

CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *Sustainable development is a model for resource use meant to satisfy human needs, without polluting the environment, so that these needs can be satisfied not only in the present, but in the future as well. It is a concept of nowadays with no generally accepted definition, placing environment first and foremost, aiming at implementing the environmental policies in all structures and at all economic levels. Within the present study we have aimed at creating a conceptual delimitation on sustainable development, sustainability and socialresponsibility, concepts of present interest, that tend to become a mystery for the academic community and practitioners by their variety and complexity of approaches. During our scientific endeavor we believe that social responsibility is the foundation of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a concept used especially at macro-economic level, while social responsibility is used at entity level and incorporates the economic, environmental and social dimension, which has a voluntary character and tries to respond to the information needs of the society and other stakeholders. Sustainability at the entity's level is the goal or final objective of sustainable development – satisfaction of present needs without compromising the possibility for future generations to satisfy their own needs, while social responsibility is an intermediate phase of sustainability wherein entities try to balance the economic, social and environmental dimension. Thus, we can state we include ourselves within social corporatism, slightly close to social institutionalism, which is characteristic to developed countries, giving a particular importance to social contract and relations between entity and society. We believe that in Romania, a POSDRU funded project should be regarded as a legal person with social values, which must be based on sustainable development and to promote, besides legal liability of automatically deriving legal contract, social responsibility, which resulting from its relationship with society in which it is implemented, and within these relations, environmental protection represent a major social responsibility of any kind of project.*

Key words: sustainable development, social responsibility, sustainability, conceptual approach, environmental economy, POSDRU funds

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1. Introduction

The economy of environmental protection implies the achievement of a sustainable, compatible ecological development, linking humans, economy and environment, believing there is a tight link between natural disasters, environmental mutations and the economic development of each state.

Sustainable development is a model for resource use meant to satisfy human needs, without polluting the environment, so that these needs can be satisfied not only in the present but in the future as well.

The meaning of sustainable development is given precisely by the endogen model of reconciliation between man and nature. The developing countries need to accelerate their growth rate, but within strategies considering the natural physical environment, by means of using less energy intensive and non-polluting technologies. The countries with a developed potential from a financial, economic, human and technological point of view have multiple chances of projecting a sustainable development.

The main objective of our study is to offer a clear image on the concepts of *sustainable development*, *sustainability* and *social responsibility*, concepts that are of present interest, which by a variety and complexity of approaches tend to become a mystery both for the practitioners and the academic community.

2. Research methodology

The use of certain research methods and instruments was necessary when conducting this scientific approach in order to facilitate the scientific research process (Mustata, 2008: 13). From the point of view of research currents, the present paper aligns to the main research current, having a positive and constructive touch. As far as the research typology is concerned, the study is a theoretical, fundamental research. Amongst the research methods specific to qualitative research we have used as part of this scientific approach we would mention comparative analysis and non-participative observation.

3. The Concept of Sustainable Development

„Sustainable development is loyalty towards the future”(Pearce et al., 1989: 20). According to Tietenberg (Tietenberg, 1984), if a project maximizes the updated value of benefits, but incurs losses for the future generations, a quota from the gained benefits should be put aside in a compensation fund for „inter-generations”. Sustainable development is probably the key element of the 21st century humanity. It is a difficult to grasp concept, mainly due to this notion's richness, diversity and complexity. There are more than 100 definitions in use and various persons understand in different ways this term, depending on their political and ideological convictions (Hibbitt, 2001). Nevertheless, there is no generally accepted definition of sustainable development, which is a problem for practitioners, but also an attraction point for academicians (Moneva et al., 2006: 122).

Sustainable development has gained a particular place with the issue of the Brundtland Report in 1987 and the acknowledgment of the greenhouse effect, the most widely accepted definition of sustainable development being the one proposed in this report. The Brundtland Report defines sustainable development as the satisfaction of present needs, without compromising the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs (WCED, 1987). The Agenda 21 defines sustainable development as that development which doesn't destroy or compromise the ecological, economic and social basis that continuous development depends on (WTOEC, 1995).

Sustainable development doesn't consider exclusively the environmental aspects. The reference document for the **World Summit on Sustainable Development** in 2002 speaks about the independence and mutual support of the pylons of sustainable development such as economic development, social development and environmental protections. Certain researchers have mentioned in time, during the

various international forums the existence of the fourth pylon of sustainable development, i.e. cultural diversity.

The uniqueness of sustainable development as concept consists in the attempt to include the environmental and inter-generations dimensions in the neoclassical theory of economic development (Purvis and Grainger, 2004, pp. 1). This has inevitably lead to the development of an approach which is meant to work within the existing production and distribution economic system, placing emphasis on the use of economic instruments in order to secure the proposed results. Thus, sustainable development is a concept combining the postmodernist pessimism on the domination of nature and the illuminist optimism on the possibility to reform human institutions (Dresner, 2002).

Critics on this concept have not delayed to occur:

- John Baden believes that the notion of sustainable development is dangerous, because the consequences of using such concept are procedures of unknown or potentially dangerous effects (Baden, 2008);
- The term „sustainable development" is criticized for its lack of clarity, considered an absurd term, or more likely, so vague that it means nothing, proving contradictory: „The term is more charming than significant [...]” (Ferry, 2007: 78);
- Sustainable development hides a protectionism practiced by developed countries in order to hinder the development of other countries. Sustainable development is a pretext for protectionism and is considered a perfect help for capitalism (Brunel, 2008);
- The „decrease” is a political and economic ideology, pleading for a gradual decrease of the economic production. The supporters of this ideology believe that the decrease of production is the only solution for the current environmental problems the humanity is facing, and that sustainable development is not possible (Clémentin and Cheynet, 2008).

In our opinion, although sustainable development can be criticized for lack of clarity and difficulty of being put into practice or maybe, on one side hides the protectionism of developed countries, it represents an acknowledgement of the fact that the planet's natural resources are limited and that the natural environment shows a limited capacity for waste absorption. These limits, once surpassed, compromise the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs. Thus, sustainable development, before everything, is a way of performing our activities, day by day, a way of acting such as to ensure a balance between the planet's natural limits, the satisfaction of present needs and the satisfaction of future needs.

The introduction of the sustainable development dimension within POSDRU funded projects is a necessity in order to increase the sustainability of projects because as sustainable development seeks to promote a more efficient in terms of greener and more competitive use of resources.

4. Sustainability Development versus Sustainability

In the Anglo-Saxon literature the term used is "sustainable development". In Romanian, the translations used are both "durable development", as well as the more forceful „sustainable development". The last translation derives from the word „sustainable", which in turn comes from „sustain"- to support (oneself) and „able"-capable. Henceforth two perceptions of this concept leading to the same result, that

of „development within the limits of the *supportcapacity*” (Petrişor, 2002: 2; Conway and Barbier, 1988: 654):

- „*capacity to sustain*”- the capacity of natural resources to sustain unlimitedly the development of the human society, a use of natural resources within the limits of the support capacity;
- „*capacity to self-sustain*” - refers to a development that would ensure on one side, the evolution of the human social and economic system without affecting the existence of future generations, and on another side, it suggests the idea of an evolution within the limits of the support capacity

Sustainability is a concept referring to a process of equal allocation of resources, at global level. The equity or correctness derives from a rational and responsible distribution of resources and from the existing opportunities in the present and future generations (O'Dwyer and Owen, 2005; Dragomir, 2008: 2).

There are also certain confusions regarding the terms "sustainable development" and "sustainability". The sustainable development and sustainability have been and are still considered synonyms by many researchers, despite the fact that Brawn Lester was writing in 1988 about sustainability: „The concept of sustain capacity is used by biologist for many years, but until recently, it has been rarely considered by economists” (Lester, 1988: 34). Sustainability, in a large sense, means the capacity to maintain certain process and is more frequently used in connection to biological and human systems, in other words, sustainability is not a concept specific for the field of economics. Starting with 1980, the idea of human sustainability starts to be more and more associated with the integration of the three spheres specific to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. In 1989, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defines sustainability as the satisfaction of present needs, without compromising the future generations' capacity of satisfying their own needs (United Nations, 1989), definition which the Bruntland Commission used in 1987, in its report called *Our joint future*, in order to define the concept of sustainable development.

Foreign literature (Schaltegger et al., 2006) highlights that a distinction must be made at entity level, between „sustainability” and "sustainable development”. In order to conform to the principles of sustainable development, an entity must establish a set of objectives and targets it wishes to achieve, thus heading towards sustainability. We can therefore visualize *sustainability* as the final objective an entity would wish to achieve, the statute or situation it aspires to, and *sustainable development* as the process by means of which human activity heads for sustainability or maintains this statute (Hibbitt, 2001). It results that sustainability is a specific concept at entity level, frequently used at micro-economic level, while sustainable development has a much wider inclusion area, and the concept is used at macro-economic level. We are thus talking about sustainable development as a principle or objective, at national or international level, and sustainability as an objective at entity's level.

In conclusion, although some researchers consider sustainability as a synonym for sustainable development, we believe sustainability to be a specific concept at entity level, frequently used at micro-economic level and associated with the integration of the three spheres specific for the sustainable development: economic, social and environmental, whilst sustainable development is an objective or principle used at macro-economic level.

In POSDRU funded projects, sustainability is a key criterion in awarding funding that should be followed for the entire implementation of the project and monitoring how the project is constructive for natural and social context in which it is implemented to generate new ideas and services when the grant ends².

5. Sustainable Development versus Social Responsibility

Similar to the globalization or sustainability, social responsibility is a complex concept, with much significance which, as removed, new meanings of this concept come out (Shanahan, 2001). As a result, within the entities and the academic world there is an uncertainty regarding the way social responsibility is defined. Certain researchers go so far as to believe that there is no definition of this concept whatsoever (Jackson and Hawker, 2001). The problem is more likely represented by the fact that there is a large variety of definitions, influenced by specific interests and as a result, hinder the development and implementation of the concept (Van Marrewijk, 2003).

Alexander Dahlsrud (Dahlsrud, 2007) identifies during a content analysis 39 definitions frequently used, five dimensions of social responsibility:

- Environmental dimension – natural environment;
- Social dimension – relation between entity and society;
- Economic dimension – social, economic and financial aspects;
- Stakeholders dimension – group of users;
- Voluntary dimension – actions not having been prescribed by the law.

By combining these dimensions a variety of definitions and visions on sustainable development is resulting from. The most frequently used definition in the specialized literature for representing the concept of social responsibility is issued by the European Commission, definition incorporating all five dimensions mentioned above: Social responsibility is a concept that entities use to voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns within the economic operations and their interaction with the stakeholders (European Commission, 2001).

Social responsibility is a *brilliant* term (Göbbels, 2002: 96) debating the relations between the business environment and society. Depending on how it regards the entity and the connection between the entity and society, there have been five approaches identified on social responsibility, based on different political specters (Carter and Burritt, 2007):

- *Fundamentalism, neoclassicism or owners / shareholders approach* is the approach corresponding to the right hand political spectrum stating that entities are purely legal creations and not social institutions, as social responsibility is limited to paying taxes and creating new jobs (Klonoski, 1991; Moir, 2001);
- *Social corporatism or users approach* is based on the fundamentalist approach wherein the purpose of a corporation is to create profit, by admitting and accepting at the same time the social aspects arising during the actions taken by the entity. This approach is a melting between the fundamentalist belief and the social institutionalism. One of the first supporters of this approach, Druker, claimed that in order to pursue their own interest, entities should be concerned

by society and undertakes some of the responsibility appearing beyond the traditional economic areas. Social corporatism considers sustainable development and social responsibility as business strategies, determining entities into becoming more receptive to the changes occurring in their environment of operation (Dentchev, 2005; Brown and Fraser, 2006);

- *Social institutionalism* approaches the entity as a social institution with social responsibilities, necessary for the creation and promotion of an open and transparent democratic society (Klonoski, 1991; Brown and Fraser, 2006). This approach is based on the social contract and represents the middle ground between fundamentalism and criticism (Gray et al, 1988). According to this approach, the entity should respond to the society's needs and demands and must be fully responsible before it (Gray et al, 1995). Social institutionalism is the dominant approach in the current academic debates, based on the entity legitimacy theory and stakeholders or user theory. (Norris and O'Dwyer, 2004);
- *Moralism* is an approach close to social institutionalism, but a little more philosophical, directing social responsibility towards philosophy, thus incorporating moral and ethical virtues. The entity represents a legal person, intangible, responsible (Klonoski, 1991), which needs to be treated just as a private person, having the possibility to make it accountable for actions taken. Palazzo and Scherer (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006) believe that the entity's moral legitimacy is the foundation of social responsibility;
- *Critical theory* represents a new approach corresponding to the left hand political spectrum, bringing about a critical vision over the other approaches presented above. For the critics, social responsibility is a potential victim of daily activities, a mystery, where meanings are lost among the members of the society (Brown and Fraser, 2006), and the social, ethical and environmental reports are means of disinformation or ways of washing out responsibilities (Brown and Fraser, 2006).

Considering three of the five dimensions (economic, environmental, social) we raise the following question: what is the difference between sustainable development and social responsibility? In order to answer such question, we have analyzed the study conducted by Ebner and Baumgartner (Ebner and Baumgartner, 2006), including 43 articles published between 1998 and 2006, with the subject of social responsibility and sustainable development. The authors have identified the following treatments applied to social responsibility:

- Social responsibility is interpreted as the social dimension within the concept of sustainable development. In this case, the responsibility of an entity includes social, economic and environmental responsibility (Zwetsloot, 2003; DesJardins, 1998);
- Social responsibility is the foundation or base of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a concept used at large scale, macro-economic level, while social responsibility is only used at entity level, expressing the sustainable orientation of the entity. There are small differences between sustainability and social responsibility at entity level: sustainability focuses on creating value, environmental management, ecological production system and human capital management, while social responsibility is associated to certain aspects of communion between individuals and entities (Dawkins and Lewis, 2003);

- Social responsibility is treated as a tridimensional model, synonymous with sustainable development (Cramer, 2004). This trend comes from the American researchers and entities tempted to replace the concept of sustainable development with the concept of social responsibility.

To be sustainable, POSDRU funded projects should increase social responsibility in the communities in which they are implemented and to create added value to the society in which are implemented on a long time orizot.

5. Conclusions

Sustainable development is a concept of present interest at national, European and international level, a new philosophy of development, a fundamental objective towards which European countries aspire to reach.

During our scientific endeavor we believe that social responsibility is the foundation of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a concept used especially at macro-economic level, while social responsibility is used at entity level and incorporates the economic, environmental and social dimension, which has a voluntary character and tries to respond to the information needs of the society and other stakeholders. Sustainability at the entity's level is the goal or final objective of sustainable development – satisfaction of present needs without compromising the possibility for future generations to satisfy their own needs, while social responsibility is an intermediate phase of sustainability wherein entities try to balance the economic, social and environmental dimension (Figure 1). Sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are concepts often used in the same context. Nevertheless, sustainability is a complex concept aiming to promote long term growth, for all forms of available capital (financial, natural and social), and corporate social responsibility is a more narrow concept, focused on short term problems and activities such as observance of legislations, philanthropy and the improvement of working conditions. In general, we could say that many entities claim to be responsible towards the society, but only few would claim to be actually sustainable.

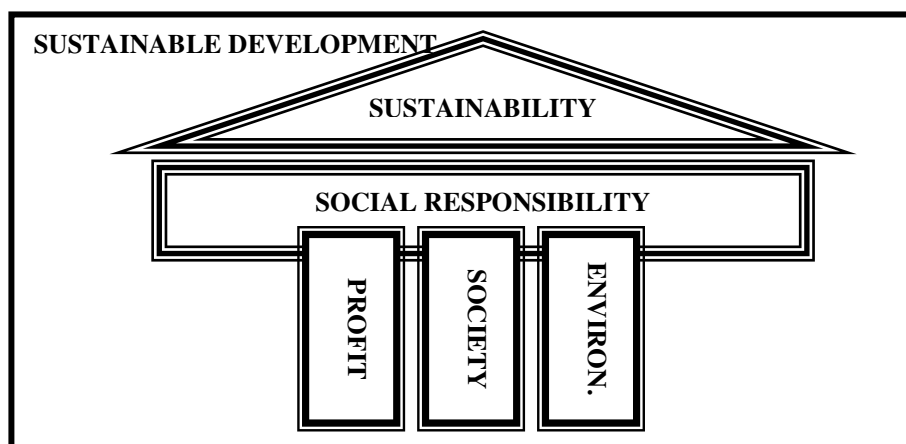


Figure 1. Representation of the relation between sustainable development, sustainability and social responsibility at entity level
Source: author's projection

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