

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONVENTIONS REGARDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AT A GLOBAL LEVEL

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### **Abstract**

*Although the latest economic approaches refer to the natural environment as if it were part of the economic system, using numerous planning techniques and strategies in favor of the environmental protection and conservation, the obvious negative effects had on the environment calls in for a brand new conception on the economic development. This new perspective, called “sustainable development”, has become a paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it includes all means of development, as the environmental policy implies the participation of many interested people and institutions such as governments, international organizations, non-governmental groups and even people themselves, who make significant efforts together, thus contributing to its evolution on all levels.*

*The sustainable development is a concept which has recently become more and more frequently used, attracting people's attention and interest; it is a process which implies protecting the environment, sustaining a less destructive industrialization and also the replacement of the intensive and uncontrolled means of economic development, so as to prevent the natural resources from drying out, preserving them for the future generations as well.*

*Approaching the concept of sustainable development is nothing like a simple way of regarding the environmental protection. On the contrary, the sustainable development represents a new concept of economic growth; in fact, it is that sort of concept which triggers in people a sense of moderation and equity, without destroying the nature and compromising its capacity of sustaining our successors.*

**Key words:** sustainable development, economic growth, environmental protection.

### **INTRODUCTION**

From Adam Smith and up to nowadays, the economic theory directly or indirectly approaches the idea of development. As the complexity of the connections existing in the worldwide economy has started to grow, a new specialized view on this concept was in need to emerge. But only after 20 years of an unseen before economic evolution, has the first trace of interest in redefining this concept appeared – somewhere in the ‘70s.

Beginning with the year 1972, when the first report of The Club of Rome – “The limits of growths” – was published and when the first UN Conference on the environmental problems in Stockholm was held, over 60 different interpretations of the concept of development have been identified, matching the new perspective over the interdependency between the environmental problems, the overall well-being and the process of economic growth (Meadows D.H. et al, 1986). One of these interpretations led to the

invention of the “eco-development” term, which underlines the necessity of searching some concrete strategies of development, capable of implementing a rational way of ecologically applying a given system, meant to satisfy the fundamental needs of society (Esty D., 1999).

## **1. REDEFINING THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Out of the more than 60 interpretations of the concept of development, the specialists have chosen the one which seems to currently best define the solution that could solve the problems of humanity, namely, the sustainable development. The report of the Worldwide Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), widely known as the Brundtland Report after the name of its initiator, published in 1987, defines sustainable development as being the development which satisfies the needs of the present generations, while considering the interests of the future generations as well. This definition leads us to the essence of sustainable development – the solidarity between generations, united together in the name of the common future of all the citizens and nations in this world.

According to the Brundtland Report, sustainable development refers to that path towards evolution which carefully takes into account the needs of both present and future generations when it comes to exploiting resources, directing investments, using technology and implementing institutional changes (Solow R., 1986). The fundamental problems concern the consumption of the exhaustible resources, the environmental protection and conservation, the eradication of poverty (seen not only as an ethical objective, but also as a key method of diminishing the environmental pressure, as poverty is one of the major causes that lead to its destruction), the development of the local communities and the equality of chances between different generations (Barde J.P., 1992), (Popescu C. et al, 1996).

After condemning the mistake of regarding the environment and the development as two different objectives, the WCED document promotes a whole new approach concerning the policy and projects of development; according to their point of view, if the proposals made are ecologically rational, then they have to trigger a sustainable development in both currently developing and developed countries; in this case, the main part is claimed by the preventive and anticipative measures, however, without neglecting the immediate corrective action that shall be taken (Our Common Future, 1987), (Cămășoiu C., 1994).

In June 1992, the UN conference regarding the Environment and the Development was held in Rio de Janeiro. On this special occasion, they have internationally recognized the need of integrating the economic development and the environmental protection among the objectives of sustainable development; this has also been a way of stating the

continuously growing importance of the Environmental International Rights, seen as a mechanism of codifying and promoting sustainable development (Duguleană C., 2002).

The most important documents adopted by the end of this conference are: Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, also known as the “Earth Summit”, containing 27 principles, the action plan called “Agenda 21”, The Climate Change Convention, The Declaration on Forests and the Declaration regarding desertification.

The convocation of this worldwide forum – right after the first environmental conference, held in Stockholm, in 1972 – answers one of the most urgent necessities. The economic and social development, regarded as a general interest of all the peoples, is accompanied by a justified anxiety, brought along by the huge contrasts existing in the nowadays’ society, by the conflict between our society and nature (Herrera A.O., 1983). And so we came to acknowledge some really complex problems concerning the human species and its future. The thing is we can only ensure a state of development in conditions of ecological rationality and environmental protection (Burcu A., Burcu Al., 2005).

The recognition of the dependency on economic growth, of the development and the people’s well-being, of the natural resources on which all the living systems depend, has been pointed out by coming up with the “sustainable development” concept – an ecological concept which bears consequences that have a major importance in the evolution of the worldwide economy (Angelescu C., 2003). The last decades have underlined the necessity of reorienting the strategies regarding development so as to ensure a certain ecological stability and balance on a global level (Tietenberg T., 2000).

Having taken all this into account, it is important to point out again the fact that the deterioration of the environmental, the lack of ecological balance is not only the consequences of development, but also the side effects of some irrational models of economic growth (Pearce D., 1993). It’s high time we understood the imperative need of ringing the changes as far as the life of our planet is concerned!

## **2. THE CONVENTIONS REGARDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ON A GLOBAL LEVEL**

Having tackled the global problems that humanity is confronted with, after they have been pointed out and widely discussed by the international scientific community, is the merit of the UN. The phenomenon of underdevelopment and the aggravation of the discrepancy existing, on a global level, between the rich and the poor, the problem of overpopulation, of the alimentary security and the protection of the environmental factors –

the soil, the water, the air – of endangered species, of energy, of industry and of human habitats request a globally organized approach and a widely international cooperation (French H., 2000).

The Rio Conference takes some important steps forward as far as this aspect is concerned, by adopting the Convention on Climate Change and the one regarding Biodiversity (Panayotou T., 1993). These two significant instruments will complete the framework of the laws of the environmental international rights (Duțu M., 1995). The Rio Declaration and the wide action programme displayed by “Agenda 21” must be seen as a final result of the Conference, as an answer to the complex environmental problems and development, given to the world by all participants.

The Rio Earth Summit has made public the problems of the environmental protection and development, thus triggering a large amount of positive reactions, including the initiatives of locally adopting the principles enclosed in the “Agenda 21” and the reorientation of the environmental protection policy (table 1). Consequently, national commissions supporting the sustainable development have been formed in most of the states and so new strategies have been launched.

*Table 1.*

The elements of the “Agenda 21”

ELEMENTS	PROBLEMS
The social and economic dimension of development	Poverty, production and consumption, health, human habitat, integrating the decisions that have been made
Natural resources’ conservation and management	The atmosphere, forests, land, mountains, biological diversity, ecosystems, biotechnology, fresh water resources, toxic chemical products, solid and radioactive waste.
Enforcing the role of the important groups	Young people, women, indigenous population, NGOs, local authorities, commercial associations, business, farmers, tehnic and scientific communities.
Implementing instruments	Finances, technologic transfer, information, public conscience, education, capacity building, juridical instruments, institutional environment.

Source: Earth Summit 2002: Briefing Paper, [www.earthsummit2002.org](http://www.earthsummit2002.org)

The strategy of implementing the sustainable development has met another problem: the existence of humanity, both temporally and spatially speaking. More than that, it is also imperative to come up with a logical system that can afford the costs generated by the economic and social development, by the attempts of avoiding pollution and by the actions taken in order to “wash away” the side effects of it.

Here you have a list of the minimal requests imposed in order to apply the sustainable development principle:

- a change in the economic growth, considering a balanced distribution of resources and pointing out the quality of production;
- poverty eradication, which can be obtained by satisfying the essential necessities, such as having available work places on the market, producing

- enough food, energy, having enough water resources and maintaining a good health condition;
- a reduction of the out-of-control population growth;
- conservation of the natural resources and maintenance of the ecosystems' diversity, a permanent surveillance of the impact of the economic development had on the environment;
- technology reorientation and keeping under control its resources;
- a global centralization of the decisions made regarding the environment and the economy.

But in order for these minimal requests to be fulfilled, we have to come up with strategies which should commence with the necessity of the environmental protection. This concept should represent the basis of the development of the future society (Primarck R.B., 2002).

Year 2002 marked the organization of the third UN Conference on environmental problems, the global Summit from Johannesburg, supporting the sustainable development concept. The preparations for the Summit began in 2001, on a national, regional and international level, the main subjects referring, on the one hand, to the evaluation of the progress that the governments, the private sector and the civil society had made ever since the Rio de Janeiro Summit, in 1992, and, on the other hand, to the attempts of finding new solutions in order to trigger a more equitable and sustainable economic and social evolution (Paraschivescu V., 2008).

The Johannesburg Summit stated, once again, the sustainable development as being a main concern on the international agenda and stimulated once more the putting into practice of the global measures for fighting against poverty and for the environmental protection. The understanding of the sustainable development concept was then reinforced, especially by pointing out the important links existing between poverty, environment and usage of natural resources.

The participating governments came to an agreement and reaffirmed a certain domain of obligations and real action targets in order to attain the objectives of sustainable development. The Declaration from Johannesburg was seen as a way of taking full collective responsibility for the progress and the reinforcement of the three interdependent principles of sustainable development: economic development, social development and locally, nationally, regionally and globally environmental protection.

The Implementation Plan follows the application of correct measures on all levels and the reinforcement of the international cooperation, while counting on the common, but differentiated responsibilities, mentioned in the seventh Principle of the Rio Declaration, and also the integration of the three main principles of sustainable development. This way, the efforts made are mainly focused on poverty eradication, the changing of the

production and consumption patterns, the health protection and the protection of the management of the natural resources, reserved for the economic and social development (Camarda A., 2008).

Following the same context, the EU adopted in 2001 the sustainable development strategy, which was updated in 2006, as new country members joined the alliance. This way, every country can follow the main points of this strategy and, therefore, create its own national sustainable development strategy, while taking into account the context given by the natural, social and social environment (Council of European Union, 2006).

## CONCLUSIONS

Always wanting to make progress and reach an economic growth at any price, people have forgotten that they are part of the natural system as well, seldom exploiting it way over its capacities. Therefore, states of imbalance have emerged; their side effects can already be spotted, so concerns regarding these situations and possible ways of fighting against them have been arisen on a global level.

The sustainable development is a concept that was brought to life thanks to the real state of our planet, which can be easily remarked by anyone: the nowadays' abnormally increased economic development and population growth. If the numbers keep growing like this, thus enabling the situation to expand all over the world, without being accompanied by harsh measures of environmental protection and of saving the resources we still have, then the Earth is prone to become inhabitable in the near future.

Both economic growth and development inevitably cause changes in ecosystems and, therefore, the economic development policy should be a rational one so as not to harm the natural environment and humanity in anyway; not now, not ever.

Economic growth and pollution should not be put in direct contradiction to the environment, but adapted to the laws of nature. Economic growth is efficient when society reaches a certain economic, social and ecological level. This involves attracting and efficiently using all the main resources belonging to the society.

The existing conceptions, which are based on sustainable development, begin by reconsidering the place of humanity in the economic ecosystem of our market economy, and also in the social and spiritual space. What is more, it is imperative to rationally use the resources we have so as to obtain the highest volume of products possible, while consuming the same amount of raw materials. Nonpolluting technology must be used so as to fight against the environmental degradation.

All these concepts lead to the appearance of a new environment, made of a natural part, an arranged one and an artificial one. In this type of

environment, the roles of economy and industry are no longer focused only on the idea of product supplying, but also responsible for ensuring a pleasant, esthetic and clean ambience.

I personally consider that the sustainable development can be regarded as an adaptation of society and economy to the great problems which humanity is being confronted with at the moment: climate changes, drought, desertification, resource exhaustion, waste, biodiversity loss, population growth, poverty etc. So as to anticipate, fight against and eliminate their side effects and in order to ensure the economic development, the social progress and the humanity evolution, people must initiate and sustain a set of concrete actions, which should aim at specific targets that are likely to be attained, thus representing the main concern of the National Strategies for Sustainable Development as well.

National strategies have been elaborated so as for the society to adapt itself to the present situation; the objectives of these plans are to be made reality through actions that will solve, somewhere in the future, the problems which our society is currently being confronted with.

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