a rational development direction.

International treaties on environmental issues if not abide by, they should usually put specific sanctions but it is not always the case. In terms of the future of our planet there is no choice. In principle every law aiming to improve the state of man's natural environment, sooner or later, is approved by individual societies. It is necessary to associate this with a growing awareness that ecological threats have no borders. It is possible, that in the foreseeable future each country will experience the effects of carelessness or lack of adequate safeguards in another country. Furthermore, public opinion is very sensible to these issues and closely monitors all activities which are even a potential threat to the deterioration of the natural environment or the social environment.

However, the care of the second environment, the anthroposphere constitutes a separate issue. On the one hand, the problem lies primarily in the fact that universal rules, which are applicable to all countries and nations of the world, cannot be easily established in this case. Here, more can be demanded from the rich, than from the poor. On the other hand, it is in the interest of developing countries to improve their environment, since they will quickly feel the negative effects of this state of affairs through the exodus of its citizens to countries that put more effort in this respect. Yet it is difficult to measure parametrically the state of the environment because the citizens' subjective sense of well-being is more important here than the size of GDP *per capita*. However, if such an exodus is approaching, its direction is very

easy to predict. Therefore, it seems that instead of spending millions on building barbed wire entanglements and fences separating the world of the rich from the poor, it is better to spend it on equalising the difference or at least on creating development opportunities for the poor. It is this lack of development prospects and the inability to change one's situation, which lead people to migrate. The most important thing is that entrepreneurs and the highly educated migrate from the underdeveloped regions. Thus, after their departure, most ecological slogans do not bring results because the ecological awareness of the remaining inhabitants in such regions has not had the time to form yet.

It is no wonder that the international regulations embrace a common sense concept of *sustainable development* which in the documents of the United Nations has been defined as follows: *The sustainable development of Earth is development that meets the basic needs of all people and preserves, protects and restores the health and integrity of the ecosystem earth, without jeopardizing opportunities to meet the needs of future generations and without exceeding the limits of long-term capacity of the Earth's ecosystem* (Pawłowski, 2011).

On the basis of publications on sustainable development that are available, it can be noted that authors often accept hidden assumptions that solving natural environment problems solves at the same time all the remaining ones. Meanwhile, the reasoning is only partially true, because *mankind is already our planet's destiny* (Morin, 1999) and it seems that without solving its problems it is difficult to expect any spectacular achievements in the field of improving the state of the natural environment. Thus today, taking care of the anthroposphere is equally important as caring for the natural environment. This is the result of mankind's long liberation from the surrounding natural environment, which allowed us not only to adapt to it, but also to find effective ways to prevent natural disasters. The objectives of activities in both environments must be identical because an attempt to create an entirely artificial (unnatural) environment intended only for man is impossible, similarly to considering human existence exclusively as one of the elements of the natural environment. The existence of a completely artificial environment is not possible, especially while taking into consideration the fact that the human body, for its proper functioning, must live in symbiosis with hundreds of species of micro-organisms which live inside, or on the surface of the body. We realise the fact that they are important to us when, for example, after a long-term course of antibiotics, we administer special medicines, and rebuild our internal microbiota with great difficulty. Likewise, a man would lose the whole of the previous generations' legacies, if upon return he completely became a child of nature.

Considering sustainable development, we should think about what would happen if the human race suddenly disappeared from our planet. Would it really be such a good solution for the biosphere, as it is proclaimed by the neo-naturalism supporters? Earth without humans would look entirely different but that does not mean that it would *ipso facto* fulfil the dreams of the radical environmentalist supporters. In such case all deliberations about sustainable development would be meaningless for this concept, that contains the idea of the non-deterioration of the current state of both the biosphere and the anthroposphere, as well as a certain vision of the future, that humanity should achieve. The popularity of the idea is mainly due to the lack of its opponents' alternative vision, of which the numerous scientific papers predicting the *end of history* would try to convince people. After all, it is not an important idea capable of capturing crowds, but rather a sign of intellectual weakness in addressing both social and ecological problems. The *end of history*, predicted by Francis Fukuyama, preached that humanity has already achieved its target state and all countries of the world have adopted the liberal democracy model, which is the best of all possible regimes, but it is not the ideal solution. Meanwhile, supporters of the sustainable development concept proclaim exactly the opposite slogans, that the existing political solutions are deeply unfair to both individuals and entire countries. The preservation of the current state is really only for the privileged and therefore, its aim is only to ensure security for the elite. Ordinary people do not need golf courses, which replace drained moors, or private airports, because they isolate, rather than unite them. For an ordinary person the world is shrinking, because it is dominated by the privileged elite, which possess private islands, lakes, attractive places, monuments etc. and access to them for a mere mortal is strictly controlled, or even impossible. Clearly, it is at odds with the egalitarian view that Earth is home for all people.

Thus today, we observe two fundamentally different approaches to the existence of our species and at the same time adopting one of them means siding with a specific historiosophical option. The first one assumes a static course of history, and its embodiment is the *end of history* concept, or any similar assumptions based on either infinite multiplication of the existing condition or its limited evolution. They also assume that the existing situation does not require any radical changes, but at most limited modification. This implies a specific precautionary principle, which leads to a defence of the existing *status quo* because the changes not only disturb the existing order, but are also associated with a risk whose consequences cannot be predicted. This leads directly to defending one's ownership at all cost, which is also achieved with the help of the military. Every war is a spark for uncontrolled and unpredictable changes

in the social and natural environments. Good examples of this situation are the war in former Yugoslavia, as well as the current conflicts in Afghanistan and the countries in the Maghreb region of North Africa.

The second option, expressed in the sustainable development concept, is inherently associated with a disagreement over the existing order. It also assumes that historical progress does not have to be associated with progress measured using parametric indicators. Thus, specific periods of stagnation or even decline in some areas would be acceptable provided, that man's quality of life does not deteriorate. The decline in industrial production does not have to be a disaster if people live better. Better, always also means more safely.

Sustainable means secure

Sustainable development is not exclusively about behaving carefully with the limited natural resources, but about maintaining the potential for further functioning and development in the interests of future generations. Already in the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development report *Our Common Future* also known as the *Brundtland Report*, published in 1987, a definition of sustainability was included, namely economic development of such conduct, which does not affect in a significant and irreversible way man's living environment, does not lead to the degradation of the biosphere and reconciles the laws of nature, economy, and culture (WCED, 1987). In my opinion, this is very clear wording which simply reflects the practices implemented by our species against the natural and social environments. At the time when human intervention in nature was almost imperceptible, there was simply no need to introduce any specific directives in this area, but such directives appeared as soon as the interference turned out to be excessive and risked compromising the interests of other people.

Accepting all the criticism towards sustainable development, which Václav Klaus expressed in his book *Blue Planet in Green Shackles. What is Endangered: Climate or Freedom?*, the entire concept should be recognised for being very harmful to mankind¹. Meanwhile, everything seems to indicate that sustainable development is the most natural course of action for humans. The first Polish environmental laws, which protected beavers and aurochs at a time when there was no talk about an ecological crisis, testified how our ancestors have taken care of nature. But similar records can be found even in the Egyptian *Books of the Dead*, in which the deliberate destruction of the irrigation system was considered to be one of the greatest sins and transgressions.

One can of course contemplate the wisdom of the Saxon forester Hans Carl von Carlowitz (1645-1714), who was authorised with the primacy to use the term *sustainable development* by indicating this *management method for forest goods so that in the place of felled trees new ones had time to grow* (Pawłowski, 2011). A rapidly industrialising Saxony then at a lightning rate rid itself of its forests, which fell under the lumberjack's axe, which served both as building material and fuel. Hence, there was an urgent need to stop the wasteful economy, which initially was intended to be achieved by only importing timber from neighbouring regions. But was von Carlowitz's motto so revolutionary, or does it reflect his high level of sensitivity to environmental protection issues? It is much easier to accept that he was simply a good manager directed by an appropriate rationality for the informed representatives of our species. Nonetheless, the actions of the Saxon authorities reminds us of the modern industrialised nations, who have not even allowed a permanent depletion of their natural riches now, as if saving them for a *rainy day*. But it is nothing more than an experience, rooted in our species, which is the easiest way to survive even the most difficult moments. People can be considered as masters of survival precisely through the implementation of the sustainable development principles. We of course believe that ecological issues are inherent, or occur as a result of the implementation of the projects which did not achieve their aim, but it does not change the nature of the problem which is that most often those are people themselves who cause the ecological crisis, and significantly less frequently, but independently of them, natural disasters. This results from the observation, that every natural phenomenon, even if it spreads terror as a tsunami or an earthquake, it does not lead to an ecological crisis by itself. However, this does not mean that such a risk cannot occur in the future, because the biosphere can achieve a state where life is impossible on the planet, since the planet's evolutionary direction, as well as the world's, cannot be predicted to the end. Indeed, this is the logic of the evolutionary processes.

It is fair to say, that we humans are the sole perpetrators of the ecological crises, because we still forget that whatever we do in our artificial environment, the anthroposphere, is automatically reflected in the natural environment. A classic example of this is draining the swamps in order to acquire additional areas for crops. Then, it is obvious that we radically change the local natural environment, but it should be no surprise, that beavers disappear and for example hares appear. Knowledge of what each change to nature which surrounds us can lead to is provided by ecology, which speaks of the conditions connecting organisms with their environment. When we change

¹ Zdzisława Piątek conducted a thorough analysis and critique on the works of Václav Klaus, in her article *Does*

society 'obsessed with ecology' pose a threat to human freedom and democracy?

the environment, it is clear that the composition of the organisms inhabiting it also changes. If our knowledge of the consequences of implemented projects is insufficient, then it is necessary to be guided by the principle of precaution, as the human race did for centuries, and to introduce these changes gradually, monitoring the state of the environment.

Critics of sustainable development, such as Václav Klaus, see the orders of the ecological demands above all others, because they consider the ecological issues as something autonomous, something that has no significant effect on humans. But each action in the natural environment has an impact on the human condition and *vice versa*, each change in the anthroposphere alters the state of nature which surrounds us. Knowledge on this topic is essential to effectively modify our civilisation, in which building a human-friendly environment has also a positive influence on nature. In France, the precaution principle was written into the *Basic Law*, as a basic requirement, when undertaking decisions of a political or economic nature. As Klaus believes, it does not mean, that the state of our civilisation is automatically deteriorating. For instance, the French do not mind developing the nuclear power which supplies the vast majority of electricity consumed there. Therefore, sustainable development is a rationally chosen direction in which our civilisation is developing. It is not that there are no alternative development paths, but it is the most reasonable solution which we have at our disposal, and human activities testify as to its effectiveness. Cultures, which could not abide by it in their daily practice, have long since become extinct, and it is all for the same reason (Dorst, 1987). Thus, there is no better way for civilisation to develop, than that which implements, even to a limited extent, sustainable development. Security is not just endurance, but also the maintenance of the capability for further development that leads to survival in the medium and long term.

A New axiological order

Sustainable development is also involved with the transformation of the order of values, which functions in human societies. Robert Goodin's *Green Theory* may propose a new axiological order. Its starting point is the belief, that every improved idea based on scientific achievements must be simultaneously pro-ecological. This makes it possible to gather large numbers of people. Thus, humanity currently has only three systems of values to choose (Goodin, 1992):

1. neoliberal – based on the interpretation of preference, and the core value is consumer satisfaction,
2. socialist – the core value is production and human labour associated with it,
3. *Green Theory* – the core values are the natural attributes.

The Green Theory implies that associating effectiveness with morality is something natural. Thus, the more natural (*green*) the man-made product is, the more morally acceptable its production becomes. It also indicates that both a politician and a capitalist can and should act pro-ecologically, but at the same time without sacrificing future successes. The starting point here is the assumption, that all pro-ecological measures are always good for humanity. The same reasoning can be found in Hans Jonas' *The Imperative of Responsibility*, which inherently involves the future, and thus the survival of our species with the state of the natural environment. We have become responsible for nature and for ourselves, since we have the tools to self-destruct by destroying simultaneously both environments in which we operate. Hence, nature needs human support, but at the same time protecting it, ensures our continued existence (Jonas, 1996). However, our existence is not associated with continuous endurance under static conditions, but with continuous change, which should improve both our own security as well as that of the ambient environment.

So, questioning the sense of sustainable development does not appear to be reasonable. It must be assumed, that our ancestors survived due to their reasonable exploitation of the natural environment. Long term residence in one place convinces us as to the reasonableness of this strategy. For instance, there is no other explanation for the fact that people have been living continuously for tens of thousands of years on the Apennine and Iberian Peninsulas in the same place. If they did not take into account such a concept, they would not only have devastated the natural environment, but also exploited all the local resources. Therefore, it seems that cultures, even if they have been guided by the limited logic of sustainable development, survived not only historical storms, but also delved deeper into nature's mysteries and were able to not only take advantage but also use the acquired knowledge to improve their material culture. However, our type of globalisation and its associated specific *eco-imperialism*, are still calling for new requirements and at the same time imposing a unique responsibility on the global community. Sustainable development activities do not explain everything, but explain many things. It is worth referring here to the experiences of Bill Drayton and his ideas and practices related to the implementation of the Ashok concept, the so-called new social economy in various neglected regions of the world, where prudence was not applied earlier, and to his foundation's program which effectively supports these cultures, by introducing sustainable development concepts as is happening today in Bangladesh, Africa and South America.

Adjectives such as *green*, *natural*, *ecological* are also readily used in the language spoken by politicians because they give a positive meaning to the spoken words. Such terminology has permeated into

the language of political debates from the incorrectly termed popular culture and hence is used to describe what for man and his continued existence is of utmost importance. Thanks to some politicians, *green* has become a quality which is always worth seeking and taking care of. In order to explain the reasons for the politicians' interests in the concepts drawn from ecology, it is necessary to go back into the history of our culture. Green is the traditional colour of hope, and consequently not only do political groups willingly use it in their symbolism, but it is also often introduced into a nation's symbolism. Therefore, it is synonymous with naturalness. Naturalness is something which needs to be maintained, preserved, because its existence is *fragile* and is often irreparably damaged. The restitution of an extinct species is a misguided task, because, after all, nature is also guided by a specific sustainable development logic and the disappearance of a specific species means the constitution of a new order in a given ecosystem, for which the return of an extinct species would be an unmitigated disaster. In this analysis, restitution is an artificial procedure which does not have much in common with naturalness. Nevertheless, it is obvious that every species inhabiting a defined environment finds itself in a defined equilibrium within it, because it can only receive food and find shelter within it.

It cannot be forgotten that the protection of the natural environment is a targeted procedure only performed by humans. However, such an activity only makes sense, when it combines human interests with the interests of the environment. This is precisely the meaning of sustainable development, and it does not involve, as some radical supporters of environmentalism want, a man suddenly renouncing the anthroposphere, the environment he created after thousands of years. Sustainable development does not depend upon people voluntarily renouncing the benefits of civilisation. Such an understanding of sustainable development prevailed when in September 2000 the United Nations Millennium Summit took place in New York, when the *Millennium Development Goals* were adopted. Even then these objectives were ambitious and were formulated on a global wave of enthusiasm and belief in the bright future awaiting our planet. The state of affairs from the year 1990 was chosen as the initial basis for these targets and the individual objectives were to be achieved by 2015. In order to control their implementation intermediate points were also identified. Moreover, those targets should already be partially completed. Eight strategic objectives were adopted, none of which, as it is already known, will not be fulfilled by 2015. Even the most mundane objective, the postulate to provide the world's young people up to 15 years of age with at least a basic level general education, has proven to be impossible to achieve. The reasons for this of course do not lie with nature, or the lack of access to resources, but in the fact that a significant

proportion of the Earth's poorest people do not have a permanent place of residence, and their offspring have not even been registered. Numerous armed conflicts deepen this state of affairs resulting in considerable numbers of refugees and the destruction of the educational infrastructure. Those are people themselves who have to first manage to end all conflicts between themselves in order to effectively improve the condition of the surrounding environment. Nonetheless, it is important that in the objectives of *The Millennium Goals*, the main emphasis was placed on general public issues, as it was clear by then, that an improvement in nature will not occur if not preceded by an improvement in the conditions of human existence. A prerequisite to radically improve the state of the natural environment is not, as it turned out, typical protective activities, or some strict rules to protect the environment, but public access to environmental information and the elimination of illiteracy. In order to protect the environment it is necessary to know what and how to do it. Ignorance is the cause of the mindless devastation of nature probably more often than targeted exploitative human activities. The numerous fires as a consequence of burning meadows and pastures constitute the proof of this.

Interestingly, in the ongoing discussion big phrases such as *we must, we have no choice* are used and this determinism is very awkwardly explained. Human activities are rarely determined by the laws of nature, but are more often an expression of a convention, which can be agreed or negotiated. The formulated sustainable development concept is the result of compromises, that have been agreed at international conventions. Therefore, we can only say that our current knowledge and experience indicate that it is the best functional model of our civilisation available to us at a given time. So if someone opposes sustainable development, he should point to a model that better protects the needs of individuals and whole societies. It seems that the declared critics of sustainable development, such as Václav Klaus, have nothing to offer except for a handful of little meaningful slogans. Therefore, the starting point for the undertaken deliberations is not a mutual exclusion of either sustainable development or the end of civilisation, but a bound alternative, sustainable development or some other model, which assumes that it is possible to implement in parallel with social practices some competitive principle. Even so, it seems reasonable to assume that all previously identified civilisations always adopted a development direction which can be considered sustainable. Striving for balance appears to be a natural feature of any system which by its very nature tends to arrange its elements in such a way, as to ensure itself the longest period of endurance. It would be intriguing, if it turned out that human rationality escapes from this convention and may approve of such a culture which today we would call suicidal. Trying to benefit from past experiences

we should rather look for answers to the question: why a particular culture disappeared; or why, despite everything, it still persists? In the light of available information, it appears that this is primarily due to past experiences, with the implementation of sustainable development, which is currently a paradigm for the development of our civilisation.

The current implementation of the sustainable development model is not ideal, as we have already experienced, through the ongoing financial crisis. It will force certain adjustments to the implementation model because, regardless of the actual noticeable improvement of e.g. air purity, it is however the quality of life and people's sense of security which has declined. So the question for today is – what needs to be done, so that the residents of our world do not feel the discomfort associated with the various crises? Sustainable development links all the development factors into one indivisible whole, thanks to which it is possible to effectively combat many epidemics and improve the global natural environment. However, it is not a charitable or typically protective action which has improved the current state of affairs but actions seemingly remote from the very problem such as the elimination of illiteracy and improvements in hygiene and sanitary conditions. The very idea is based on the fact that through consistent efforts in specific areas, the condition of our planet will improve together with mankind's quality of life. The current crisis once again reminds us how far our world has become globalised and integrated in a network of interconnections whose characteristics we have not yet learned, but which we severely feel every day. So, it seems that the world's development, on the whole, is moving in the right direction but this development encounters from time to time various obstacles, which we must manage to overcome.

But how do we know what we should strive for? Ostensibly, the answer to this question seems difficult, because man always sets the development goals, and besides his needs, they must be met first. Discussion on the fact that the environment is more important than a man is on the whole misguided, because it is only meaningful when a man is already within it. Nobody feels sorry, when trees or animals die as a result of a volcanic eruption, but everybody regrets it when they die as a result of an intentional or unintentional human activity. Therefore, the value of the individual natural environment elements depends on man himself. While considering how the implementation of sustainable development should look, we must first take into account man's interests. It is possible, of course, to consider a hypothetical situation, where we reduce a man into the role of a *world citizen*, but it will never be an idea sufficiently important to mobilise people into taking concrete actions targeted at such a state of affairs. Therefore, to implement sustainable development one must start from oneself. This is the starting point for social, economic and

even ecological practices. Such an opinion can be criticised that it unduly differentiates man, but then no other opinion can be realistically implemented.

Man in nature

Even among those people with a revolutionary attitude towards the current reality, the following belief may be interpreted as surprising *only a vision based on human nature, or (...) unchanging objectives pursued by man, can visions of a desired society be built. Society has to be suitable for people, who – by nature or for other unchangeable reasons – have such rather than different expectations* (Krol, 2008). Human objectives are also constantly changing, earlier they were only limited to ensuring survival. However, today many of the implemented objectives pursued by humans go back so far, that they sometimes modify the Earth's ecosystem. The problem is mainly that their implementation should not interfere with the interests of others and the foreseeable needs of future generations. Importantly, it should be also compatible with the individual objectives, as well as social one. In other words, a man who is protecting the natural environment, or is reducing some of his expectations, works as much as possible in his well-conceived long-term interest. Following this path it must be recognised that a man, since the dawn of civilisation, had to act in such a way, that he will express at least the various forms of protection of the selected elements of nature, which was achieved at least by assigning them a sacred meaning (holy places, trees, animals, etc.).

Thus, we can fully benefit from past experiences, because human nature has not changed over this relatively short period of time in which we have acquired the ability to record our experiences in writing. Epicurus wrote, *He who believes that he has little, even though there is plenty, for him nothing is sufficient* (Epicurus, 2003). This quote retains its relevance even today. In order to further develop, mankind is reaching out for inorganic resources which convert into chemical compounds which can be applied to satisfy his biological needs. We are already able to harness microorganisms to this task, which in their biotechnological reactors produce not only vanilla for us, but also biodegradable plastics. Microorganisms in modern wastewater treatment plants can also neutralise toxic wastes, which are a by-product of human activity. Therefore, it is not entirely true that existential human activity only leads to the impoverishment of the biosphere, as it also expands its physical boundaries. Meanwhile, we are constantly talking about the economic crisis, which has pushed discussions about environmental issues into the background. It is astonishing how little is written about sustainable development in the practical context for example in Poland. Undoubtedly very few fellow-countrymen know that in the interests of mankind's future we are celebrating the *UN's Decade of Educa-*

tion for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) whose presence in the media or in politics in Poland is difficult to find. In parliamentary debates the issue of sustainable development is either not raised or is only limited to the selected aspect.

Meanwhile, in science there are two general strategies to explain the reasons for the causes of every crisis. The first one raises the argument about the aggressive nature of humans that led humanity to try to dominate over nature and make it a conquered territory, appropriated, which can be ruthlessly exploited. In this case, the cause of the ecological crisis would lie in man's very nature and would be in some sense justified by subjective mental reasons. Then again, from the supporters of technocracy's point of view, ecological issues stem from the weakness of the applied technology, as an undesired by-product of civilisation. Therefore, improvements to our technical shell should be sufficient for the problems to disappear by themselves (Mikiewicz, 2009).

In fact, there is no other choice but to opt for one of these strategies in order to explain the causes of the ecological crisis. We all agree that the crisis should never have happened, but then with each step we experience its effects. How is it that although being full of good intentions to end the crisis, we have not achieved major successes in this battle? To answer this question, one needs to once again refer to one of the strategies which explain the causes of this crisis. Since the crisis is real, then it would be theoretically easy to eliminate its causes, in order to return to the original state prior to the crisis. But returning to this desired past is only possible with the first strategy. The second strategy absolutely does not create the possibility of return, because this would entail the liquidation of civilisation's entire infrastructure, which would require an even more sophisticated technology, than that considered to be the driving cause of the ecological crisis.

While approving the first strategy, we assume at the same time, an opportunity to harness human nature to such an extent that people will voluntarily renounce their desire to rule over nature, and perhaps even to give up the entire material cultural heritage. After all, by building houses, motorways, airports, we appropriate nature's existing territories, and in addition we do a lot to prevent it from returning. In our own homes we do not tolerate insects, rodents, etc. Similarly, motorways and airports are not designed for forest animals or even small organisms. Therefore, it can be noted that the first strategy offers only one way of ending the ecological crisis; it is a strategy to give up the culture of material gains. In many ways it seems pointless, since only depriving humanity of contraceptives and medical technology would bring upon our species countless disasters associated with an uncontrolled growing population, and a rapid spread of certain diseases and disabilities. Thus, such a strategy is irrational, but willingly promoted by many supporters of the back to nature

idea. The popularity of these ideas has remained unabated for centuries, thanks to various philosophers, and this return would mean a return to the old reconciliation of man with nature, when apparently there was no hunger and disease, and everyone was happy. The ancient past emerges as an image of mythical Eden, of paradise lost, from which we were expelled, as if at our own request. It does not matter, whether we refer to the Plato's, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's, or the contemporary Henryk Skolimowski's view. Yet even if such a *return* turned out to be possible, we have already managed to transform the biosphere to such an extent, that it would then constitute a real threat to our species. But it is not at all about predators, but about places of past ecological disasters like Bhopal and Chernobyl. We do not possess a sense, which could warn us against radiation and chemical contamination. Therefore, a return to nature does not come into the equation, all the more since it is an illusion of a glorious past that never was. Such a vision has nothing to do with sustainable development. In the light of the achievements of modern ecology and anthropology another myth also falls apart – the belief, that man once lived in peaceful coexistence with other living organisms and the whole of nature. *The belief that civilisation ruined man, because he once lived in harmony with nature and was peacefully set towards others, is simply false* (Rotkiewicz, 2010). Observations of peoples, who have not developed material civilisation and man's evolutionary animal relatives, show that closeness to nature makes our species even more aggressive and ruthless. It is even possible to surmise, that if it was not for the developing culture and closely related conventions, customs and morals, mankind would never have left the caves, which of course would make the whole debate about the ecological crisis pointless. Thus, Rousseau's *noble savage* is not some scientific truth, but rather self-deception and an attempt to blame one's actions on an impersonal civilisation. It also cannot be hidden, that we willingly believe in this myth. The first type of solution to the ecological issues we can term regressive, because regardless of whether or not we will be guided back to the *noble savage*, that is implement the *return to nature* motto, or whether we build a mystical community of people reconciled with nature, it means stopping cultural development and depriving people of elementary security.

Since in the elimination process the first strategy was rejected, we are inevitably destined to work within the second strategy. It does not imply abandoning the achievements of the material culture, but its improvements indefinitely. Here, no achieved state is considered as being purely right and worthy desire, because even at the time when humanity is creating a completely closed material loop, in which there will be no waste and no need to appropriate new territories, it is after all in cases of vast wildfires, long-term droughts, floods, etc., that people will continue

to come to nature's aid in such a way so as not to diminish its richness. This prompts a remote analogy regarding anglers, who care about fishing, stock the reservoirs with fish and ensure their cleanliness.

One should not count on humanity voluntarily giving up everything civilisation has brought us. It has also provided us with the knowledge of how to manage limited resources wisely. Accumulated evidence indicates, that nature gains more if man wisely take advantage of it, rather than when he does not have the skills or even gives up from exploiting it. *History is full of evidence that the limitations of technology and demand, rather than cultural self-restraint, deterred tribal people from over-exploiting the environment* (Ridley, 2000). In such a situation, they needed to implement sustainable development, imposed on them by external circumstances. In this respect the situation has not changed to this day, so humanity has no other choice than limiting itself in order to survive. Nor can it be expected, that oak and alder will spontaneously grow in former crop fields rather than thistles and corncockle. Maybe they will even quickly change from flowering fields into an arid desert. It seems, that man with his presence has changed the natural world so much that irrespective of what he might do, everything anyway will have an impact on the Earth's ecosystem.

Therefore, the technocratic strategy contributes to the development of civilisation by seeking to introduce such cultural changes, even by trial and error, which would allow a man, as well as the surrounding natural environment, not only to continue to exist, but also to have the best chance of further development. The consequence of such thinking is the idea of a new world order, that postulates not to eliminate civilisation, but only to modify its development in a direction that can be called a *green culture*. It is expressed of course in the assumptions of the implemented sustainable development model.

Conclusion

Political debates on sustainable development are burdened with legacy. One cannot expect agreement, if a discourse partner with a different viewpoint is treated as an enemy. *It is the enemy, who is fully responsible for his underdevelopment and his moral shortcomings. Nevertheless, the disease of evil, although it has characteristics which are independent of will, is always guilty* (Kubiak, 2008). However, such an attitude called *protagonist psychology* assumes the inner readiness of opposite side to adopt one's own position, which of course is considered to be the only rational one, and sometimes even the only possible and real one. A kind of *conversion* is only possible, when supporting an opponent's guilt and discomfort who is shown in every possible way that he is wrong and should repent as quickly as possible and unconditionally accept the other party's position. Practically all discussions about sustainable

development are also tainted with this stigma of *conversion*. Only the proponents and opponents of nuclear energy, motorway construction, expansion of protected areas, hunting, and all kinds of prohibitions motivated on ecological grounds take part in the waged debates.

Such a *dialogue* does not lead to a consensus, and yet mankind needs to be convinced that all people and all cultures are guided by a similar set of symbols and that different languages can be translated and agreed in a consistent, global attitude towards the problems plaguing the world today. It is clear that the term *sustainable development* is translatable into any language, but it does not have to mean the same thing in each language. A Sub-Saharan African resident does not associate sustainable development with a hunting prohibition, but such connotation may be implied for a Swedish or even Polish resident. In discussions on sustainable development it is also possible to see a lack of elementary logic. For example, when we embrace strict protection of whales, it is the duty of everyone to protect them regardless of situation. Paradoxically, this leads to a negation of ecological component of sustainable development, which after all does not distinguish any element of nature, even people, as it only enables them to benefit exclusively from maintained livestock and crop resources without restriction.

What sort of future awaits sustainable development? Is humanity still able to rise above divisions and the specific interests of individual countries? This is quite a paradoxical question, since the problem can be turned around and perceived, that if it was not for sustainable development, is there any notion capable of uniting the whole of humanity? Therefore, it seems that due to the widening differences in the political and economic spheres, there does not exist any equally important notion today. Indeed, Stefan Kozłowski, the tireless proponent of this concept, was right in perceiving, that there had already been a historical moment in which favourable conditions existed for a global agreement for the implementation of the sustainable development strategy. He pointed out, that this moment came in 1992, when the antagonistic bipolar division of the world finally collapsed (Kozłowski, 2000). Today, conditions to unite humanity around this concept are less favourable, but instead of that societies' awareness is already so high, that regression for mankind is most likely no longer a threat. Only simple reserves have become exhausted which enabled self-development at the expense of other people or even regions (Wallerstein, 1998). However, even Wallerstein himself does not indicate what the new organisational structure of society will be, which replaces capitalism, but everything indicates that it will continue to be guided by sustainable development. Contemporary sensitivity no longer has a mercantile or social character because it is determined by the colour green, the colour of hope.

Pro-ecological movements are primarily mass social movements, from whose ecological aims demands for the reconstruction of the existing social, economic and political orders emerged. It is no longer a true picture of an ecological supporter, who *no longer desires anything less, than a reform of the rules of governance, economic and social transformation in the name – because it is impossible to define it more modestly – of liberating nature from the yoke of man's exploitation* (Nisbet, 1998). Not long ago, a few critics of such an unorganised ecological campaign maliciously remarked: *Pro-abortionists, egalitarians, health food addicts, fluoridation opponents and as Engels would say, the rest of 'fanaticism', 'stupidity' and self-interest are seeking political protection today under the wings of environmentalism* (Nisbet, 1998). Such discredit of spontaneous initiatives brought about socially undesirable results. Unfortunately, social sensitivity has recently decreased and an important notion is constantly needed, which will attract millions. It is strange that the rebellious environmentalism was seized by millions, while the rational sustainable development concept somehow was not, even though it is the subject of official speeches, conferences and scientific publications. But in the light of the contents discussed here, one does not have to be a prophet in order to anticipate, that political representation of the supporters of the *green theory* will continue to grow in strength. In the context of the slogans proclaimed by unorganized supporters of the *outraged movements*, the wording with which once Alexis de Tocqueville described the upcoming changes seems more accurate: *one could suppose that the goal of the imminent revolution was not the overthrow of the old order, but its restoration* (Arendt, 1991). In the context of the financial crisis and the accompanying ideas, these words should have a special meaning, because undoubtedly sustainable development is a proposal of such an order, and more importantly, may be universally accepted.

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