Cultural Dimension of Sustainable Development as a Presumtion of Local Communities Development[1]

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Abstract: The term "sustainable" can be found in both science and practice. As a global concept of development, it was accepted at the Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 in order to overcome and find a possible way of dealing with problems connected to the development of contemporary civilization. Three dimensions of sustainable development are usually mentioned: economic, social and ecological. The paper points out the significance of the fourth dimension – cultural dimension, which is not only significant for reaching development in the real sense of the world, but it also represents the basis for the development of local communities. The cultural dimension respects the particularities of local communities and emphasizes the maintenance of the cultural and national variety which is of special significance for multicultural societies.

Keywords: dimensions of sustainable development, cultural dimension of sustainable development, sustainable development, variety.

Introduction

Sustainable development as a model of social development at a global level is becoming more significant along with more and more distinct manifestation of negative anthropogenic influence on the environment. The 1950s were the beginning of pointing out the necessity to reexamine the current model of development which rested on the profit-oriented industry and the anthropocentric view of the world, that is, as Plumwood states, on arrogant culture [1]. Taking into consideration warnings against the rapid crash of the industrial system and depletion of natural resources, the search for a new model of development, shaped through the concept of sustainable development, began.

One of the first definitions of sustainable development, which rests on harmonizing economic development with a need to preserve the environment and intergenerational solidarity, was given in the so-called Brutland report, known as *Our Common Future*. In the report, sustainable development is defined as "the development used to meet the present needs, so as not to jeopardize future generations to satisfy their own needs. Basically, sustainable development is a process of changes within which the exploitation of resources, direction of investments, orientation of technological development and institutional changes are in harmony and enable the use of present and future potentials so as to satisfy human needs and aspirations" [2]. Regardless of the polemics caused by the definition itself, because of the insufficient operationalization of the terms need and aspiration, the report is significant because it stresses problems such as poverty, violation of ecological balance and a need for the protection of the environment, that is, it points out a need to harmonize the socio-economic development with the possibilities and capacities of the environment while avoiding economic, social and ecological risks and crises. What followed were numerous efforts to define this model of development more precisely by numerable scientists (for example Hauff, Kirn, Magda), but also by international organizations and forums (for example World Conservation Union, World Bank). Thus, depending on the approach (economic, ecological, sociological, etc), and in order to operationalize

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the definition which is the precondition for building strategies of sustainable development, this model of development is determined as the process of changes by which "the use of resources, structure of investments, orientation of technological advancement and institutional structure arrive at agreement with the future and present needs" [3], or as the development which "focuses on people and its aim is to improve the quality of human life. Sustainable development is based on protection, so that it is conditioned by the need to respect the capacity of nature, in order to provide resources and services needed for life" [4].

Considering the fact that sustainable development was accepted as a model of development at a global level, at the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, but that it is necessary to apply it to the local level, the question of the relationship between global and local seems interesting. Most frequently the relationship between global (which refers to the whole world) and local (something limited in space) is seen dualistically through the valuation-hierarchical view of the world, whereby global is favorized. Modernity, development and universality relate to global, and tradition, underdevelopment, particularity relate to local. According to this approach, global is universal and all that is local has to conform and subordinate to it. However, accepting such an interpretation of global and local would lead to the unification and loss of the particularity of special areas. Thus, the global-local relationship should be considered and interpreted from the point of their inseparable interconnection. Only in this way it is possible to reach real development which, according to Major, has to be in accordance with moral and cultural aims rooted in the historical heritage of every people [5], and sustainable development will not be something abstract, but it will be perceived and placed into local frameworks in the right way, because local space, as Korff [6], writes, is structured by the organization which finds specific (local) knowledge important.

Dimensions of Sustainable Development

Taking into consideration the definition of sustainable development given in *Rio Declaration of the Environment and Development*, which primarily highlights "people's right to lead a healthy and productive life in accordance with nature" and intergenerational responsibility, but also the necessity to harmonize development with the protection of the environment, the eradication of poverty, as well as the necessity for cooperation which would lead to economic growth, sustainable development and the protection of the environment [7], a large number of authors emphasize the connection between economic growth and the protection of the environment. Thus sustainable development is understood as "a form of social and structural social transformation which respects the relationship between economic growth and non-renewable resources" [8], that is, as a strategy of development managed using all basic means, natural resources, as well as financial means in order to increase long-term wealth and welfare [9], as a concept which reconciles and harmonizes economic with ecological aims by means of a complementary overview of economic and ecological interests and integral economic development [10]. In that sense, three dimensions of sustainable development are emphasized: economic, social and ecological, and there is a demand for "a redefinition of economic growth, a reasonable use of natural resources and the increase in the quality of production; eradication of poverty and satisfaction of basic needs of the population (job, food, energy, water supply, housing and health); acceptable population growth; preservation of natural resources and increase in variety by means of maintaining ecosystems and monitoring the influences of economic activities on the environment; technological changes and the control of technological resources", but also the decentralization of power and active participation of citizens in the decision-making process, making national and international regulations considering the environment and development [11]. The three-dimensional conception of sustain-

able development is most often represented in the form of a tripod, whereby the need for an integral overview of these three dimensions of development and equality of all three elements are emphasized, because, as Hart states [12], the solution to the problem is in only one element leading to a problem or worsening the already existing problems in other two elements, contrasting interests and short-term solutions and profit by ignoring the long-term results.

There are authors who, starting from sustainable development as integral development, consider that sustainable development should not be reduced to three dimensions in any way, and thus they introduce the fourth dimension as well. Some consider that it is culture [13], while others suggest politics or institutions. Thus Lay connects social and cultural dimensions and suggests three more: bio-ecological, economic and political dimensions [14], while Spangenberg, beside economic, social and ecological dimensions, mentions the institutional dimension as well [15]. Accepting di Castri's attitude that if we want to reach sustainable development, it is necessary to harmonize four backbones of sustainable development: economic, ecological, social and cultural, we remind ourselves of its metaphor of a Renaissance chair. "Sustainable development can function only when four backbones of development – economic, social, cultural and the environment – are of equal importance and strength, with a strong mutual connection and interdependence provided with an adjustable institutionalized basis. If one leg of the chair is shorter or lower than the others, there is no sitting comfortably, no sustainability /…/" [13].

Culture and Sustainable Development of Local Communities

Not diminishing the significance of the standpoint that the fourth pillar of sustainable development is politics or institutions, we still consider that the fourth pillar is culture, because, in fact, culture represents an agglomeration of material and spiritual creations human activity has made in order to improve and prolong human life. The cultural dimension [13], primarily includes new ethics and behavior, but also the respect for and nurture of a religious and cultural variety. In effect, as Hawkes [16], claims, the fourth pillar of sustainability – culture contributes to the improvement of the quality of life and includes the nurture of partnership, respect and an exchange between the different aspirations of government, business, art organizations and citizens. In that sense, this pillar points to the necessity to create and develop the framework for the evaluation of the influence that culture has on the environment, on economic and social decisions. Keith Nurse [17], has a similar attitude, according to which culture is the key element of sustainable development. According to her, culture shapes what we consider to be development and determines how people act in the world. The cultural dimension of sustainable development includes "the ability to preserve cultural identity along with enabling changes in accordance with cultural values" [18], it contributes to a cultural variety which is equal to the value of biodiversity, identification and protection of cultural identities and the promotion of cultural particularities enabling the transition to sustainable development [17].

The necessity "to lower" the concept of sustainable development from global to regional, national level and the level of local communities, as well as the need to consider sustainable development through the cultural dimension also, were pointed out in the article 22 of Rio declaration of the environment and development. "Indigenous people and their communities, as well as other local communities, have a vital role in managing the protection of the environment and in development because of their knowledge and traditional way of life" [7].

However, regardless of pointing to the necessity to perceive sustainable development through the cultural dimension as well, strategic documents made at the level of national states base their strategies

mostly on three pillars of sustainable development. However, there are exceptions. New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage, in its documents, emphasizes that the local authority is responsible for promoting "social, economic, ecological and cultural welfare of the community for the present and the future", and points out the mutual connection between all four aspects of welfare, whereby the welfare of everyone is in the center, and culture represents the key dimension of sustainability because it primarily includes the right of individuals to freely express their identity, history, heritage, tradition and participate in cultural, but also in recreational activities [17]. The cultural dimension of sustainability can also be found while analyzing the life of Aborigines in the region of Vancouver. Cardinal and Adin place the health of people, nation and country into the center of sustainability, and believe that all four dimensions of sustainable development are necessary for the realization of these [19]. Analyzing the specificity of Aborigines' lives, taking into consideration the tradition which connects culture and the family, these authors suggest the indicators of cultural sustainability in the region. At the same time, the given indicators are not perceived as static, but as developmental, with regard to the interconnection and interaction between the dimensions of sustainability and a constant change in society.

In order for sustainable development not to be something abstract for the largest number of people, something that stifles local, that is, in order to realize full development for real, it is necessary to plan development through the cultural dimension as well at the level of local communities. In that sense, it is necessary to explore cultural (material and spiritual) heritage of local communities and tradition, along with finding possibilities for these to be a part of the strategies of the local sustainable development.

Conclusion

Introducing the cultural dimension of sustainable development is especially significant while planning the development in multicultural and multinational environment, because only when we accept cultural, natural and all other specificities and particularities of the local community and when we harmonize the aims of development with them, it is possible to realize full development. Besides, this dimension contributes to the realization of basic human rights and the establishment of permanent peace.

In the end, it is worth mentioning that unlike other three dimensions of sustainable development, the cultural dimension has no generally accepted set of indicators which would follow the degree of its feasibility. One of the limiting factors is the interdependence of the dimensions of the sustainable development, especially the cultural and social ones, and the other is the fact that every local community has its own characteristics. Nevertheless, the first steps were made after the Agenda 21 for culture was established in Porto Alegro in 2004 at the Forum of local self-governments for including citizens in the decision-making processes, through recommendations to UNDEP to include cultural indicators while calculating the human development index (HDI) and to the UN sustainable development section to develop the cultural dimension of sustainability. However, until the generally accepted indicators are adopted, it is necessary for every local community to determine its own indicators, whereby we should bear in mind the current state of affairs in the community, historic heritage, tradition and respect for basic human rights. Cultural sustainability of the local community could be monitored, for example, through demographic data, legislation, contents of radio and TV shows, printed media, concern over cultural heritage, participation and practice of customs, but also through the compatibility of production activities with traditional activities.

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(Endnotes)