

Anna Chmielak

Poland
Wyzsza Szkola Finansow I Zarzadzania W Bialymstoku
Agatki 2 St.
15 – 156 Bialystok
Poland

Ethical aspect of sustainable development

The idea of sustainable development, which only recently has acquired its clear and precise definition, had been initially inspired and developed by social organizations and representatives of various interest groups, concerned about the scope and speed of uncontrolled transformation of different resources within natural environment. It has been assumed that the environment, constituting human living space, is relatively seldom perceived as one of the crucial factors in production process. Consequently, the conduct of participants in social administrative process takes on more and more significance in context of shaping the quality of human living space. Its alterations are being treated as the effect of rapid progress in the process of industrialization and the extending scope of civilization changes. The mainstream line of thought within the concept of sustainable development is subordinated to the investigation of rational management of environmental resources.¹ Apart from the approach of investigating the process of development as mentioned above, there exist many other ones, more or less popular among the luminaries of social sciences.

The realm of social administrative processes, as far as mutual connections and relationships among particular types of conditioned behaviour of individuals and groups of people participating in the process are concerned, has remained relatively unexplored so far. The outcome of interdisciplinary co-operative efforts, and the effects of recognising the relations between the phenomena and processes taking place on both: micro- and macro-scale, still remain far from being satisfactory. Nowadays, the fascination about the process of globalization is on everyone's lips. However, its "continuity" aspect is frequently being disregarded: the process has certain historical background; it didn't start just ten years ago, and will not be terminated, when some group of states gain full access to the European Union. Social sciences require from us retaining certain distance, which makes us see into and think about the matter with scrutiny; looking further and deeper at the problem, than it is indicated by the phenomena occurring on the surface of social life. It is justified, then, to put forward some investigative hypotheses:

1. The concept of sustainable development is based on preserving equilibrium in the realization of the ideas of efficiency, justice, equality, welfare and safety.
2. The analysis of social administrative process, in accordance with the conception of sustainable development, requires simultaneous taking into account changes in economic, social and political dimensions.
3. The prerequisite of sustainable development on macro-scale is bringing up to life the concept itself, its principles and objectives on micro-level.
4. In the sustainable process of administering participate not only economic units, but also social groups, organizations and political institutions.
5. In order to achieve a state of balance among efficiency, justice, welfare, equality and safety, the interests of all: economic, social and political groups need to be institutionalized in both: formal and informal way.
6. The analysis of expectations of particular interest groups requires interdisciplinary approach.

All those points mentioned above indicate the necessity of taking up a research which would include various types of conditioning. It is not an easy task, but it seems inevitable

¹ The criterion of preserving at least the existing *status quo* of environmental resources is convincing enough to express the idea as "sustainable and durable development". The "durability" aspect allows for bringing up to light the consequences of waste materials treatment absent from the "sustainable" approach, which can be hazardous to people's lives and health.

for sticking to the requirements of balancing all aspects of administrative process. It is human factor that spans the entire process of administration. Man is the factor in production process; the receiver of the effects of economic activity; active and creative entity; the representative of various organizations and institutions; the owner of factors of production; the subject perceiving the quality of his environment as his living space. Such attitude allows for subordinating the aims of sustainable development to the expectations of local communities. There can be no other, higher and nobler, goals in administrative process than those set in order to provide the sense of comfort by means of efficient, just, secure and equal access to its results for particular groups and individuals. Thus, a single unit of administration, through combining all the aspects and dimensions of sustainable development within itself, becomes its starting point at the same time. It is, then, sufficient to conclude that any research activity, concerning the determinants of development, has to be conducted including their social aspect.

For instance, while analysing development and its results, not only the mass of gross income gained from taking advantage of services of production factors should be measured. It is preferable to adopt the criteria of general sense of well-being.² This category escapes any attempts of its quantitative assessment, or trying to find its comparisons, or its self-improvement due to internal activities. Unequivocal interpretation of the notion of welfare has to accept the input of utterly subjective factors; and allow for maintaining certain distance towards individual or group systems of preferences, to the evaluation of achievements, the sense of well-being, or self-realization. Economic sciences, especially the ones deriving their roots from neoclassical ideas, prefer to use "countability" categories, vying with each other to adapt quantitative methods to measure the process of development. Dissatisfaction with the lack of achievements in basic research areas (and such is the process of socio-economic development) is best expressed by the overall use of GDP factor.

Inadequate attitude to the problem starts already at the stage of identifying the factors of economic development. Notwithstanding the operation of dividing them into several categories, predominant significance will be always attributed to their material and measurable values. The attempts to assess incalculable parameters and features of individual factors, and the impact of their diversity on productivity, are being made only sporadically. As a consequence, the realization of goals and expectations is being reduced to the lowest common denominator – it becomes merely the subject of some more or less sophisticated measures, due to the lack of coherence between statistical and real assessments made by particular individuals or groups.

The research around the concept of sustainable development definitely overstates incalculable qualitative features of natural environment, missing out the significance of qualitative features of other kinds. The quality of natural environment exists to the extent to which it coincides with people's specific expectations. It is similar in the case of other factors participating in production process. The rate, character and direction of their improvement are subjugated to the expectations of individuals and groups.³ Qualitative aspect of all types of resources reveals itself during administrative process as the result of being recognized by

² The well-being of a company is not only the result of its investing various (visible and measurable) financial and material resources – many others are involved as well. Its good shape cannot be perceived nowadays in the narrow view of growing figures on the "credit" side; it has to be measured by the company's capacity of creating prosperity in the future. Traditional accountancy of expenditures and profits does not embrace many components of administrative process. It leads to the discrepancy between statistical valuation of resources or the company's output in books, and their evaluation by the participants in administrative process. The system of intellectual capital, for example, includes the following components divided into human and structural parts: customers' capital and organizational, process and innovative capital constituting the structural part. Apart from intellectual capital, there is financial capital. The two combined together constitute market capital which is considered as the basis of company's rank and strength. See: Hudson, W. *Intellectual Capital*, John Wiley and Sons Inc., New York 1993, p. 16; Steward, T. *Intellectual Capital – the new wealth or organization*, Currency Book, Doubleday 1997.

³ Institutionalization of the interests of the particular economic, social and political groups allows for their expression, and taking them into account during the social process of administration. During the process, specific economic, social or political groups periodically emerge as dominant ones.

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man. The degree of recognition and accumulated knowledge are the decisive factors of achievement in productivity. Accumulating knowledge leads to the fact that the contribution of qualitative features in creating welfare is on the increase, while the impact of quantitative features is decreasing. Systematic accumulation of knowledge and skills being the result of educational process, self-improvement and gaining experience, is relevant in each dimension of administrative process. Thus, it applies to the general sense of well-being in economic, social and political aspects.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative features of consumption components for different individuals varies from time to time. Individuals achieve the sense of well-being and satisfaction by cumulating the assessments of all aspects of their existence. To put it another way, in their estimation of welfare they take into consideration the degree to which they have realized their expectations as units of economic, social and political groups. Raising the standards of living would combine, then, qualitative and quantitative changes; as well as economic, social and political components. The economy's perception is fragmented and centred only on calculable economic features of the process. This represents its major impediment, as seen from the perspective of the attempts to create sustainable development. The milieu of our social environment, the atmosphere surrounding our contacts with other members of the society, our position within the system and structures of political power - their significance cannot be diminished and perceived as invalid (though their role undoubtedly evolves and continuously undergoes the process of individualization).

Keeping in mind the facts as mentioned above, it can be assumed that the evaluation of economic, social and political achievements requires adopting both, qualitative and quantitative criteria, which would enable us to include the improvements in the scope of productivity of its particular components, as well as their sense of acceptance, equality and just treatment within particular interest groups. Such situation is likely to take place, provided that members of the community comply with generally accepted sets of norms and rules of conduct in mutual contacts on economic, social and political grounds. Ethical conduct needs to be approached in much broader context, exceeding the borders of strictly economic activity – ethical attitude involves the entirety of mutual inter-human contacts and relations. The wider is the scope of internationalization, the more complicated such relations become, since particular patterns of behaviour and value systems interfere with one another: the agents of production are being interspersed within different cultures; people migrate, transferring with them not only economic, but also social and political awareness and expectations. The more rapid is the mobility of resources, combined with the effects of economic activity, the more intensified becomes the process of melting all those expectations, preference-based arrangements, the sense of well-being together with the diversity of its features, into a single crucible.

The company's mission cannot be only a form of its supplying some sort of final product. It is supposed to provide society with means which would lead to the realization of its needs and wants. It can affect individual activities as well as co-operation and joint-effort. The individual, feeling absolutely free, autonomous and independent from others would never be compelled to follow the rules of ethical conduct. No definite standards of behaviour would arise then. It's the participants of the social process of administering goods who define and shape the norms of conduct by themselves. Only the free human beings, clearly defined according to ethical standards can be trustworthy and capable of building up relationships in such a way that the self- and societal developments will occur. Creative organizations foster creativity and the use of knowledge – they don't only sell goods; they sell the good of knowledge. The mission of a creative firm is not production, as much as co-operation, nurturing the most effective use of knowledge, and laying the foundations for creating local prosperity.