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**ECONOMICS**

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**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT –  
THE WAY OF BUILDING JUST  
SOCIETY**

**ABSTRACT.** Human use of the environment often gives us a presupposition that the Earth and its resources play only instrumental value in our lives. Generally the biggest global threads, which occurred at the end of XX century, are rooted in bigger accumulation of antropopression on natural environment, unsatisfied needs of meaningful number of people, wider destabilization of natural and socio-economical systems. Discussion around those escalated threads and the model of a new modern global development brought up the conception of the sustainable development. A big impact on the idea of sustainable development came from Gro Brundland Raport in 1987. One of the most meaningful purpose of sustainable development is to build society where the rights of the individuals are free from “political bargaining” and protected from “the calculations of social institutions”. The World order in social, economical and environmental spheres became unquestionable necessity

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**Introduction**

The purpose of the paper is to present an investigation of the idea of sustainable development as a social justice proposition to contemporary World. Global threads which occurred at the end of twenty century as consequences of rapid waste of natural resources, growth of impurity of environment, increase of human population, fast urbanization, unsatisfied basic needs of people and global destabilization of natural and socio-economical systems made different environments of politicians and activists seek for rational solutions of those problems.

Finally as a result of some propositions, especially notified by international comities, the idea of sustainable development came into existence. Great impact on arising of that idea came from so called Brundtland Rapport in 1987. In the document it was stated that one of the conditions of sustaining development in the World requires such development which would satisfy needs of present generations without depriving future generations abilities and satisfactions of their needs (Nasza, 1993, 14).

The authors of Rio Declaration in one of 27 articles emphasized: The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations. In reference to the idea of sustainable development in this paper two-fold purposes were undertaken:

1. instantiation of distributive justice criteria, and
2. explaining validity of future generation justice.

### **Distributive justice and its criteria**

One of the most characteristic symptoms of the contemporary World it is undoubtedly rapid development of capitalist economy, measured by maximization of economic well-being on one side but also by serious problems of structural social marginalization and disturbing ecological crises on the other side. In 2000 the representatives of the United Nations Comity organized in New York the conference concerning developmental problems in the World. The members of the meeting signed up Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The document emphasizes eight goals:

1. eradicate extreme poverty;
2. achieve universal primary education;
3. promote gender equality and empower women;
4. reduce child mortality;
5. improve maternal health;
6. combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;
7. ensure environmental sustainability;
8. develop a global partnership for development (After: Borys, 2005, 53).

In 2002 next Earth Summit organized in Johannesburg aimed at assumption of ten years anniversary of the Agenda 21 in the days of economical growth and globalization. The meeting insured the legitimacy of undertaken operations, pointing out at the same time inadequate of their efficiency. The documents, accepted by the majority of the Conference focused on the following aims of sustainable development in social sphere:

1. up till 2015 should be eradicated of 50% the number of leaving people under the level of poverty, which means 1\$ or less a day;
2. up till 2015 should be reduced of 50% the number of people who leave without an access to clean water;
3. up till 2020 should be improved of the leaving standard among people existing in the areas of slams;
4. up till 2015 should be lowered of 3/4 the death indicators among infants and children, comparing with year of 2000;
5. up till 2005 should be reduced of 25% the number of HIV infected people between 15 – 24 years old.

It seems reasonable to ask the question concerning just distribution of social proceeds and participation in natural resources. Undoubtedly John Rawls is right when he writes: *Justice is the first virtue of social institutions. (...) Likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged just be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. (...) Truth and justice are uncompromising* (Rawls, 1994, 13).

Making an attempt of investigating the phenomena of distributive justice, at first it should be explained what it is concerned about. According to *Oxford dictionary of philosophy* distributive justice depends on *defining principles of distributing goods and obligations, (...) in order each one received what it is one's amount due. At starting point we all should consider that each person ought to be treated as equal with others, with an exception if some other reasons of inequalities, taking place, are explainable; next the answer to the following*

questions should be provided, what it can excuse those inequalities, what the main role of government depends on preventing from inequalities and what relationship occurs between distributing system and maximizing of goods (Blackburn, 1997, 376).

The situation becomes complicated when we want to describe the way how to satisfy demands of distributive justice. The problem depends on choosing adequate criteria, upon which we can decide if a coordinated consensus – being applied, among others, to a socio-economic order – has been really just. It is obvious that there is no way to distinguish concrete principles of distribution (for example social product) but there is a necessity to eliminate unjust extremes and establish minimal standards of basic needs (Dylus, 2000, 16 – 17).

C. Perelman points out six criteria of social justice that prove this point: justice can be seen to mean that everybody should receive:

1. the same;
2. according to their deserves;
3. according to their deeds;
4. according to their needs;
5. according to their rank; and
6. according to what the law attributes them (Perelmann, 1967, 16).

It is clear that all of these criteria conform to some expectation of justice but they cannot be satisfied simultaneously.

The statement *everybody should receive the same* postulates that all society members should be treated *the same*, independently out of particular conditions. According to that statement the equality of partners should be considered in hierarchies of goods, powers, prestige and education. This principle becomes socially very attractive and it is often used by different populists as a handy political tool. Actually in practice it creates all kinds of social and economical difficulties. Applying such a criteria in crisis situations such as rescuing work, disasters etc. becomes very useful because supplying the needs of injured once does not take in account such things as: age, sex, race, descent or wealth.

Application the criteria *everybody should receive the same* to the principle of sustainable development meets certain difficulties. Serious doubts comes out of the statement that all people can have equal access to consuming goods with the same pace of economical growth (Piontek, 2000, 53 – 61; Papuziński, 2005, 42 – 47). Rather – as Paul Hawken writes – we should *make the World better in a natural way by simple daily deeds, than by conscious altruism* (Hawken, 1996, 16).

According to the criteria *everybody should receive according to their deserves* it is supposed that distributing goods is possible when their participants possess special features. This criteria creates meaningful doubts especially if it is proponed in applying to the principle of sustainable development.

The formula *everybody should receive according to their deeds* takes in account the results of individuals' activities, unnecessary work contribution by itself. It is supposed that income would be parted among those who by their efforts are able to offer certain services or goods. This criteria can stimulate people to work for increasing and building their wealth. There are no privileges or limitations that should not be taken into consideration which might weaken potential competition in society. Although there are some countries in European Union that were able to indorse international contracts protecting their “sensitive sectors” on global markets, such as agriculture, textile industry etc., that means justice build on the criteria *everybody should receive according to their deeds* was violated, because for developing countries, which in this case might be competitive, those domains of economy are very important. Similar situation takes place in case of creating all different international fusions of concerns or exporting cartels, which evidently limit developmental chances for poor countries.

The criteria *everybody should receive according to their deeds* is hardly useful for the idea of sustainable development because it is concentrated on inner structure of societies, rather than on solutions and tools coordinating global economical order.

Being capable in functioning on global markets require an independent capital based strongly on knowledge and information. In cases like many African countries are not able exist on international markets, the World community should take into consideration additional criteria, which we can call *justice of chances* (Ziembiński, 1992, 121 – 122). The shortages of social goods, such as education, public services, law for citizens, access to basic infrastructure, technology, finance knowledge etc. make those countries discriminative.

The formula *everybody should receive according to their needs* shows humanitarian character of the formula. This criteria might suggest that all people should be taken into account in just distribution of goods even those who do not own any properties. And here we are facing a big problem – distribution goods but according to whose needs. Considering the idea of sustainable development on the ground of such a criteria of justice it looks unreasonable because “needs” we are talking about can be taken in account only in boundaries of particular cultures and countries. There is not strong sufficient foundation for building objectivism in proposed formula. Although some countries in the West worked social programs supplying basic needs of their citizens, such a global system is still unreal dream.

The next criteria *everybody should receive according to their rank* origins from hierarchical structure of society, and divides people to diverse categories, who supposed to be treated in different ways building non-egalitarian structure. This principle is rooted in ancient Latin sentence: *quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi*.

And final statement *everybody should receive according to what the law attributes them*. This formula allows as many varieties of laws as many legislations and it is generally known that they are not all compatible. Justice is measured according to particular legislative system and it might happened injustice in another one.

As it was shown, defining the idea of sustainable development as a principle of justice is not easy because it faces a lot of problems with choosing proper criteria of justice. Sustainable development is a proposition of development in global dimension. It seems that additional criteria of equal chance of justice can lead to a global solidarity both in social, economical and ecological sphere.

### **Intergenerational justice**

The idea of justice written into a definition of sustainable development has both intragenerational as well as intergenerational assessment. In a first situation it is emphasized that the necessity of supplying the needs of present generations and stipulations particular countries to make reasonable development balance in the area of society, economy and ecology. However, intergenerational dimension of sustainable development shows the need of making provision for common inheritance, worked out by earlier and present generations, which might be available by future generations. It also includes their possibilities of accessing to natural recourses at least not worse than it is at present (Tyburski, 2004, 49).

Applying intergenerational justice for respecting interests and lows of non-existed generations becomes jet problematic. First – it is difficult to asses rationally the number of future generations. Second – how we can measure the quantity of consumption in the present generation not to expend resources reserved for unborn future generations. Moreover, it might appear that principle of justice for future generations leads to an intragenerational injustice because trying to consider needs of future generations we limit consumption in contemporary poor countries, while reach people keep high standard of leaving (Zabłocki, 2002, 160).

Mentioned doubts might suggest that passing present responsibilities for the needs of future generations on the shoulders of present generations reduce rationality of sustainable development. It is out of question that the lot of future generations is very important but it is unthinkable that project of intergenerational justice with obvious lack of intragenerational justice. It is difficult to say definitely what it is especially just or unjust, but it can not hinder anybody from looking for the answer to this question.

Doubts which can appear in the context of intergenerational justice rationality might have, among others, utilitarian roots. Utilitarianism is a doctrine in social philosophy, ethics, and also in economy or law, according to which usefulness for man or his happiness represent the measure of moral attitude. Assessment of conduct is founded upon real effects and not intentions. J. Bentham and J. S. Mill argued that a principle of moral proceeding should be the most possible success of the maximally big amount of people. Saying in a different way, utility becomes bigger proportionally according to satisfaction of life, sensation of satisfaction and happiness. Than what is the relation of intergenerational justice with utilitarian doctrine? According to presented arguments, if there is no future generations it is really difficult to talk about their goods and it is actually impossible to treat them as sensitive persons, they do not experience a satisfaction or pain. For that reason they can not own any moral rights.

John Passmore, Australian philosopher and environmental ethicist, accordingly with utilitarian way of thinking puts a big question mark after legitimacy of intergenerational justice. He argues that any postulate attempting to limit present generations' needs in the name of interests of future generations is equal with absurdity, meanwhile basic needs of contemporary people are not satisfied. He things that we should limit our responsibility towards the nearest descendents, because we dispose similar scales of values and upon this we can know what it is good or bad. We are obligated only for passing on this heritage that we received from our ancestors. There is no need of heroic effort full of sacrifices and renouncements for benefits of unknown future generations, because at present we are not able to anticipate their needs for their number, gender or size can have completely different structure then ours. We should limit our responsibility towards the love of our children or grandchildren treasuring things which are valuable to us.

Passmore's arguments seem to be groundless when we consider biocentric perspective of investigated problem. All doubts of Australian thinker – as it points Z. Piątek – *apply to socio – cultural needs and interests because, as it is with majority philosophers, biological needs of men and other living creatures are not exactly important and they are hardly taken under consideration in ethical discourse* (Piątek, 1998, 155). However, principle of justice can be defended when we consider biological human needs such as breathing, oxygen, health – those goods can be anticipated for a long period of time ahead. Especially it should be considered in the context of more and more threatening problem of climate changes in the World.

## Summary

Justice plays important value in the context of sustainable development because it is appeared in specific conditions of ecological crises as an instantiation of apprehension concerning assurance of human needs coming out of their natural dignity. It does not demand establishing a new law which would require additional explanation. It finds its justification in addition to liberty system and human rights. However, detailing justice in the context of sustainable development does not belong to an easy job. Emerging difficulties concern: appointing proper criteria of justice and rationality of intergenerational dimension of sustainable development. There is a desperate need of undertaking more complex philosophical and interdisciplinary research regarding this important political concept.

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