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ON SOCIETY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SOCIEDAD Y DESARROLLO SOSTENIBLE

M. G. Akhmedova

University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Russia

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Abstract

Global changes in sociopolitical situation worldwide at the turn of the XX – XXI centuries, the acceleration of all public processes, the conflict of interests of political systems, nations and individuals draws attention of experts studying the issues of sustainable development theory and methodology. Theoretical evidence base of the sustainable development process and related multifaceted problems in the modern conditions is insufficient and therefore it requires socio-philosophical studies of new social reality. The aim of the paper is, firstly, to consider conceptual bases of society “sustainable development”, reflecting axiological and regulatory foundation of the novel outlook of the XXI century, and secondly, to compare abstract regulatory concept of “sustainable development” with the actual global status quo. The objective is to deploy the integrated, system nature of society sustainable development. Consequently, theoretical, specific historical and methodological aspects of the study are united into a single problem field. The author believes that the ideas of sustainable development are successful only if they reflect popular, public interests for shaping the conditions for progressive development worldwide. The materials of the paper may be of use for researchers and specialists engaged in the issues of the theory and methodology of sustainable development.

Keywords

Sustainable development – Global problems – Social development – Globalism

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Introduction

Being applied to the understanding of social life, the idea of “sustainable development” has some features enabling us to consider this issue by itself. The concept of “sustainable development” has become the most popular subject of research of the past decade. The range of opinions in this respect is wide. Further development of the “sustainable development” concept at different national and international conferences has been intensifying recently and thus the scope of the problem under analysis has also increased. In 2012, 20 years after the Rio-de-Janeiro environment and development conference, the city hosted a meeting of the representatives of various countries at Rio+20 summit. The event was dedicated to discussing the issues of *green economy*, sustainable development and eradication of poverty. The sustainable development was also in the focus of attention at a major forum – the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York (September 25-27, 2015). According to P. Murray, the author of individual approach to sustainable development, the mankind has never had such holistic knowledge of its impact on the environment.

Prizes have been established for environmental protection to be awarded to the scholars whose research predict global warming (e.g., scientists of Intergovernmental commission on climate change), politicians (Al Gore, the author of book “Earth in the Balance”)¹ and an African woman who has called for healing the Earth all her life (Wangari Maathai). All the above actions have been intended to inform the world of the forthcoming danger and to create a strategy of avoiding the global catastrophe.

A large number of publications has been devoted to the concept of “sustainable development”. The “sustainable development” has long become... a copper personal sign on hundreds of doors, has penetrated agreements, commissions and initiatives at all levels, from the UNO to the “green” camp² but few people given their reasoning on the axiological and regulatory foundations for the new world outlook. For this purpose it is necessary to bring the abstract regulated concept “sustainable development” down to earth – to compare with the actual status quo in the modern world. The real world is far more complicated and diverse than any simulated model of system dynamics or other precedent models. The problem, by default, is a gap between the required (norm) and existing status quo.

At first the term of “sustainability” appeared in book “The Limits to Growth” in 1972, where it was applied to the environment, and at present it refers to the world on the whole. The notion of the “sustainability” integrates economy, environment, social and personal well-being into a single whole, dynamically related to the system for decades of even centuries. Considering the polysemy and uncertainty of the notion, it later came to denote the main stage of the global movement, generated serious debates and engaged numerous participants. A variety of Earth charters have been written, as well as international agreements and other documents deemed as a great step forward.

¹ Alan Atkisson, *Believing Cassandra*. How to be an optimist in a pessimist's world. (Moscow: 2012) The absurdity of the situation was that the person who wrote “Earth in the Balance”, one of the most visionary and popular books of the XX century, was to gain both glory and shame by “signing the memorandum for internal use, prohibiting the governmental environmental protection bodies to use new restrictions on the use of pesticides in foods”, 121.

² Alan Atkisson, *Believing Cassandra*. How to be an optimist in a pessimist's...

Gradually the idea of “sustainable development” formed its regulatory basis that allows it to spread worldwide. Over 100 countries have adopted the concept of “sustainable development”, set up sustainable development councils and national programs to transit to the balanced development. The transition to this type of development appears a global process from the very beginning, and at the same time it becomes a new *life-saving* form of global development for the world community³.

In nearly all the key official governmental and international documents the concept of “sustainable development” is used as basic ideology. In the Russian Federation the Presidential Decree was signed. On the Concept of RF transition to sustainable development. It is obvious that the adoption of such a strategically vital document is significant not only for Russia, but for the whole world, since it involves, primarily, the interests of the state, politics, ideology, economy and environment.

Materials and methods

“Sustainable development” as a leading form of new world outlook in XXI century

The concept of “sustainable development” has high chances of becoming the leading form of thinking in the coming historical epoch, since its core is based on the common human values. However, the idea of “sustainable development” is not gaining popularity by itself due to the common sense. “Sustainability”, according to Alan Atkisson, belongs to the elite group of new and complex ideas that managed to suppress the old order often in an unequal struggle⁴. The end of the XX century turned out to be the start of new global economic, political and cultural processes, which significantly changed old political and economic features of national states. These changes are so profound that the previous ideological mythologemes appeared inadequate as the leading forms of public mind. Present and future require not a rigid antagonistic system, confronting the hostile ideological system and oriented on the growth of political, military, technological-and-economic power to maintain the world order but a softer, veiled ground for interaction, peaceful settlement of escalating conflicts and growing problems. It is the new so-called humanistic bases, found as a result of balancing between the groups of contradicting values, that have become the foundation for designing, setting and implementing new social functions necessary for “sustainable development”. This reasoning leads to the conclusion of the extraordinary importance of preparing the opinion (both elite political-and-economic and public) to the complex ideas and principles of “sustainable development”. Modern information technologies that are changing the model of social development are quite fine and non-obvious. They become effective owing to the consistent, systematic use and unnoticeable impact for the affected nation (victim). Gradually the project value system was formed to differ greatly from the classical axiology of W. Windelband, H. Rickert, M. Scheler, N. Hartman and others. Project axiology provides, on the one hand, intellectual grounds for the value-based thinking as a probable new major form of world outlook, on the other, it offers the principles and methodological tools for the axiological grounding of the principles and ways of “sustainable development”. The main contribution here was made by the ideologists of the Club of Rome⁵.

³ I. V. Ilyin; V. A. Los and A. D. Ursul, “Sustainable development” and global processes (Moscu: 2015).

⁴ Alan Atkisson, Believing Cassandra. How to be an optimist in a pessimist's...

⁵ Gvishiani, D. M.; Kolchin, A. I.; Netesova, Ye. V. and Seytov, A. A. M. The Club of Rome. History of establishment, selected reports and speeches, official materials (Moscu: 1997).

Ideology of “sustainable development”

The idea of “sustainable development” as a system of views of the ideologists in the Club of Rome, having emerged in the 1960-70s, generated agitated scientific and sociopolitical debates, involving the problems of the economy version, under which, based on the rational use of all resources, the use of new technologies and organizational management tools will secure the environment and the conditions for the development of the society in the future.

In the late 1960s the most prominent scholars united into the so-called Club of Rome and within 25 years of its operations they presented 20 scientific reports stating that provided today's development algorithm the humanity was approaching the global catastrophe at an ever increasing pace. The danger referred not only well-being but also the very existence and life of the mankind. In addition, these were not merely talks about the apocalyptical end of the world, but scientific forecast, based on mathematical estimations. The task of computer models, according to the author of “The Limits to Growth” D. Meadows, “is not to predict, but to warn, encourage to changing the behavior of people who are considered reasonable creatures”. The aim of the creators of the mathematical model “World3” was to simulate with the highest accuracy most probable development of events in the real world. The results consistently showed the same trend – fast reaching the extreme value followed by the collapse and total destruction. Owing to the generous financial and mass media support the computer-forecast destiny of the mankind became a sensation⁶. Since then there has been the concept of the “global challenges facing humanity”. The problems of limited resources for economic and demographic growth appeared in the foreground. It was stated that there was a need not only to stop the global population growth, but also the economic growth by reducing global investments in new industrial facilities in the same proportion, in which tangible capital funds wear. However, as we all know, the global economy has not ceased growing, vice versa, the growth has intensified.

Thus, “sustainable development” is directly related to changing the logic of production and consumption development, as well as to the demographic policy. The aim is clear – to restrict or suspend their further social progress – to redirect and adjust this process, which will enable to develop a set of solutions to unprecedented issues the mankind has faced and to do it fast. No surprise that the activities of the Club of Rome in the past and today are correlated by many researchers with the concept of “zero growth”.

In the 1980s the issues of environmental pollution and the threat of the global ecological crisis became a priority. In his report “Our Common Future” Gro Harlem Brundtland laid out a manifesto of sustainable development, which states that the damage caused to the environment, in particular by each of us, will not be stopped as long as we do not eradicate social and economic inequality, affecting common human culture. In the 1990s the concept of “sustainable development” was gaining social dimension.

Why does it all happen? A persuasive answer to these questions was given in June 1992 in Rio-de-Janeiro, where under the auspices of the United Nations a conference dedicated to “Environment and Development” was held. The main conclusion made by hundreds of prominent human minds was as follows: the way chosen and followed over the past centuries by the bigger part of the humanity that achieved significant economic

⁶ Alan Atkisson, *Believing Cassandra. How to be an optimist in a pessimist's...*

and technological success, or briefly, – the way of capitalistic development, aiming at making profits has exhausted itself. It has exhausted itself fully and ultimately. Further motion along this path will lead to the inevitable death of the mankind. It is suggested that the model of the development we have been using since the industrial revolution is not sustainable any longer. The humanity must find a new model, a paradigm of “sustainable development” to escape from the threatening environmental, mental, and perhaps, nuclear catastrophe, ensure the path of sustainable development, where the reason is given a special role as an objective factor of natural-historical process.

“A great turn to the sustainable development must be a great disruption, too. The disruption with a centennial logic of scientific-and-technological progress, with the willingness to provide well-being without thinking about humanness or anti-humanness in their activities. In the XX century, more than ever before, killing was *industrialized* during the two world wars, and the lethal weapon technologies (noticed by Marx) were in the avant-garde of the progress. The solution is in the fundamental change of the technology “economic algorithm”. Transiting from the parasitic-absorbing technology and economy to the saving-creative economy and technology. Only by recognizing this need it is possible to search for the ways of organic inclusion of the industrial activity into material and energetic natural exchange process. The way to this technology is its total biologizing”⁷.

It is evident that the idea of the transition to the sustainable development appeared as a result of the deep insight into the environmental problems, when it came clear that the existing contemporary system of interacting with nature was increasingly threatening. Despite the discovery of a number of contradictions in the humanity development, it was the interaction of the society and nature that turned out to be the main global contradiction in the world system. Environmental imperatives appeared leading in creating and understanding the concept and strategy of sustainable development.

At first sight it may seem that the greatest idea of the late XX century on the “sustainable development” is limited only to environmental protection and management, when it is in fact much wider. The term “sustainability” is deceitfully simple to denote a very complex and multilayered idea. According to V. B. Pavlenko, we face a very refine ideological structure, being a nearly universal algorithm of integration between ecology and socio-political life. Consequently, with domestic and foreign policies of countries and international relations on the whole.

Therefore, “sustainable development” is not only an opportunity to breathe in fresh air and drink clean water, eat eco-friendly foods, and a somewhat wider methodological approach, adequate to the research into the objectives of “sustainable development”, appears not a social-natural or social-ecological but a political-economic approach.

Discussions

Methodology of “Sustainable Development”

The concept of “sustainable development” claims that for the harmonious mankind development it is necessary to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor countries and put more efforts to protect the environment. The ideologists of society “sustainable

⁷ R. Kosolapov, The Truth from Russia (Moscow: 2004).

development” called on to the countries to become more modest to the development requirements due to the threatening environmental and social catastrophes, and get united in the face of the coming danger. However, in effect, the developing countries were offered not to enter the insurmountable race, and to prefer the so-called sustainability to development, which was acceptable to the West, but did not satisfy the rest of the world. The right to develop was included into the integral rights. The very fact that the USA did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol (in 1997 the US Senate unanimously voted against the country entering any treaty resembling the Kyoto Protocol), aiming at restricting human impact on nature, testifies that nowadays the concept of sustainable development, which has positive objectives at first sight, works only for limiting the growth of less-developed countries, not involving the “the Golden Billion”.

Thus, to ensure further prosperity of the Golden Billion countries, the developing countries must refuse from their sovereignty and the right to dispose of their natural resources for their own development for the sake of an abstract “global sustainable development”. Nonetheless, in practice, the point is to gain total control of natural wealth of the developing countries by the world financial and industrial elite. Instead of the need to introduce post-industrial austerity – ecological self-limitation and spiritual development (what the Club of Rome intellectuals called for) – there has emerged the temptation to turn a part of the world into a strategic foothold to prolong the existence of the western sensual-consumerist society. Primarily, it is supposed to actively use the territory of Russia as a resource base, a market a reserve of the colonial labour, the landfill of industrial waste, badly needed by the capitalistic countries in the conditions of the growing new wave of global ecological crisis.

“Sustainable development” in the conditions of globalization and global issues or the way that the “masters of global discourse” demolish traditional social systems

The earlier studies showed that globalization is related to “sustainable development”. “Globalization and a number of other global processes in the strategic outlook will be implemented via “sustainable development”, which was reflected in the documents of many UN forums, including the recent Rio+20 Summit⁸.

One of the dominants in the world capitalist development is the process of economy internationalization, the establishment of the unified system of global relations, alteration and weakened functions of national states, activation of the multinational corporation activities. Generally, this process is natural and historical, evolutionary, long-lasting, heavily influenced by the subjective factor and ruling circles of the world financial-oligarch system.

Nevertheless, lately the pace of this process has risen dramatically. That was spurred not only by great advancements in science and information technologies, by electronic means of communications etc. This naturally objective process showed the strong power that accelerated it by force in the preferred direction. It became especially evident after the disappearance of the USSR and its allies from the world political arena. The global process of capital internationalization was called *globalization*. In a certain sense globalization smoothly follows natural and historical process, but at the same time it is something fundamentally new, artificial and subjectively imposed.

⁸ I. V. Ilyin; V. A. Los and A. D. Ursul, “Sustainable development” and global...

Obvious capitalistic advantages are related to globalization or internationalization. The market expands and develops, specialization and international labour distribution deepen, and production growth is encouraged. Seemingly, it might lead to the common well-being around the world and, therefore, “sustainable development”. Instead, adverse consequences are evident: national competition is getting tougher, generating new antagonisms at the governmental, national, regional and international levels. We entered the twenty-first century when the contradiction between labour – capital became globalized and turned into: “The Golden Billion” – the rest of the world – and that qualitatively changed both the scale and complexity of the human issues to solve⁹.

Globalization further deepens already huge abyss between the rich and the poor, escalates the problem of social inequality, in other words, it does not solve any global issues for the humanity but worsens them.

The reality of global issues as a threat to the existence of mankind is clearly understood by everybody, including the USA and its allies. This is confirmed by the fact that the final document of the Rio-de-Janeiro conference “Agenda 21” was signed by the leaders of countries and governments from 147 countries, including the USA, Japan and all European countries. To implement the concept of “sustainable development” the countries committed, in particular, to overcome the established, centennial giant gap between the overwhelming majority of the poor and the absolute minority of the rich countries, share state-of-the-art information technologies with developing countries and promote the philosophy of rational use in the post-industrial countries. The main idea of all these and many other measures is to seek social justice, equality and weakening of a new lap of social controversies within societies and between countries. All that gave an opportunity to suggest that the conclusions of the Conference would become a turning point in the foreign and domestic policies of different countries, in international relations and world development on the whole. Especially, taking into consideration the fact that according to the Conference decision, member-countries had to develop and adopt their national concepts of the transition to sustainable development. However, developed countries actually continued accelerating globalization, promoted by global capitalism, being simultaneously a stage in the human history and a political program.

Global capitalism as a political program is supported by the USA, EU and multinationals. The program itself is not new, although historians agree that recently it has gained the features of the ideology, moreover, an aggressive ideology. After the collapse of the Soviet Union globalization became the “only game” in the global village.

The distinction between the objective trend of the society to develop and the program of national clans is rarely clearly visible, it is deliberately concealed by them. The ideologists of global capitalism emphasized the importance and inevitability of the economic trends, determining human history. This statement is evidently based on the principle of economic determinism, which does not account for equally significant and independent aspects of social life. Contemporary neoliberal ideology of market economy, based on the premise of “demolish your neighbor”, is still in place. Using the newest information technology achievements, it is spreading to all those countries, whose natural systems can be used to produce vital strategic resources to keep “sustainable prosperity” and meet the needs of successfully developing socioeconomic systems.

⁹ R. Kosolapov, The Truth from Russia...

Therefore, the concept of social “sustainable development” is not designed for the West and its allies in economic terms – because it presupposes lower rate of the economy development, its support on primarily its own material resources and mutually beneficial trade with resource producing countries; it also presupposes lower rate of consumption in the society, accustomed to its high standards; furthermore, it presupposes sharing wealth and achievements with weaker and less-advanced countries. Socio-economic development levelling is not beneficial for the USA and developed countries politically, too: weaker will become stronger, strong – weaker. To encourage this means to voluntarily refuse from the idea of global hegemony, from the establishment of the new world order preferred by them.

It is obvious that there is a clear relation between the method of global issues solving and the concept of “sustainable development” as an instrument of its practical implementation in the current situation.

Results

Thus, “sustainable development” is actually the austere reality deliberately disguised as a *utopia*. It is a product of well-thought and consistently implemented political reason. According to a follower of the concept, Alan Atkisson, Sustainability, like democracy, is the ideal we seek, and the path towards it is more important than the destination¹⁰. The main tools to move towards the above *ideal*, that is the global capitalism, include the overall liberalization of economy, privatization, competition and structural reorganization of the global system. “For this reason only very naïve and primitive people may suppose that the common triumph of *democracy and human rights*, especially today, will become a historical breakthrough to the future. Rather vice versa. Since the *end of the history* is not a continuation but the completion of any development – both in the West and in the East. What can stop the *end of the history*? Only continued competition of different projects of world outlooks within or between civilizations¹¹.

The theory of “sustainable development” is not a theory of social development and moreover, it is not the theory of modern socialism, as it is considered by some domestic scholars it is a theory of the “new global capitalism”, where national interests of social development voluntarily concede to imperialistic ones. And it is even more indiscreet and dangerous to unite the ideas, formulated by the ideologists of “sustainable development”, who made a significant ideological contribution in the collapse of the USSR, with the noospheric ideas (Strategy and issues of sustainable development of Russia in the XXI century. 2002). Monopolization of the project model of “sustainable development”, intended and supported by the contemporary global capitalism by imposing material, sensual-consumerist values of the western civilization (presented as universal, common human), substituting and denying the Ideal on the rest of the world, entails termination of the historical development. The approach to the *end of the history*, whose concept was formulated by F. Fukuyama and the mechanism – by the formula of S. Huntington in “The West and the Rest”, means the division of the mankind into the privileged elite and the obsolete others¹².

¹⁰ Alan Atkisson, Believing Cassandra. How to be an optimist in a pessimist's...

¹¹ V. P. Pavlenko, Myths of “sustainable development”. “Global warming” or “crawling” global coup? (Moscow: 2011).

¹² F. Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (Moscow: 2007).

The results of COP-15 and COP-16, hosted in 2009 and 2010 in Copenhagen and Cancun, show that the main divide of the confrontation in the climatic issue, and, accordingly, in the assessment of “sustainable development” is currently between the West and the rest of the humanity¹³.

The offered *global development model* evidently conceals its part, which is not designed for the *public* mind. First of all, it is necessary to understand that this concept is not just a call for action, but an instrument of the “masters of global discourse”, which quickly and effectively processes traditional “imperfect systems”.

“Sustainable development” is a project model of capitalism that meets the interests of the global imperialism and aims at substantiating the legitimacy of the western project expansion. Thereupon, it is reasonable to claim and create the national project models of social development that would meet the actual interests of Russia and global progressive development on the whole. For this purposes thorough philosophical reconstruction of the imposed project language and the reference system is required. The project language is not a *jeu de mots* (a pun), but a vital theoretical and empirical issue¹⁴.

Conclusion

It is absolutely clear that there are two interrelated lines of the “sustainable development” concept: the first was built by the Club of Rome and introduced in the public opinion as a new Utopia, outlining the ideal image of the potential society, the ideal type, a new model of the social development, and the other is an active obligation project, designed to serve for the good of the financial-oligarch interests of the global elite. The former line must serve for the common good, whereas the latter – for the few only. The first aims at protecting the environment, eradication of diseases, famine and wars via slowing down their own development. The second rewards those who serve it, multibillion contracts and provides them with global powers.

To speculate in the values, deliberately deceive, persuade of the solidarity of interests with those who do not have ideals, and having cheated, take advantage of their ignorance in their own interests is in fact the concept of “sustainable development”, which has so-called “universal value”, mainly oriented on material pragmatic objectives, based not on the ideals, but on political and economic interests of preserving global capitalism. The conversion of “sustainable development” ideas into the generally accepted and compulsory rules and their processing into social relations and the order, supported by the totality of public opinion, law and institutional violence. Thus, global capitalism values more its survival than that of the mankind, actually setting an ultimatum: either my prosperity and immunity, or no history at all.

The history of human development illustrates different forms of social-economic relations, which were accompanied by political, social, economic, cultural suppression of the weak, which has been continuing thus strengthening and complicating social contradictions.

Social history of the mankind has long demonstrated the opposition of two types of social dynamics. One of them involves the powerful guideline of social-Darwinist ideas of

¹³ V. P. Pavlenko, Myths of “sustainable development”...

¹⁴ V. P. Pavlenko, Myths of “sustainable development”...

fighting for the survival, the survival of the fittest as the engine of the natural process. Further evolution of the humanity can be seen in fighting and replacing the weak and inflexible forms. This dynamics is technical, parasitic and commercial, leading to the establishment of the rigid monopolar world system. The aim of “replacement” and not of development may not ensure survival in the long run. The other is a moral-humanistic concept of social development that supports self-sufficient and highest value of the human personality, called for transforming not only the environment, but also the inner imperfect nature. This type of social dynamics does not feature egotistic ideal of the future, allegedly belonging to those who, following individualism, takes the *every man for himself* principle to the extreme.

Social development philosophy is still in the doctrine of objective laws for the development of nature and society, and the studies on what the society of the future will be and how to achieve that. The answer to the question was given by K. Marx. That is the society where free development of each person is the condition for free development of all¹⁵. Social development philosophy is a part of the natural philosophy, similarly to the social evolution which is a part of the great primary process controlling the Universe.

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¹⁵ K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Moscú: 1955).