

# “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT” AND GLOBALISATION PROCESSES

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The term “sustainable development” was coined in the 1970s as a concept that encompasses all further human development needed, together with the mandatory environmental protection. To date, according to the available data, there were several hundred attempts to define this term. Generally speaking, the most known and accepted definition dates back to 1987. In this year, a report titled *Our Common Future* or well-known as the *Brundtland Report*, the definition of sustainable development has been published and remained leading until today: “Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>1</sup>

At the last decades of the 20th century, numerous conferences and meetings are organised addressing the development and implementation of the concept of sustainable development in all elements and at all levels of global societies. Thus, one of the most famous conferences was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The result of the Rio de Janeiro meeting is a document called *Agenda 21*.

Agenda 21 is a program for sustainable development at a global level, encompassing the social and economic dimension, protection and management of developing resources, empowering the role of the crucial groups and implementation of funds. The slogan, “Think globally, act locally!” which has been promoted there, is considered today to be the main principle and

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1 The report is named after Norwegian Minister Gro Harlan Brundtland, who chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development. Otherwise, the document, which is over 300 pages long and consists of three parts and two annexes, describes the process of sustainable development in all levels of its possible occurrence, from common concern and conceptualization to common challenges that involve populations, food, ecosystems, energy to peace building, security, development, environmental protection and proposals for institutional and legal changes.

essential guideline for thinking and acting in accordance with sustainable development.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. *What is sustainable development?*

On the whole, sustainable development is explained today as a process of change in which the utilisation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional reforms (political, educational, legal, financial and other systems' reforms) are in harmony with each other and enable the needs and expectations of the present and future generations. It can be said that sustainable development represents a general direction, an aspiration to create a better, more ethical world, a world of balancing social and economic factors in protecting the environment. There are three domains of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental (ecological). The process of globalisation is undoubtedly linked to them.<sup>3</sup>

The globalisation that is the creation of a world without borders, in the opinion of many, is a result of a) the worldwide expansion of communications and b) liberalisation wave of change of goods, followed after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Both statements are true, however, only partially. The globalisation of communication connections is the outcome of technological development, while the globalisation in the field of economics is the result of ideology and strategies.

The "mondialisation of civilisation", the birth of what M. McLuhan called the "global village" as its product, is the result of a combination of two previous factors: economy and communication. Yet, if we look at the state of the things over the last fifty years, we will realise that there is actually one form of globalisation that precedes the latter, and which results from the recognition of a simple thing, and that is *the environment*.

The global approach to environmental issues stems more from existing states of affairs and efforts to understand facts rather than from technological or political data or thoughtfully and carefully planned strategies. Pope Francis states in the *Laudato si* encyclical that a global approach stipulates recognition and affirmation of human activities. It is enough to mention only one aspect — threats to biodiversity due to the massive and accelerated disappearance of species: whales, birds, tropical plants..., of which the primary cause is human activity. As soon as this phenomenon was accepted and understood, sometime in the 1960s, its global character became apparent.

2 See B. Irrgang, *Christliche Umweltethik*, München 1992.

3 See I. Koprek, *Pridi da možeš čuti. Etika u sjeni globalizacije i postmoderne*, Zagreb 2005.

Thus, in many environments, public opinion became aware of the danger that is threatening our planet due to the increasing number of disorderly human activities, compounded by the influence of not always the right technologies. The symptoms of environmental destruction became undeniable such as water pollution, black tides on shores, poisoned fogs, depletion of natural resources, and testimony of the risk that people caused by their activities. The biosphere itself is also endangered. Humanity simply had to react.

The fact that the term “environment” itself is a new term in many languages illustrates the swiftness of this evolution. Nevertheless, the relations of human with nature and its elements have been around since ancient times. Cosmological representations occur in ancient civilisations or those that stem from their roots. In African, American–Indian or Asian civilisations, the Earth is the “goddess”, the “mother” of humanity, the human matrix and at the same time the food provider. Therefore, she is sacred, and animals like plants are worthy of respect. The three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) preach that the universe is God’s work and it belongs to Him.

This conception, as mentioned before, has changed with the progressive emergence of rigid rationalism and mercantilism, which has only interest in the market value of goods. The deep sense of respect that human had for nature was replaced progressively by the desire (greed!) for profit. With the advent of the industrial age and lightning–fast technological advancements, a new belief emerged — human, the only lord of the world, can allow things to happen and dominate nature.

By an odd, but by no means illogical coincidence, materialism that has conquered Western societies and progressively spread to the rest of the world has shamelessly led to the exploitation of the biosphere, which was significantly considered a communal natural resource in the service of humanity. Even the first signs of concern for the preservation of specific environmental components had anthropocentric features: some aspects of nature, fish, birds or seals (used for fur production!) are protected only if utilised by a human.

## 2. *Some reasons for discussing sustainable development*

The confusion described here raises some questions, “Why is the environment protected? What is the reason for its protection? Why are we talking about, or should we be talking about, sustainable development?”<sup>4</sup>

4 See Pope Francis Encyclical *Laudato si*, no.: 52, 102, 141, 167, 169, 193, 207.; See S. Schallenger, M. Menke, “Die Enzyklika ‘Laudato si’ und die katholische Soziallehre”, in: *Die neue Ordnung*, 3 (2016), pp. 164–178.

There are at least four possible answers to these questions: the first scientific, the second economic, the third humanistic and finally the fourth — ethical.

For *scientists*, a series of claims about the increasing importance of short-term or long-term pollution, depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer, loss of biodiversity and climate change are warning signs of acting more ethically.

The *economic* explanation, which dominated the 1970s, takes environmental elements to be the natural resources needed for living and development of economic systems. While traditionally the list of these resources contained only arable land, forests, minerals, wild flora and fauna, the reduction of unpolluted seas, drinking water as well as clean air, now they additionally gained their economic value. The use of natural resources has had its price, which has led to more rational use, that is, their management.

The approach we call *humanistic* holds that humanity should be at the heart of the biosphere and that natural goods should be equally shared and mediated for generations to come. One form of this understanding is long-term development, a concept that has dominated public speech since the 1992 Rio de Janeiro conference: goods must meet the needs of present and future generations. From a few years ago, there is talk of natural law within the present generation and law among future generations.

An *ethical* explanation encompasses several versions. Religious people understand the world as taught by the Bible, Christians, but also Jews and Muslims, are reminded of the fact that human is not the master of the Earth but merely manager and thus responsible for it. Humanity is part of the biosphere, and by destroying it, man ruins himself, too. Some conclude from that that humanity should be considered one of the millions of species that is an integral part of the global ecosystem. Hence, we can talk about natural law among species.

We have concluded that all of these explanations have globalisation in mind, that they hold the problem of environmental protection to be a planetary problem. Moreover, it is acknowledged that environmental issues are above the current political and economic structures. In the late 1960s, international instruments reminded us that the environment knew no boundaries, while in the 1980s, it was officially recognised that the greatest threats to our biosphere were an issue of worldwide importance. These include stratospheric ozone depletion, climate change, desertification, deforestation, accelerated loss of biodiversity and depletion or pollution of natural resources, whether we talk about fish or drinking water supplies.

No country, no continent, no matter how developed, is capable of leading the battle alone. Mondialisation is imposed because of the necessary solidarity in facing these threats. Thus, one can speak of the emergence of

a new element in the general interest of humankind, of *global sustainable development*.

### 3. *How to protect the environment?*

Every human society gathers around several values, emphasised principle that legal language names constitutive. In most countries of the world among those are: respect for a person, religious or other beliefs, freedom, private and family life, property etc. Protecting these fundamental values and social cohesion becomes a general interest. The purpose and aim of the laws and institutions of each country are to strengthen that general interest. It is reasonable to question whether this scheme can be transformed into an international, that is, a world plan since globalisation inevitably leads to it.

The logical answer is that it should be this way: the two fundamental sectors of human society are now open to the whole world: a) on the one hand communication, thus large part of civilisation, and on the other b) economy, with all the consequences for social and political structures of different countries. At the same time, there are no countries nor societies in the world that could impose to “planetary village” mechanism respect for ground values. Maybe there might be a place for the legal regulation of this problem, but above all, a place for pointing out the necessity and meaning of ethics.

The classical theory of international law holds international treaties, in one way, as a limitation of countries. We can take as an example, four world conventions, which were to be accepted by almost all countries of the world: Vienna Convention in 1985 and Montreal Protocol in 1987 on the protection of the stratospheric ozone layer; Basel Convention in 1989, which put under severe control the expose and import of hazardous waste; Rio de Janeiro Convention on biological diversity and its counterpart, Convention on Climate Change. The last one took place in Paris in 2015.<sup>5</sup>

How do we relate this form of globalisation to other types of mondialisation, such as communications and economics? The answer should be: any globalisation should be motivated by the general interest of humanity and striving to that aim.<sup>6</sup> In practice, this means that international protection of

5 For the first time in history an agreement was reached on how to save the globe from climate changes in Paris, from 30 November to 12 December 2015. See A. Lienkamp, *Klimawandel und Gerechtigkeit. Eine Ethik der Nachhaltigkeit in christlicher Perspektive*, Paderborn–München–Wien–Zürich 2009.

6 See G. Kruij, „Marktwirtschaft und Gerechtigkeit. Die Perspektive der christlichen Sozialethik“, in: V. J. Vanberg (Hrsg.), *Marktwirtschaft und soziale Gerechtigkeit*, Tübingen 2012, pp. 51–70.

human rights and environmental rights need not only jurisdictional (legal-political) but also, above all, ethical standards. Without it, a conflict between different types of globalisation could become damaging, almost dangerous. The very idea of the global village that has so well explained the phenomenon of mondialisation can assist in solving the problems that need to be addressed. One of the features of each village is the intense connection among the inhabitants. That phenomenon is now present globally, which is the essence of globalisation. That implies a global responsibility that must be implemented on the one hand by communities and on the other by individuals, especially those who serve in the service of community — politicians.

The crucial question arises, “How to define the responsibility of one and the others?” It is evident that at the top of the pyramid, there are major planetary problems whose solutions require the cooperation of all nations and countries. The straightforward phrase “Think globally, act locally”, expresses the rule of the fundamental game of the global world and its diversity — a possible ethic of sustainable development.