



PHILOSOPHICAL CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to reveal impact of classical philosophical-ethical theories on sustainable regional development. The difference between strong and weak sustainability are also analyzed and also the conflicts and synergies between social economic and environmental development in this article. There will also be a historical perspective to the concept of sustainable development. To give a deeper understanding about different opinions and approaches to sustainable development, there will be an interpretation of some theoretical perspective both about sustainable development and also about different philosophical theories and how they are related sustainable regional development. The study includes also a discussion about the synergies and conflicts between economic, ecologic and social development. We proceed to draw on consequentialist ethical theories and non-consequentialist ethical theories to argue the predominance of these classical philosophical value priorities and to explore which mindshifts are required to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what is needed to enable 'sustainable development'.

KEY WORDS: philosophical challenges; sustainable development; ethical theories.

Introduction

Nowadays, the concept of sustainable development has been defined in a variety of ways, but in practice it has three dimensions – economic, environmental and social ones. The word “sustainability” has become a global buzzword as a potential solution for many international, regional, and local problems facing society today: overpopulation, diseases, political conflicts, infrastructure deterioration, pollution, and unlimited urban expansion under limited resources’ availability. The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WECD, 1987) coined a definition of sustainable development, which is probably the most well-known in all of sustainability literature: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Another issue related to sustainable development is whether an as high economic growth as possible always is the best way to increase life satisfaction and happiness. These issues are also related to whether we are talking about weak or strong sustainability. Promoters of weak sustainability in a larger extent accept to substitute natural resources with man-made capital whereas promoters of strong sustainability argue that it is necessary to treat natural resources and man-made capital separately. The term sustainable development itself is the equivalent of the proper measure of all things, sought by classical philosophers in order to define the man’s deeds in the world. Issues related to sustainable development such as the approach to natural resources and how to manage responsibility for future generations are related to different philosophical theories. Therefore we analyze different philosophical theories and there relation to sustainable development.

The main aim of the article is to investigate, to analyze and to present the influence of classical consequentialist and non-consequentialist philosophical ethical theories and main challenges to the concept of sustainable regional development.

Analyzed problem / object of the research: impact of classical philosophical ethical theories on the concept of sustainable regional development.

Objectives of the research: 1) to reveal the historical context and philosophical assumptions of the idea of sustainable regional development; 2) to reveal the difference and fundamental meaning of the concepts of weak and strong sustainability; 3) to analyze the fundamental philosophical significance of classical consequentialist and non-consequentialist philosophical ethical theories and challenges to the idea of sustainable development.

Research methods: systematic scientific literature analysis, comparative, logical text analysis, methods of generalization and theoretical reconstruction.

Theoretical Backgrounds of Sustainable Regional Development: Weak vs. Strong Sustainability

The concept of sustainable development is based on three dimensions: economic, environmental and social ones. Regions’ development is usually defined as the integral community development (social, economic, environmental and healthcare, technological, cultural and recreational) on a particular territory (Jovovic, R., Draskovic, M., Delibasic, M., & Jovovic, M., 2017). Region’s development must be based on their optimal expansion constituents (social, natural and economic development aspects) aimed at certain life’s level maintenance and quality improvement through the

mentioned constituents. Regional development encompasses not only traditional policy on a concrete territory, but also socioeconomic process organized in the specific political and cultural context (Atkinson, 1996; Bourdeu, 1999; Spangenberg, 2002). Regional development in today's context is at a critical juncture, with multiple crises (financial, food and energy) forcing us to re-assess the economic paradigm of our time and to evaluate how to better address the unfulfilled promises that we are currently leaving to future generations in the areas of employment, social progress, quality of life and respect for nature. While there is no doubt about the importance of integration of the pillars of sustainable development onto the regional level, implementation of this concept has proved challenging in practice. In fact, integration of the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development on the regional level implies the implementation of complimentary and coordinated actions in different areas which results in economic growth that is also supposed to achieve social objectives, without endangerment the rare resources of the planet.

Sustainability is also a political term. It has been used in a certain historical situation in response to specific problems. Its political utility is mainly composed of novelty and flexibility, in its capacity to gather consensus and to shift perceptions and values at the same time. These attributes do not correspond to scientific efforts for precise meanings (Thierstein & Walser, 2000). Today, the concept of sustainability is a hub for many different approaches. It is used for various policy issues, development processes and planning strategies at regional level. There are several important features related to the term "sustainability" (Thierstein & Walser, 1997): the first is that sustainability requires awareness of the interconnection of social, ecological and economic problems; Secondly, all concepts of sustainability are based on different needs within the region and therefore require a lot of knowledge of how to deal with different interests; As a third feature, implementation of sustainability concepts at the regional level should bring together local needs - formulated in 'Local Agenda 21' - and demands for co-operation created over problems above the local level. Regional sustainability is defined as "the continuous support of human quality of life within a region's ecological carrying capacity" (Wackernagel & Yount, 1998). Sustainable development is understood in the category of economic development assuming the availability of certain natural resources in the region. However, economic development should remain at a level not exceeding the environmental capacity of the region (Malik & Ciesielska, 2011). Sustainability within the region is realized through integration within orderliness of sustainability: economical, eco-space, socio-institutional and ethical. Integration within the region is implemented through strategies and development programs. Development plans are operational dimension of regional development strategy (Stimson, Stough, & Roberts, 2006, p. 85).

When talking about theories about sustainable development, there are two main approaches, weak and strong sustainability. Maintaining total capital intact is often called "weak sustainability" since it is based on

generous assumptions about substitutability of capital for natural resources in production. By contrast, "strong sustainability" requires maintaining both man-made and natural capital intact separately, on the assumption that they are really not substitutes but complements in most production functions. (Daly, 1991). Furthermore, strong sustainability implies that renewable resources must not be drawn down faster than they can be replenished. Weak sustainability accepts that certain resources can be depleted as long as they can be substituted by others over time. A problem with weak sustainability is that it is sometimes hard to give a monetary value in all the natural resources and furthermore it does not take into account that some resources cannot be replaced by manufactured goods and service (Agyeman, Bullard, & Evans, 2003).

Weak sustainability requires keeping total net investment, suitably defined to include all relevant form of capital, above or equal to zero. Promoters of weak sustainability often talk about keeping "genuine saving" non-negative. The term "genuine" distinguish it from traditional net saving measures which only include depreciation of man-made capital (Asheim, 2011; Hartwick, 1977). If the value of man-made capital is big enough, an explicit policy for sustainability is not necessary since sustainability is guaranteed quasi-automatically. Otherwise, measures such as resource-tax, saving subsidy or regulation are needed to ensure non-negative genuine saving (Neumayer, 1999).

One of the promoters of strong sustainability is Eric Neumayer who has criticized promoters of weak sustainability of being environmental optimists. He argues that they are in favour of economic growth either because they believe that a rise in consumption can compensate a decline of renewable resources or because a rise in consumption will prevent a decline in renewable resources. According to him, promoters of weak sustainability believe that, eventually, with rising incomes the state of the environment will improve as well. (Neumayer, 1999). Neumayer himself argues for non-substitutability. He means that we are largely uncertain and ignorant about the detrimental effects of depleting natural capital. He also believes that natural capital losses often are irreversible. Another thing to take into account is that some forms of natural capital provide basic life-support functions. He also argues that it is impossible to compensate loss of natural resource with increased consumption possibilities. Neumayer distinguishes between two forms of strong sustainability. According to the first interpretation, strong sustainability is a paradigm that calls for keeping the aggregated total value of manmade capital and natural capital itself constant. Thus, strong sustainability encompasses weak sustainability, but it also includes an additional requirement that refers to natural as a subcategory of total capital. This interpretation of strong sustainability does not require that nature always has to be preserved in its origin. Nor does it mean that non-renewable resources must never be used in production. What is important is rather that when using a resource such as coal, the receipts from coal mining must be reinvested into the development of renewable energy sources in order to keep the aggregate value of the total natural resource

stock constant. According to the other interpretation, strong sustainability is not defined in value terms; instead it calls for the preservation of the physical stocks of those forms of natural capital that are nonsubstitutable. If the flows from these resource stocks are used, their regenerative capacity must not be exceeded, so that their environmental functions remain intact. This interpretation does not allow for any substitutability between different forms of critical natural capital. But it does not imply keeping nature as it is. What rather is important is to maintain its functions intact (Neumayer, 1999). The discussion about weak versus strong sustainability is related to the discussion whether it is possible or not to combine economic growth and environmental development.

The Impact of Classical Philosophical Ethical Consequentialist and Non-consequentialist Theories on the Concept of Sustainability

The issues of sustainability are connected to different philosophical theories. Normative theories can be divided into two main groups. According to some theories, one should act in ways that give rise to the best overall consequences. These theories are called consequentialist ethical theories. The other group of theories are called non-consequentialist ethical theories. Various nonconsequentialist theories exist, for example deontological theories or duty ethics, according to which the moral rightness of actions is determined by other factors than the consequences of the actions (Ariansen, 1993). According to proponents of utilitarianism, the morally correct action or policy is the one that produces the greatest amount of utility for the members of society. A problem associated with utilitarianism is the difficulty of determining what utility is. Below, there will be a description of different directions of utilitarianism and their respective methods to assess and calculate utility (Kymlicka, 1995). The English philosopher Jeremy Bentham is usually considered to be founder of utilitarianism. Bentham argued that utility (or happiness) is equal to pleasure. Hence, society should be organized so that people's happiness pleasure, or pleasurable experiences was as high as possible and their unhappiness as low as possible. This approach introduced two new approaches as a contrast to earlier traditional and religious moralities. Firstly, it was people's happiness and not, for example, their piety or virtuous characters, that was important. Secondly, humans were equal in the sense that nobody's happiness counted for more than anybody else's, independent of sex, background or social position. This original version of utilitarianism is commonly referred to as classic utilitarianism or hedonistic utilitarianism (Hansson, 2002). Others, for example the philosopher G.E. Moore, argues that pleasure is not the only value to take into account. According to him, also for example knowledge, love and beauty have a value. Therefore, he prefers a wider definition of utility than that of hedonistic utilitarianism. This form of utilitarianism is called ideal utilitarianism (Driver, 2009). Both hedonistic and ideal utilitarianism have been criticized since it is hard to give

a specific content to values such as happiness, knowledge and beauties. It can also be argued that human welfare is something more than merely having a particular mental state. Another position is therefore the theory about utility as preference satisfactions. According to preference utilitarianism, preference satisfaction increases people's utility, independent of what those preferences are (Kymlicka, 1995). Another problem with preference utilitarianism is that we do not always know what our preferences are. We act based on a preference and then afterward regret what we did. What humans believe is important to do when they are thinking visionary is not always the same as what they prefer to do for the moment. It can therefore be argued that fulfillment of preferences is something valuable only so far as those preferences are not based on false perceptions. A way to manage this is to define utility as satisfaction of "rational" and "enlightened" preferences. Hence, according to this form of utilitarianism we should aim to satisfy those preferences that are based on complete and accurate information. Another kind of utilitarianism is the welfare utilitarianism that equals utility with welfare. The welfare utilitarianism differs from both the hedonistic- and the preference utilitarianism as it focuses on external living conditions rather than on internal mental states. The utility as should be taken into account according to the welfare utilitarianism is people's access to accommodation, health care, education and other things that are related to welfare (Hansson, 2002). Another way to handle utilitarianism is to do utility calculations for the actions. Consequences of an action are given a numerical value, then that value multiplies with the number of people affected. A problem is yet that a significant disadvantage for a small group of people can be accepted as long as it has enough positive consequences for another group of people. Another critic to the utilitarianism is that it is a strict impersonal theory. While traditional moral theories talk about individuals' interests and rights, the individual has absolutely no significance in utilitarianism, except as bearers of utility. It can also be discussed whether nonhuman beings preferences and utility should be taken into consideration in the utility calculus. Both hedonistic and moral utilitarianism emphasize the moral significance of certain mental states. Arguably, on the assumption that animals may possess at least some of these mental states, consequences for animals should be included into the happiness calculus. However, it is not sure that an action gives the same loss or utility for human as for nonhuman beings. It is for example possible that people can understand the extent of suffering more clearly than nonhuman beings and therefore suffer to morally more significant degrees (Ariansen, 1993).

Another consequence ethical theory is Johan Rawls' "A theory of justice". Rawls' method assumes hypothetical social contract situation. In this situation, no one knows their place in the society, class, position, intelligence, strange and so on. From this position he means that the maximin rules apply. According to this rule, alternatives shall be ranked by their worst possible outcomes, then we are to adopt the alternative, the worst of which is superior to the worst outcome of the others

(Viking, 1995). He also argued that all social values – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and all the bases of self-respect – are to be used distributed equally, unless an unequal distribution of all or any of these values are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society. An unequal distribution can also be acceptable if it is to everyone's advantage. But, it is also important to point out, according to Rawls', each person also processes an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. A large sum of advantages enjoyed by many cannot be outweighed by sacrifices imposed on a few (Viking, 1995; Kymlicka, 1995).

Within the non-consequentialist ethical theories, actions are valued not by their consequences but rather by whether they are made with a good intention, if they are possible to place in a set of rules and also on different kinds of duties and virtues. An example on a non-consequentialist theory is Kant's moral theory, which are based on the so called Kant's categorical imperative. Thus, to decide if it is morally acceptable to lie, one must answer the question: Would a rational individual accept lying as a universal rule? Kant also believes that to do something only out of self-interests is not ethically correct. The fact that all actions should be possible to place in a set of universal rules forbids actions that are merely done out of egoistic motives (Grøn, et al., 1988). Another non-consequence ethical theory is the Virtue ethic that focuses on the development of human character traits. The virtue ethic was developed during the antiquity when ancient philosophers promoted four main virtues which people should strive to achieve: justice, wisdom, courage and moderation. These are the so called cardinal virtues which are introduced in Plato's "The State" (Hansson, 2002). Aristotle also discussed these virtues and took them one step further and argued that the good life was to develop properties that are characteristic of humans in contrast to nonhuman beings, namely the human ability to reason and rationality. Instead of promoting a theory of ethics based on consequences of action, human rights or on a social contract, he argued for the idea that a human being of excellence will understand that it is rational to develop certain traits of character, called virtues. These virtues make it possible for the human being to develop a peaceful life in human community. Modern virtue ethicists argue in a similar way, but emphasize that the character traits that should be developed are those that are needed not only for the individual's development but for society as a whole. A consequence of this is that the desirable virtues may be different in different societies with their different traditions (Hansson, 2002).

Within the utilitarian theories, which aim at maximizing the total utility, it is definitely possible to see a connection with sustainable development. Since the utilitarianism see all human beings and sometimes also nonhuman beings as equal bearers of utility, it is possible to argue that we have the same responsibility for future generation as for the present. When talking about weak versus strong sustainability and whether it is possible or not to substitute natural resources with man-made capital, a utilitarian solution would be to do utility

calculations. To decide whether it is correct or not to substitute natural resources with man-made capital we have to answer the question "does it generate most total utility for those affected by substitute natural resources with man-made capital?" If the answer is yes, it is correct to do that. What is important to point out when talking about utilitarianism and other consequentialist ethical theories is that, if it should be defensive both to substitute natural resources with man-made capital and to not do that, it has to be motivated by detecting consequences for those affected. Looking at Rawls' Theory of justice, it is easy to argue for sustainable development. Environmental problems affect poor people in poor developing countries most. The theory of justice and environmental issues are therefore close linked to each other. According to the theory of justice, you should handle as you do not know where in the society you are born. Therefore, it is easy to argue for taking future generations into account in decision making. If we instead talking about, for example conserving natural resources because it is a duty or a virtue, we are talking about non-consequentialist ethical theories Happiness and average annual income. One of the non-consequentialist ethical theories which are related to sustainable development is the "Environmental Virtue Ethics".

Promoters of Environmental Virtue Theory argue that we should develop characters that lead to the preservation of nature for its own sake and for the sake of becoming better and more joyful persons. A critic to this is that it is not certain that all people agree to that preserving nature will lead to higher joys and not either that depletion of natural resources will lead to lower joys. It is also in general hard to say which joys are higher and lower (Holly, 2006). One of the promoters of environmental Virtue Theory is Lisa Newton. Since she believes it is hard to motivate people to do things that lead to less material welfare and also to make them care about future generation remote from our own, she argues that it is the focus on the joys of living on the basis of a character of environmental virtue that motivate people to live in an environmentally sustainable way. Newton argues that less consumption of material and a simpler lifestyle need not entail a mindset of gloomy austerity and deprivation. She rather argues that such a lifestyle can contain joys and satisfactions that attend the flourishing of a more highly evolved character. This also involves a less materialistic flowering of the self in which environmental virtues, especially the one she considers the cardinal virtue of simplicity, are cultivated for the sake of the enjoyment of a deeper satisfaction in living as well as to protect the environment. She also argues for Land Ethic, which aims to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the ecosystem as a whole, in which humans are just plain citizens alongside all the other creatures and entities of nature. What humans need to do is to find a place in the ecosystem along with the needs of other creatures and entities. She believes that Land ethic in combination with Environment Virtue ethic in combination with Land Ethic is the best way to promote sustainable development. Even if Newton promoters Virtue Ethics, which is a non-consequentialist ethic, Land Ethics can in

a way be described as an extension of consequentialism to nonhuman nature, since it regards actions as right or wrong depending on whether they preserve the stability, integrity, and beauty of the land. It is therefore the original form of consequentialism in utilitarian theory that Newton criticized as not doing the job for environmentalism, since originally the theory only takes human beings into account.

Conclusions

The term sustainable development began to be used increasingly during the 1980s and includes social, economic and environmental development. This concept has evolved in sustainable measures: living within certain limits of the earth's capacity to maintain life; understanding the interconnections among economy, society, and environment; and maintaining a fair distribution of resources and opportunity for this generation and the next. The discussion about weak versus strong sustainability is related to the discussion whether it is possible or not to combine economic growth and environmental development. Sustainability within the region is realized through integration within orderliness of sustainability: economical, eco-space, socio-institutional and ethical. Sustainable development should provide a solution in terms of meeting basic human needs, integrating environmental development and protection, achieving equality, ensuring social self-determination and cultural diversity, and maintaining ecological integrity. Although the concept of sustainable development has undergone certain changes during the past, its fundamental principles and goals have contributed to a more conscious behaviour adapted to the limitations of the environment. This is the reason of adopting the concept in different areas of human activities.

The article reveals the significance of classical philosophical ethical theories and ethical values for the sustainable development of the region and its practical significance in making important decisions. The sustainable social well-being is impossible without ethical values that ensure the prosperity and sustainability of society as a whole. Classical consequentialist and non-consequentialist ethical theories can help to make concrete decisions that ensure sustainable regional development. Within the consequentialist (utilitarian) theories, which aim at maximizing the total utility, it is definitely possible to see a connection with sustainable development. Since the utilitarianism see all human beings and sometimes also nonhuman beings as equal bearers of utility, it is possible to argue that we have the same responsibility for future generation as for the present. When talking about weak versus strong sustainability and whether it is possible or not to substitute natural resources with man-made capital, a utilitarian solution would be to do utility calculations. Within the non-consequentialist ethical theories, actions are valued not by their consequences but rather by whether they are made with a good intention, if they are possible to place in a set of rules and also on different kinds of duties and virtues. Another non-consequence ethical theory is the Virtue ethic that focuses on the development of human character traits. Modern virtue ethicists argue in a similar way, but emphasize that the character traits that should be developed are those that are needed not only for the individual's development but for society as a whole.

Regional politicians, social, business and cultural leaders could develop sustainable ideas for the future based on classical philosophical theories. On the other hand, acquiring and retaining adequate knowledge and

skills, which are gaining importance in a rapidly changing environment, is an important challenge.

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