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## DECONSTRUCTION AND EVALUATION OF AGENDA 2030 AND LOCAL AGENDA 21 IN THE CONTEXT OF APPLIED ETHICS

**Abstract.** Sustainability and sustainable development are the keywords of the 21st Century – the frequently used magic symbol of policies, strategies, programmes, plans in the form of sustainable communities, regions and responsible organisational practice. It is obvious that the approach to developmental needs to change from the outdated qualitative, Aristotelian, and Rortyan viewpoints and a shift towards something more sophisticated, just, responsible, moral and therefore good and stemming from *Phronesis*. The study proceeds as follows: firstly, a discourse analysis is employed to demonstrate how sustainability as the magic symbol has transformed into a value tool (bottom-down approach) in the course of the last decade; secondly, sustainability will be deconstructed in order to outline new horizons and evaluation tools; and thirdly, the competences of the applied ethics in the area of creation, implementation and evaluation of sustainable policies, programmes and projects (bottom-up approach), i.e. in the CETIP Incubator – Centre for Ethical Consulting at the Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics, Faculty of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica.

**Keywords:** Applied Ethics, sustainable development, environment

## DEKONSTRUKCJA I EWALUACJA AGENDY 2030 I LOKALNEJ AGENDY 21 W KONTEKŚCIE ETYKI STOSOWANEJ

**Streszczenie.** Trwałość i zrównoważony rozwój stały się pojęciami XXI wieku, częstym magicznym symbolem polityk, strategii, programów, planów, również w postaci wskaźników zrównoważonych społeczności, regionów czy odpowiedzialnych praktyk organizacyjnych. Rozwój, jak się okazuje, musimy zacząć rozumieć inaczej niż dotychczas, jakościowo, po arystotelesowsku i rorty'owsku, tzn. nie utożsamiać go ze wzrostem (ilością, poszerzaniem, powiększaniem), lecz z czymś jakościowo doskonalszym, lepszym, bardziej sprawiedliwym, odpowiedzialniejszym, moralniejszym, a więc z dobrym, związanym z cnotą fronesis. W swojej pracy zamierzam postępować następująco: po pierwsze, poprzez analizę dyskursywną spróbuję pokazać, że w ostatniej

dekadzie następuje transformacja zrównoważonego rozwoju jako magicznego symbolu, na narzędzie ewaluacji (Top-down approach); po drugie, poprzez dekonstrukcję zrównoważonego rozwoju wskażę na nowe horyzonty i narzędzia ewaluacji; i wreszcie po trzecie, postaram się dowiedzieć, jakie kompetencje przysługują etyce stosowanej w kreowaniu, realizacji lub ewaluacji polityk, programów czy projektów zrównoważonego rozwoju (bottom-up approach), np. w inkubatorze etycznym CETIP – Centrum Doradztwa Etycznego przy Katedrze Etyki i Etyki Stosowanej na Wydziale Filozoficznym Uniwersytetu im. Mateja Bela w Bańskiej Bystrzycy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** etyka stosowana, zrównoważony rozwój, środowisko

## 1. Preliminary remarks and outline the problem

Examples concerning the inhabitants of the Easter Island and Rwandan events described in Diamond's book entitled *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* [2005], are suggestive and convincingly illustrate how societies that devastated and destroyed their environment were bound to collapse, whether due to deforestation and ruining the natural environment, excessive hunting and fishing, or depreciation of water and soil (erosion, salination, chemical pollution and toxicity).

In 2015, the document Agenda 2030, defining the new development agenda, was approved at the UN Convention in Addis Ababa, which is currently in force. Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents the most complex set of priorities for reaching sustainable development goals so far. Its philosophy, ethic and axiology are based on the Millennium Development Goals (2000). Local Agenda 21 is in force at the same time since the activities implemented at the local level, in communities and municipalities, will ultimately play a decisive role in the success or failure of the whole initiative.

Agenda 2030 and Local Agenda 21 (hereinafter LA21) represent two types of hierarchy and planning in the area of sustainable strategies: top down and bottom up. The aim of this article is to analyse them and identify their limits, but also suggest possibilities for reconstituting their content specifically in the Slovak context. What does that mean for the community of experts in applied ethics? What are the tasks and competences of applied ethics in the area of sustainable development? How to answer these questions in the context of implementing Agenda 2030 and LA21, which is currently taking place? The first complex evaluation of the Agenda 2030 implementation in the Slovak Republic will be carried out by 2019, which requires academics and theoreticians in various disciplines to start their preparation. The evaluation process will not include only experts in economics, technology or politicians – it requires inter/multidisciplinary discourse and serious ethical expertise. At the

same time, LA 21 is a great tool to satisfy the needs of inhabitants in regions and microregions and involve them in the public administration processes.

Our reasoning is based on the assumption that our future and sustainability, goodness in polis and good life (public and private) depend upon the moral fitness of the society. Freedom and democracy are essential preconditions for sustainable development [Filčák, 2009; Nováček, 2011; Klimková, 2015]. Despite political declarations on the necessity of reviving morality in Slovakia in the fundamental and programme documents of a reformatory nature, a sophisticated policy in the creation of the ethical environment as well as effective support of activities which limit unethical behaviour are still lacking [Fobel, 2013]. Our reasoning is further based on the assumption that in the context of the sustainability paradigm the key to prosperity is/should be a synthesis of the following three building elements: future-focused thinking, public space and education. The sustainability paradigm represents the fundamental idea, conceptual and constitutive framework that serves as the base for the operationalisation of definitions, goals, procedures and metrics. The key element of sustainability are values compatible with a sustainable life or lifestyle sustainable in the long run [Vavroušek, 1993].

According to certain authors, the National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Slovak Republic (NSTUR) approved by the Government of the SR and the National Council of the SR in 2002 represents a top-level document [Nováček, 2011]. A network of 150 experts, including academics, officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations, cooperated in the creation of this conceptual document. At the national level, the fundamentals and methodology for further documents were created. Currently, the two above-mentioned strategic documents are being implemented in practice – Agenda 2030 and Local Agenda 21. Therefore, the evaluation of these activities needs to be carried out with their respective and specific ways of implementation in mind (top down vs. bottom up). Applied ethics is fulfilling a specific mission in relation to practice and ethical policy, closely related to the issue of sustainability. It provides ethical analyses and expertise (on global and systemic levels) as well as ethical audits (at institutional and organisational levels).

In Poland they are intensively engaged in sustainable development at the *Centre for Business Ethics and Sustainable Development* in *Politechnika Śląska Zabrze*. Professor *Aleksandra Kuzior* is a theorist who has initiated a number of conferences and expert panels over the last decade. We know her expert texts and studies in Slovakia, at the Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics, Faculty of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, for example: *Axiology of Sustainable Development* [Kuzior, 2014].

## 2. Is sustainable development a “magic symbol” for current society?

Globalization changes the direction of the university education and influences structural changes in the content of the curriculum [Svitačová, Kovačiková, 2016, p. 162], also preparing ethical leaders [Bednár, 2015]. In the context of sustainable development, applied ethics has important competences and tasks to fulfil: (1) *at different discourse levels* (global, systemic, organisational); (2) *at the intersections of its subdisciplines*: organisational ethics, environmental ethics, ethics of technics and technology, human rights ethics, etc.; as well as in different types of consulting, e.g. bioethical consulting or technology assessment.

The role of this discipline in the social transformation of public institutions, policies, organisations, specific social environments/microenvironments is very important and interconnected with the complex concept of sustainable development on multiple levels. Besides economic, political, legal, normative and organisational dimensions, reforms also have an important ethical dimension and content. To implement ethics as an inseparable part of the economic and social environments and microenvironments means implementing and evaluating an elaborate policy aimed at creating an ethical environment in Slovakia [Fobel, 2013] also in the context of Agenda 2030 and LA 21. It does not mean formulating ethical declarations, but actually reconstructing, transforming and supporting measures which bring about ethical changes, policies and programmes.

In the beginning, sustainable development was perceived as a symbol. Since the 1970s we have crossed the horizons of exclusively protective attitudes and entered the territory of environmental policy, environmental management, environmental information systems and the environmental social movement. Today, we already partly do business and manufacture products employing integrated environmental management. The environment has become an agenda and the subject of different social spheres. We speak of sustainable regions, sustainable communities, sustainable strategies, best available technologies, sustainable development and also sustainable education [Klimková, 2015]. There are hundreds of different definitions; however, they all based on the same fundamental idea: to facilitate the needs of the current generation without endangering the survival of the future ones. In other words, the goal of a sustainable approach is to sustain different ecosystems as well as cultural and natural heritage. In the broadest sense, the strategy of sustainable development focuses on establishing harmony between humanity and nature. This general definition is undoubtedly true; however, it is very vague and rather moralising. It is justified in terms of ethical visions, but until recently, it represented merely a rather broadly formulated ideological and political concept that predestined its implementation on difficulties. Due to its proclamative nature, the strategy failed to propose a specific vision of a socially stable and environmentally just society. Even the adjectives collocated with the term “sustainability” used in Slovak and Czech translate as “permanent”, which indicates the impossibility of actually achieving the

goals (we are temporary beings living in a temporary world) [Klimková, 2015, p. 85]. Originally, the concept was initiated by the industry itself; it was turned into a slogan transformed into conferences, publications and formal declarations in national policies. However, this programme was not anchored in the realities of economic development, agriculture, industry, transport or science. Over time, the programme underwent changes and shifted towards a technological concept (through the indicators of sustainable development). In the field of business it rationalised into a form of management. From the practical point of view, it means that companies, corporations, institutions and organisations understand and implement the sustainable development as a value tool in the form of goal-oriented projects and strategies in which the social and ecological values are equal to the economic ones.

### **3. Deconstruction of "sustainable development" (Top-down vs. bottom-up Approach)**

In order to functionalise the concept of sustainable development through strategic programmes and projects, measurement tools are needed to identify whether we are heading towards sustainable development or not, whether the situation is improving, stagnating, or even deteriorating. The best known set of sustainable development indicators in the European Union are the updated versions of indicators from 2006 and 2016. Can sustainable development represented by Agenda 2030 and LA 21 be considered a value tool? Such sustainable development is characterised by its triple bottom line integrative design; therefore it can be considered a synergy of economic, cultural, social, and ecological values. But is this even possible to implement? How can we evaluate it? The values are cultural and context-specific, variable and need to be evaluated in respective ways. For instance, normative theories in the fields of ecological ethics and environmental ethics used to be based on the observation of nature for decades. These included often competing theories based on the dichotomy between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism or individualism vs. holism. As can be seen, the problem with the moral evaluation of nature is neither new, nor unique. To this day, it continues to represent a neuralgic point in ecological and environmental ethics and policies.

An example of the fact that the current environmental discourse is a non-linear and rather conflictive process or reference framework for the creation of such processes is the theoretical initiative of T. Hayward, who criticizes the moral evaluation of nature based on the internal value of nature or non-anthropocentric ethics, because he believes such an evaluation is bound to fail. He argues that such values are unrelated to human interests, therefore the moral impulses for a practical change are weak; they cannot be heard, and insisting on them is politically counterproductive. According to Hayward, it is in the human interest to integrate

ecological motives and issues (related to our survival) into political institutions and specific policies, only then will they become the subject of our care [Hayward, 1998]. If we begin formulating ecological values from the viewpoint of human interests, it will allow for their integration into the policies of social institutions. It can be stated that these are the particular reasons why we are nowadays discussing sustainability, sustainable development, education for sustainable development, environmental and sustainable development, and why they are accepted, adapted and integrated into policies, projects and methodologies. The turn towards holistic and truly non-anthropocentric ethics would require a radical change not only in the tradition, but also in our thinking and actions. The values are cultural and context-specific, variable and based on different ethical arguments. Normative theories in the fields of ecological ethics and environmental ethics used to be based on the observation of nature for decades. These often included competing theories based on the dichotomy between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism or individualism vs. holism. The problem regarding the moral evaluation of nature is neither new, nor unique. To this day, it continues to represent a neuralgic point in ecological and environmental ethics and policies. Discussions about environmental values are taking place not only in the area of environmental ethics, but also in discourses regarding politics, human rights, technology and organisational practice.

If the strategy of sustainability implementation (Agenda 2030 and LA 21) is perceived in the national and European contexts, it can be observed that the causation is bidirectional.

**Agenda 2030 Top-down approach.** The external engagement of Slovakia abroad covers the following key areas: *People and the State, Prosperity, Environment, Development Partnership*. What are the real possibilities of this engagement which would lead to reaching the goals? Can we identify any specific interventions? Can we evaluate the aspects of different policies in relation to the national concept and global documents? From the global point of view, the concept of implementing Agenda 2030 in the international environment is based on three main commitments accepted by the UN in 2015 – 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on the financing of development, and the Paris Agreement to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. In the European Union, the concept follows the European strategic documents: Next steps for a Sustainable European Future and the reviewed European Consensus on Development presented by the EC in November 2016. In order to facilitate the fulfilling of these commitments, all future national policies should be based on the vision defined in the national strategy and lead towards reaching global sustainable development goals. Partial goals underwent partial selection in order to accommodate the capacities of Slovakia. Partial goals were selected based on the expertise of the SR, past interventions and future ambitions. The common European commercial, climatic and energetic, foreign, security, and developmental policies belong among powerful EU tools that multiply Slovak possibilities in the international environment. The document represents the effort of Slovakia to actively participate and cooperate in fulfilling the obligations resulting from the Paris Agreement to

the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and to support affordable, sustainable and safe access to energy and the eradication of poverty. Reaching sustainable development goals should be the cross-topic in public policies and be reflected in all partial strategic documents, national strategies and focus. The subsequent implementation would be monitored in line with reporting the progress in national strategies. This mechanism should be defined on the national level. Some countries are obliged to report the impact of newly adopted legislative measures on fulfilling sustainable development goals

**LA 21 (Top-down approach).** The idea of LA 21 originated in Rio de Janeiro in 1992; in 1994, the Aalborg Charter was adopted at the first “European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns” in Aalborg, Denmark. The second “European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns” was held in Lisbon; the Lisbon Action Plan specified the details of implementing LA 21 in European cities. The third conference was held in Hannover, Germany, where measurement indicators were proposed, and at the fourth conference (held again in Aalborg in 2004) the Aalborg commitments were adopted. At the global level and in Europe, the following organisations play an important role: ICLEI (formulated the criteria for fulfilling of LA 21) and WHO (initiated the Healthy City project in which 1300 cities from 30 countries participated).

**LA 21 (Bottom-up approach).** The players in the field of sustainable development who can take it up as their mission include local self-governments in specific microregions, municipalities and cities, educational institutions, private sector, entrepreneurs, citizens, political parties and media. If citizens perceive sustainable development as important, it will also clearly reflect in the interests of political parties and power flows [Kozová, Kršáková, 2003] The key elements of LA 21 include:

- management and improvement of the functioning of local self-governments in the area of sustainable development (hereinafter SD);
- integration of the SD aspects into projects, plans, programmes and day-to-day running of the local self-government;
- increasing of environmental awareness and education of local citizens and members of the local self-government;
- public involvement and participative decision-making;
- partner cooperation of the involved parties;
- creation of the SD strategy and action plan;
- monitoring and evaluation of the SD results and regular updating.

To ensure that the key elements are mutually complementary and fulfilled, Kozová and Kršáková propose the following procedure:

- establish a local forum in which all participants are involved;
- creation of a common development prospect;

- analysis of the current state and evaluation of the local economic, social, environmental problems by both experts and the public;
- creation of local SD-based action plans;
- creation of preconditions for the quality monitoring of the implementation of the action plans, facilitating feedback and informing the public [Kozová, Kršáková, 2003].

#### **4. Organisational ethics, sustainable development, and the competences of applied ethics**

The changes and limits of the biosphere as well as the implementation of the environmental policy and sustainability into all areas of the social practice represent the effort and pressure leading to an organisational change. It is also related to the fact that there are already multiple optimistic visions that persuade us that professional ethical education is needed and our effort to train experts in ethical changes is indeed justified [Fobel, 2013]. We cannot expect that declaring an agenda at the national level will somehow change reality on its own. The new quality of organisations depends upon their moral development, which must include ethical tools and programmes incorporating ethical values, principles, commitments and standards leading toward our survival, i.e. sustainability of human culture and the natural world that constitutes our home. These arguments reflect justice, care and responsibility – the ethical principles present in both our private and public lives, and they also impact the whole organisational practice in which applied ethics is competent for providing professional consulting. In terms of this discourse and research field, the following disciplines emerge: organisational theory, organizational ethics, ecological ethics, environmental politics, environmental law, and the currently reviewed and updated concept of sustainability and sustainable development.

Organisational practice is a dynamic social system consisting of different organisations that constantly manifests itself as an environmental practice in which various cultural strategies are implemented; it has a complex structure and follows political, legal, environmental, and ethical standards. The issue comprises several partial questions: What is good environmental practice? How do we achieve it and what steps need to be taken? What is the role of caring for the environment and nature in this context? Attention is focused on examining care and its inherent elements, which are of key importance for good practice. We assume that all practice including the organisational one covering environmental issues can be considered good practice, if it is just, reflective, engaged and holistic (ecocentric). This should serve as motivation for us to morally cultivate organisational practice as a type of environmental practice and perceive this task as important; such change can be facilitated by

trained experts and consultants who can further help create effective ethical policies and improve ethical practice.

However, the issue of sustainable development should not be abandoned at the level of public policies and self-governments – it should extend further across different organisations (organisational practice), all citizens and their actions. The steering of the broad public towards a responsible lifestyle and sustainable development could be facilitated by a suitable means of communication or marketing presentation. A lot of inspiration is available all around the globe: there are online platforms, communication campaigns, civil initiatives involving the third sector, etc. An important role is, of course, played by education (mainly tertiary, HEDS), the non-governmental sector, citizen science, applied ethics and examples of good practice (case studies and practical solutions).

We conduct a teaching of competences in applied ethics for students at the Center for Ethics Advisory, in the CETIP Incubator at the Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics, Faculty of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. The design of the ethics expert's competency profile was elaborated by the Slovak theoretician of applied ethics Pavel Fobel [Fobel, 2013; Fobelová, D. – Fobelová, M., 2013, Fobelová, M. 2016]. In Cetipe, we verify the specific competencies of students in organizations of various types as a form of professional practice. Expertise also applies to sustainable development, strategies of sustainable development in organizational practice. At the two academic workplaces where we prepare applied ethicists, the concept of sustainability and sustainable development strategy is part of higher education and vocational training.

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