

THE ETHICAL DIMENSION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

As sustainable development is defined as an ethical concept on economic, ecological, and social dimensions, the aim of this paper is to argue that the human capital has to be enriched with certain positive values, needed and defined as such according to the principles of sustainable development. On the other hand, efforts must be made at society level in order to improve nowadays' social values so that the potential sustainable development becomes more real.

KEYWORDS: *sustainable development, ethics, moral values, education, human capital, corruption*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *Q01, I21, I25, I31, O15, 044*

1. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AN ETHICAL CONCEPT

Sustainable development is defined based on moral values and principles. It is considering people's welfare today, but also tomorrow, for an attitude as "Après nous le deluge!" proved not to be an acceptable option. This means a rational use of the resources and environmental protection. Keeping the individual in the center of all concerns means, firstly, understanding the way the person can have a fulfilling life. Beyond the biological sphere, the human needs are complex and for more than two millennia, the world's thinkers have searched for solutions, means, ways to achieve welfare and happiness. Among these solutions there also stands sustainable development, founded on practical and also on moral considerations. The principles of sustainable development are general, being globally valid, but they need to be applied nationwide, at the macro and microeconomic level, by people, who are mainly, before being the beneficiaries or the "victims" of the development, its creators.

The approach of the economic matters in the *Triple Bottom Line vision* (Elkington, 1997) (TBL/3BL) or 3P – people, planet, profit – is considering the evaluation of the development on three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. When it comes to business, TBL suggests some reporting on the three dimensions to be done, therefore data about the stakeholders and the impact on the environment are added to the financial reporting, designed to offer a clearer and more real picture of the situation, thus making it possible, in conditions of maximum transparency, the managerial decision knowingly, based on a cost-benefit analysis, and the information of the interested public. Regarding the human dimension, TBL refers to all the stakeholders of an organization (employees, clients, collaborators, community members, etc.), and at the society level we can talk about all its members. Nevertheless, do not forget that the cost-benefit economic analysis cannot be generalized, certain values, as life and human health, cannot be morally evaluated in financial terms and it cannot be weighed, in counterbalancing with this kind of terms. Another vision about sustainable development – SAEJAS (*Socially And Environmentally Just And Sustainable*) considers that "the goal of [...] development may be analyzed into three statements:

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(1) Development in the use of economics means to enhance people's choices and improve human well-being; (2) Development must be especially concerned with the people who now have the poorest choice set and the most unsatisfactory quality of life; and (3) Achievements in development must not imperil the range of choices or the well-being of people in the future." (Goodwin, 2000, p. 50)

An important step forward regarding the cogitations about human welfare has been taken by Amartya Sen. He puts the concept of freedom at the foundation of development and defines human development emphasizing the role of the social values and traditions prevailing in the positive evolution of society. Social values though, says Sen, are not immutable, but subject to change following discussions and public interactions (Sen, 2004, p. 26). Related to traditions and to the disputes whether to strictly keep them or disclaim them in order to achieve development, Amartya Sen considers that people who are directly involved in those matters should be free to decide, they should have the opportunity to participate in the process of deciding whether certain traditions should be kept or dropped out. For, he says, freedom of deciding about the way individuals live their lives represents a fundamental value. (Sen, 2004, pp. 50-51) Social and cultural values not only have a dynamic and collective character, but also an objective and imperative one. "Cultural values are objective because they are imperative; and they are imperative because they are collective. The objective value results from the way of formation of collective conscience." (Ralea, 1957) Social values vary in different cultures and in different moments, and "the horizon of social values is articulated on the dichotomy culture-nature (meaning: what is rejected, due to the fact that it is outside what is allowable and it compromises the cultural model; therefore: acts, reactions, behaviors non-, pre-, anti-cultural.)" (Macoviciuc, 1999, p. 642)

The ethics of sustainable development, its moral motivation, begins from ecological ethics, but it's much more complex. Protecting the environment is an absolutely necessary aspect, but not sufficient, for there may be a healthy and clean natural environment where people could live in poorness or not at all. And ecological ethics can be centered on certain disadvantaged or endangered species or on threatened natural area, whilst the sustainable development ethics refers firstly to people. Though initially sustainable development was confused mostly to environmental protection against industrial pollution, the concept embraced very quickly new aspects with respect to social ethics. Sustainable development has a social solidarity dimension – it has raised the issue that the underdeveloped countries would necessarily focus on the economic development (as an only chance), without giving as much importance to the ecological aspect, situation that however changes when it comes to developed countries, which have no excuse (morally speaking) to develop without protecting the well-being of the Planet (Kibert, 2012). Furthermore, the existent technologies – biotechnology, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, robotics etc. – can also have other negative effects on mankind, in the present and in the future, others than the impact on the environment, but not less serious and with less important ethical implications, matters addressed by bioethics. (Kibert, 2012, pp. 47-57)

2. ROȘIA MONTANA – AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

An example of ethical dilemma in terms of sustainable development has been the one raised by the issue of mining using cyanide based technologies at Roșia Montana. The discussions/debates/controversies in Romania about the mining of the gold and silver deposits in the area of this locality in the Apuseni Mountains (Western Carpathian Mountains) are well known. They refer to using the technologies based on cyanide by Roșia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC). RMGC is a firm set up by association of Minvest Deva SA, Romania (19.3 % of shares), Gabriel Resources Ltd, Canada (80.0 % of shares) and minor investors (0.7 % of shares) and obtained a concession for an area of 4,282 hectares, in Roșia Montana region.

On the one hand, the company wanted to mine the deposits using the most effective technology economically, arguing that the method of mining didn't represent a real and irreversible danger for the environment and that they would have done the greening of the affected area after finishing the mining. Some of the citizens in the area were also pleading for starting the mining alleging the fact that jobs would have been created, people would have been trained in different fields, and the standard of living would have been improved. At present, there is an increased deficit of jobs at Roşia Montana. The Romanian government would have received 2% of the profit, which was estimated at 4.4 million USD per annum, on an estimated period of mining of 17-20 years.

On the other hand, the environmental organizations, a part of the population, especially in the big cities, the Romanian Academy (Academia Romana, 2013), the journalists, personalities of the Romanian culture, scientists opposed and protested on the ground that this kind of mining would have meant an irreparable ecological disaster, adding also other aspects to this. Competent opinions are very important as far as they can help making a decision knowingly and respecting moral principles, there is no doubt about that. In this case the analysis of the Romanian Academy on the mining project from Roşia Montana was invoked numerous times. That analysis raised more ethical problems (besides the arguments concerning its economic efficiency): ecological, seismic legal matters, but also historical and cultural matters, referring inclusive to the demolition of certain historical monuments, moving some cemeteries and the jeopardize of the archeological area Alburnus Maior.

Was it necessary to start mining because people needed jobs in order to live a decent life? Should the mining have been stopped at all costs because otherwise the "fairytale" areas in the Apuseni Mountains would have transformed in an enormous, sad, black and irremediable poisoned hole? Here are some ethical questions.

Some voices affirmed that the polluting effects (not so dangerous and remediable at the expenses of the corporation) are a price that must be paid to provide food for the thousands of people that could have been hired in that project and for bringing benefits to the Romanian government.

The decision was made eventually by a parliamentary committee which was to analyze the facts, the specialists' advice, and both sides' arguments and make a decision in accordance to the moral principles of sustainable development that Romania, as a member of the European Union, needs to respect. This is an actual economic situation with possible major implications regarding sustainable development if a favorable decision would have been made about the start of the mining, which would have meant ethical debates and protests for a long time.

3. FURTHER DISCUSSION

The ethical matter of sustainable development is topical from another perspective as well – the one of the financial, economic and social crisis that started in 2009 and whose effects are not yet gone. It becomes obvious that the ethics of the financial system must be reinforced and redefined globally. Alain Arnaud proposes that the financial system rules and laws should be modified according to what he names "a new ecological economy", based on a moral code, a stricter enforcing of the existent rules and a greater transparency. He also identifies a series of acute challenges of the moment: the protection and the revival of the importance given to human rights and the civic spirit, a better managing of the contradictions that often appear between the short term solutions and the long term ones, rethinking the public services, increasing the social cohesion, reinforcing the values and the principles of life inside a community and the solidarity between social classes and between generations in a society characterized by risks and economic, social and ecologic crisis. (Arnaud, 2010)

In Rolson's opinion, the most important ethical principle that underlies the sustainability/durability is the one that *life must be respected*. To take away the means that are necessary for existence is almost equivalent to taking the very life of somebody. Non-sustainability endangers life.

Sustainability, on the other hand, combines self-interest, the individual preoccupation for protecting their own life, and selflessness, the protection of life and interests of others. (Rolston, 2002)

Very briefly, what moral values are invoked by the sustainable development theory? Undoubtedly sustainable development is about altruism, honesty, sincerity, respect for life, man and nature, tolerance, solidarity, social justice and many others, all of them belonging to the moral "good". For example, regarding the conceptual pair altruism/egoism "all the moral doctrines qualify negatively and reject from the acceptable sphere egoism – natively predisposed either to adaptive success through the act of power, in the broadest sense, or to pure hedonism, orientated by the mythologization of pleasure. Egoism is subject to an altruist correction. To be morally tolerable means, therefore, enough temperance, the controlled suspension of the interest for utility and sensuality. However, for being virtuous the direct assumption of certain values, qualities and symbols is necessary to the inner experiences and the immediate acts." (Macoviciuc, 1999, pp. 648-649) For development to be what it wanted to be, the human capital has to, we think, be enriched with a moral conscience which means more than respecting some rules, some sets of principles formulated as such (for example the Hannover Principles about sustainability (McDonough & Braungart, 1992), Principles of Environmental Impact Assessment Best Practice (International Association for Impact Assessment & Institute of Environmental Assessment), etc.), some ethics codes.

Human capital, knowledge, people's capabilities and abilities, obtained by investing in lifelong education, are the creative power which offers both its possessors and the organizations that employ them and the society they live in financial and nonfinancial benefits, generating development and what is called progress. Nevertheless, for that development to be a good one and for progress to be real, people should be more than intelligent, effective, productive, creative, and imaginative. As much as generous the moral values included in the sustainable development concept would be, as well defined would be the rules and principles that underlying it, the moral of sustainable development, as any other moral, achieves its objectives only if the individuals involved believe in those values, give them a meaning that motivates them to act in a certain way. They must have a moral conscience which goes beyond the level of reacting to coercion, beyond acceptance and compliance to rules, which should mean the assimilation of some moral values, the attachment to them so that they represent their inner motivations for acting in a certain way. "The respect for rules can't be reduced to the mere moral of correctness, but it has to be incorporated in a moral of conviction (orientated to significance and humanistic grounds) and, simultaneously, to a moral of responsibility for the consequences of our acts. The real internalization of the normative codes cannot motivate the simple fidelity to the rules, but it stimulates the closeness to their value significance, and the devotion to this dimension exhorts exactly to use the rules as being what they are: means for recommending, in terms of action, a value." (Macoviciuc, 1999)

But how can this be done? Have they been seeking for ways, means, certainly not infallible, not with 100% results, to lead to enrichment, to ennoblement of the human capital through growing the moral conscience of the individual? Can this be done through education? If yes, in what way? And what are the values on which it would be better to build an attachment of the conscience? Is the current global ethical evolution compatible to the declared values of sustainable development? Here are some important questions. The keys to these problems, even if partial, would represent a giant step forward to put the moral intentions of sustainable development into practice.

There are, undoubtedly, concerns about what is called education values, or moral education – the transfer of values through education in terms of constructing a moral conscience. There are researchers and there are also explanations about the fact that these attempts have not given the expected results. They also say that some moral values can be hardly conceptualized. In N. Hartman's opinion, for example, "bravery, love, the ability to sacrifice are hard to inoculate through education; the honor, love for order, self-control and temper can be, no doubt, achieved largely on the path of pedagogical guidance – in certain limits, of course, also the sense of liability, fidelity,

the sense of justice etc.”(Hartman, 1974) Laurence Kohlberg, a well-known psychologist and a researcher of the moral development of the individual (with Jean Piaget and others) fathered a theory affirming that moral development happens on three levels, each of them having two stages, in total six successive stages, starting from the assumption that moral development goes in parallel with the cognitive one and becomes possible through moral reasoning – analyzing an ethical dilemma and finding the answer to the question what is good and what is bad, what must be done morally starting with the identification of the possible consequences of the two behavioral variants. We are not trying to review the research in the field, as it is a large and varied body that belongs to both moral psychology and moral philosophy. The attachment to values of the conscience remains however the “miraculous” solution to many problems.

As shown previously, the values of the moment and of the place are established socially. Is there a divorce between the values that the education system tries to give to young people, values that are included in the moral category of the “good”, and the current socially validated values? To the custody of which set of values do today’s young people belong?

The age of democracies is called by Gilles Lipovetsky the post moralist age (Lipovetsky, 1996), and “This end of century is seriously marked by existential anguishes structured by the fragility and/or the absence of the senses; the erosion of the symbolic traditional horizons and the universalization of the pragmatic mentality, the discrediting of the oversensitive ideals with metaphoric ground and the axiological doubt that accompanies the irreversible consequences for the humanity of the technologies, the collapse of the great ideologies, utopias and globalizing discourses are signs of an ethical void followed by the foundations’ crisis and the expansion on a depressing individualism. Narcissism, libertinism, hedonism define an identity crisis and stakes the search of the self of the individual.” (Macoviciuc, 1999, pp. 671-672)

Society validates today, through television, movies, internet, as a result of the softening of the borders and the compression of distances through technology, a kind of individualism, aiming at one’s own interest, detaching from the moral duty and from the local, national, traditional values. On the pretext of finitude, therefore of the limited resource of time, x living the very moment at a maximum intensity is being preached. Happiness has become equivalent with pleasure, and people are more and more lonely in a society where they communicate mainly virtually, overwhelmed by consumerism and advertising campaigns.

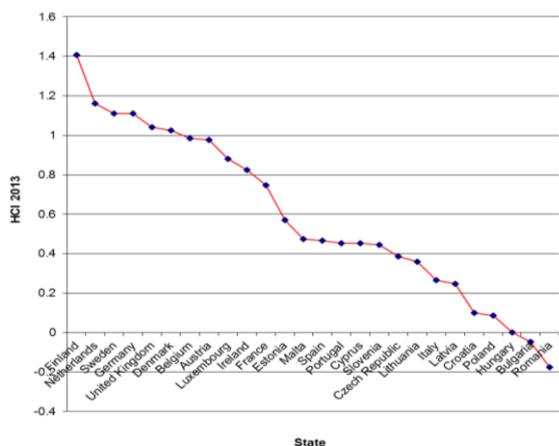
3. CORRUPTION - A MEASURE OF THE MORAL STATE OF A NATION IS A DIRECT RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION, THE MORAL STATE OF A NATION AND DEVELOPMENT SEEN AS GDP POSSIBLE?

What can be said about the situation of Romania in the recent period from this point of view? It’s hard to evaluate the moral state of a nation quantitatively, but one can try using the level of corruption as an index.

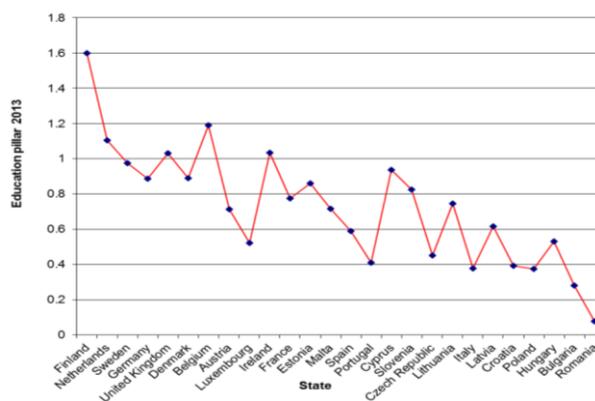
So, if we want to have a measure of the human capital and also a measure of morality, also having in mind the economic development we can analyze the Human Capital Index, its education pillar, the Corruption Perceptions Index and the Real GDP per capita.

In 2013 Romania occupied the lowest position in the European Union regarding Human Capital Index and its pillar Education (Figure 1, a, b). Transparency International data show that there is also a serious problem about corruption in Romania (Figure 1, c) (the lower the CPI is, the higher is the level of corruption). And the Real GDP per capita is low in comparison to other countries in UE (Figure 1, d), including countries from Eastern and Central Europe.

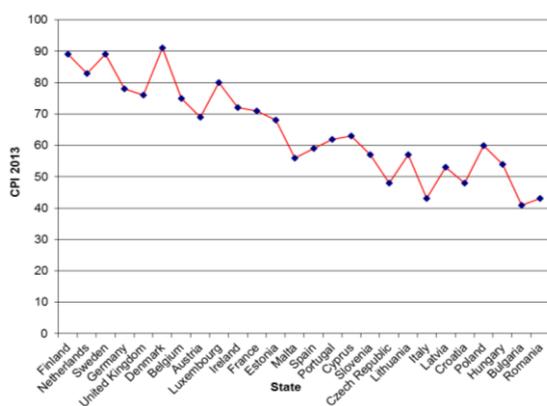
Figure 1. Human Capital Index (HCI) (a), Education pillar of the Human Capital Index (b), Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (c), and Real GDP per inhabitant (d) in 2013 for the EU countries



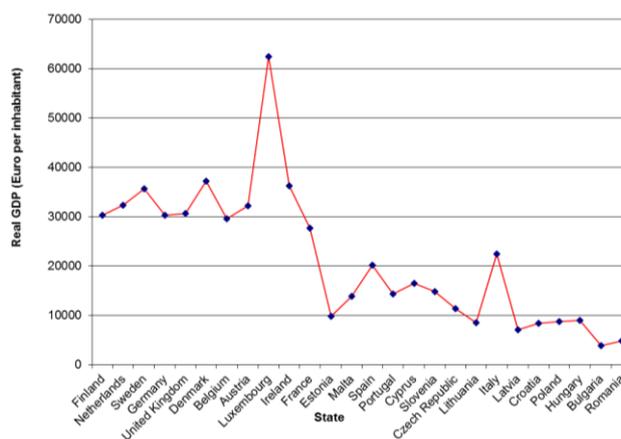
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Data sources:
 World Economic Forum. (2013)
 Transparency International. (2013)
 Eurostat. (2014)

We can draw a conclusion about the size and depth of problems in Romania. Still, at a theoretical level, we might conclude that there are things to be done regarding human capital development, including its moral component, as sustainable development is not possible without human knowledge and consciousness.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Teachers, inadequately paid in Romania from a small budget allocated to education, are trying, at least some of them, to implant in children's conscience the "good" values through education, including through humanist subjects as History, Literature, Philosophy, Ethics. Parents, preoccupied by finding a decently paid job, are also trying to offer their children role models. There are more and more school rules, there are more video cameras at the final exams, the baccalaureate

graduation requirements were tightened much in recent years, and the measures of coercion for missing classes, for violence in schools, for inadequate behavior have been hardened. And yet, children and young people are largely influenced by social validated values that are not always in the benefit of sustainable development. As shown above, the value of HCI, including the education pillar, for Romania is not at all satisfying. And the corruption level, as a possible measure of morality of the nation, is very high.

In the attempt to improve the state of education and to rebuild the system of moral values in Romania, we propose as first steps the following measures:

- The significant increase of teacher's salaries at all education levels. Well paid teachers would have a higher social status, and thus the message that the state values their mission and education in general terms would be sent. Bigger wages for the teachers would constitute an incentive for better prepared people to enter the education system, so that investment in the human capital in Romania would pay off.
- As increasing teacher's salaries, a rigorous selection of the teachers, using professional, pedagogical and psychological criteria, would be needed.
- The review of the syllabi of the humanistic subjects through interdisciplinary research so that children's readings should be appropriate to their psychological development. We are aware, though, that permanent changes and reforms in the educational system are not a proper environment for increased performance, for better results in education.
- Using more educational methods – volunteer work for the community, for the environment, and also the activity in micro production units – so that the young generation would understand and appreciate the value of their work.
- Correct and rigorous penalty, in transparency, of acts of corruption and embezzlement, thus giving clear signals that the only ways through which one could achieve comfortable incomes are education and honorable work.
- More effective control of the media on moral bases and for lowering, if not eliminating, the negative effects of some productions to the psychology of people, especially younger ones.

On the other hand, it is obvious that since the last decades of the twentieth century, there have been proposed changes of vision in economics – homo oeconomicus was finally re-humanized, at least at the theoretical level. We believe that with the weakening of the supreme position of the GDP as an indicator of welfare and development, an era of interdisciplinary scientific research has started. It has opened a promising gate and it started a process of reconsideration of the economic development through humanism.

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