ECONOMICS
& Sociology

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS THE PRINCIPLE OF CIVIC SOCIETY

ABSTRACT. The idea of sustainable development is focused on contemporary threats of human life, which generally emerge form growing consumption of natural resources, enlarging of environmental devastation, fast demographic growth, unsatisfied basic needs of immeasurable group of people or deep destabilization of natural and socio – economical systems. An imperative assignment for efficient implementation of sustainable development depends on pressing towards building a responsible civil society. Only active engagement of all social actors can build solid ground for the implementation of sustainable development principle.

Introduction

One of the main postulates of building a stronger ground for the idea of sustainable development is to make society have bigger engagement in the state participation. It is important to create such conditions in order to make possible for all sectors – social, economical, political, in local as well as in global means – to have direct influence on making an integrated balance. The most crucial principle, which has to be changed depends on passing from the type of thinking *we contra them* to thinking in categories of wider understood *us*. Besides, to obtain more optimal conditions of free and polycentric political communication it seems necessary to realize those following two basic conditions: (1) to make possible free ideas expression as well as their free evaluation; (2) to have a free access to alternative sources of information.

Unquestionable condition of achieving the principles of sustainable development must be concentrated on creating a responsible civic society. The effective solution to economical, social and environmental problems requires a certain involvement of all active partners, beginning at local and ending at global level.

The article is actually divided into to parts. First one deals with an attempt of defining the notion of civic society. The second part explains the importance of civic society to sustainable development implementation. Some conclusions end the whole essay.

The notion of civic society

In this essay civic society is understood as a system of different social organizations which, by their public relations, can cause citizens to participate in making mutual ground for economical, social and environmental order. Those relations allow to create convenient conditions for changing passive attitudes into active once. *Civic society* – according to The World Trade Organization – *is generally identified with groups and organizations, formal as well as informal, acting independently out of state or market to promote different social interests* [Kozłowski 2002, 9].

Any discussion concerning the subject of civic society can have a meaningful sense when the theory of democracy is taken into consideration, which means that: (1) there should be satisfied all basic conditions and principles for democratic structure; (2) each model of civic society in some sense is a function of exact democracy; (3) it is impossible to formulate one universal type of civic society, being flexible to all democracies; (4) the concept of participating democracy plays the main role in searching for democratic society. [Bokejło 2001, 11 – 12].

Taking into consideration all of the determinative elements of civil activity we can not forget about the role of social capital. According to Robert Putnam social capital should be understood as a sort of social ties, norms and trusts which help people to cooperate in achieving mutual goals [Putnam 1995, s. 258]. The social capital played a meaningful role in F. Fukuyama's investigations concerning development in Asian countries [Fukuyama 1997].

Social capital should be considered from the perspective of its "small" and "large" scale [Kozłowski 2002, 9]. In the first case we talk about mutual trust among people – *I trust you because I trust him/her, and he/she trusts you.* The problem of trust is a very important subject of social capital in the sense of a "large" scale, but it must be considered in a norm of general reciprocation which helps to build horizontal networks of civil engagements. Social trust in society can be achieved either by individual participants and through organizations (associations). More or less formal mutual contacts play fundamental role in cooperating common actions undertaking by people. Playing undoubtedly basic role in social capital, trust can be either cumulated or wasted. We have to remember that social capital has a meaningful place in a process of creating public good (it is not a private property!). It also can have immeasurable impact on economic development and social initiatives concerning protection of natural environment [Broda – Wysocki 2005, 121]. The lack of social capital can cause a negative influence on different practical aspects in the area of: economy, society, education, ecology etc. According to American sociologist J. Alexander building a platform of solidarity among different sectors helps to create a sense of belongingness with others and loyalty in interests. [Sztompka 2007, 40].

In the opinion of J. Gray *civic society <…> means the sphere of non – profit associations, free market institutions and private actions, which play the ground where units can mutually exist, although they might have completely different interests* [Gray 2001, 74]. Talking about civic society – according to Gray – it is important to set up such requirements: (1) neutral outlook of life which helps to coexist different opinions and values; (2) right rules; (3) autonomic economy institutions [Gray 1995, 265]. British philosopher is convinced that the omnipotent state might have too strong and independent influence on the rest of social life. He does not actually fight with the state in general, but he rather postulates its decentralization by giving society bigger competences and responsibilities.

It should be pointed also that properly functioning civic society requires a sort of public discourse. According to J. Habermas process of public communication depends on such characteristics: (1) argumentative way of communication; (2) obtaining rationally motivated consent in evaluation as well as in understanding particular questions; (3) open and

inclusive character of handled disputes; (4) liberty from compulsion which gives all equal chances of being able to be listened to, giving propositions, formulating arguments etc.; (5) concentrating all debates around such problems which might be regulated on behalf of "common good. [after Sikora 2008, 86]

Habermas trying to find exact interpretation of public deliberation gives actually the opportunity of choosing between republican and liberal understanding of the term. In the first case democratic will should be shaped under ethical and political self-understanding and debates concerning its meaning should be based on cultural build contract of all citizens. On the other hand, the liberal understanding of public communication reminds a sort of compromise which is required for obtaining all kinds of interests. According to such an interpretation compromises play sort of *spiritus movens* role of democratic process, and objectivity of contracts depends on just rules. Individuals are confronted with ethical and political choices, which were not treated as *a project* requiring of all participating citizens. Such a proposition presents American philosopher J. Rawls, trying to proof that the proper foundation for a good society should be accepted by all citizens establishing a principle of justice as fairness.

As a Metter of fact Habermas [after Sikora 2008, 38], as like Rawls, accepts *fairness* as an unquestionable condition of any constitution and he strongly believes in procedural theory of justice yet he is convinced that the concrete *world of life* or *practical discourse* of particular citizens should be the starting point for building a social contract.

He is convinced that in the contemporary society there are crucial two elements: (1) it is *a system* – built with all kinds of institutions, and (2) it is *a world of life* or *practical discourse* – representing a construct of spontaneous practices and values accepted by members of concrete society. Contrary to *the world of life, system* can function independently of knowledge and acceptance of participating members living in particular community. *System* is dominated in a meaningful way by strategies emerging out of instrumental acts, focused on obtaining some specific goals.

On the other hand, in *the world of life* the social interactions are rather symmetric requiring a sort of common knowledge and values, mutually accepted definitions of different situations and indeterminated coordination of actions.

Habermas modifies Kant's moral imperative from monologue to communicative form which goes as it follows: *Instead of acting only to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal low, you should present that maxim to each other in case of checking its universality through discursive test.*

Concluding it should be pointed that civic society is a hot topic in political philosophy and green political theory is not an exception. It is also a reasonable alternative for universally presented contemporary projects supported by free market invasion, government administration, popular modern culture. Undoubtedly public discourse, playing a fundamental role in functioning of civic society results not only in mutual adjustment of active actors but creates also meta-language which helps to describe "common good".

Sustainability in contemporary public discourse

Since the last three decades some meaningful attempts have been undertaken to redefine man – nature relationships in a new way. Undoubtedly, present discourse about the necessity of nature protection does not only belong to the environmentalist's rhetoric. Now among subjects applying for sustained development there are individual associations, different government departments and even some business corporations [Macnaghten, Urry 2005, 280].

It is commonly agreed that U Tant's Report *Problems of human environment* published in 1969 starts a new era of thinking about development. The document points at such problems as: (1) evident lack of connections between high developed techniques or technologies and demands of natural environment; (2) rapid devastation of cultivable soil; (3) unplanned development of cities; (4) decreasing of free and opened spaces and territories; (5) disappearing some forms of animal and vegetable lives; (6) intoxicating and polluting natural environment; (7) the necessity of cultivated soil, water and air protection. Actually until Brundtland Report in 1987 the idea of sustainable development was not commonly used in public discourse. At that time global concept of natural environment became the subject of dialog and cooperation among different countries, including western and eastern blocs.

One of the central components, playing fundamental role in Brundtland Report concerning global threats of natural environment, was the idea of "the common boat". Authors of the concept tried to figure that all people have got this same responsibility towards limited natural resources and if they do not learn how to coexist together they might cause really dangerous catastrophe. Brundtland Commission called up for global environmentally management as a mechanism leading to sustainable development. There were three indispensable conditions: (1) establishing some scientific programs being able to evaluate devastations of natural environment and asses limits of growth; (2) appointing new World leaders who will be agreeable in making strategic decisions concerning the World (for example such possibilities would come from organized Earth Submits); (3) educating and informing all citizens that they are passengers of "the same boat" [after Kozłowski, 2002, 282 – 283].

The delegates of The Earth Submit organized by United Nations in 1992 put a very strong emphasize on the role of society in obtaining sustainable development. In the tenth principle of Rio Declaration they stated: *Environmental issues are the best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities and the opportunity to participate in process making decisions. States shall felicitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available* [Kozłowski 2002, 58].

According to T. Borys it is impossible to achieve any statements of *Agenda 21* without wider social involvement in creating eco-development programs. At first it concerns social participation in making crucial decisions. Only through direct activity of representatives in different spheres of social life it is possible to build a partnership for eco-development. Undoubtedly social involvement in governing processes' often require radical changes in so far administrating work. In such situations it is important to create an adequate communication between all sectors [Borys 203, 196 – 212].

Social dialog is a valuable tool: (1) enabling people to identify themselves in confrontation with global problems of environment, (2) accept a type of life which respects limited possibilities of our planet and (3) support state and business plans focused on sustainable actions and activities.

In Polish reality the subject of civic society involvement in obtaining *Agenda 21* was emphasized in The Strategy of Sustainable Development by 2025. The authors of the document stated: *ecological problems are the most successfully resolved when all attracted citizens can participate at the adequate level of government management in local and national sense.* [Strumińska 2005, 187]. It also should be pointed that in the sixth principle of the Second Ecological Policy for Government it was written: *ecological policy is going to be obtained by creating institutional, legal and material conditions for participation of*

individual citizens, social groups and non-government organizations in the process of shaping sustainable development model. [*Druga ...* 2000, 10]

On the ground of shortly presented material we can say that stable process for sustainable development implementation requires an integrated and responsible civic society engagement. It is impossible to achieve such a goal without a dialog of different surroundings such as: non profit organizations, political sector and business. Only the partnership of all sectors can improve the source for a new social consciousness concerning the need of building solid and sustained civilization.

Conclusions

If the civic society is so important to sustainable development implementation, than why it is so difficult do adopt this idea in political and business programs. The problem is complicated, because the barriers with building civic society are not the same. Taking into account all determinations of social engagement there should be mentioned such issues: (1) the context of social surrounding - which means the measure of social activity; (2) geographical barriers – almost all social organizations are located on territories of big cities and agglomerations; (3) lack of believe in efficiency of civil activity; (4) economical barriers – financial uncertainty of non–profit organizations hinders them from involvement into strategic projects; (5) sociological barriers – reluctance towards non-profit organizations, corruption etc.

It seems like the real turn to universal and disinterested rhetoric of human rights and human dignity, sustained economy, environmental justice is the only option of a rational protest against all social injustice.

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