The sustainable development and tourism

C. A. C. Sampaio

Department of Social Science and Philosophy, Universidade Regional de Blumenau – FURB, Brazil.

Abstract

Sustainable development substantially alters all the presuppositions of the existing economic development model, including what is termed the tourism industry, and in particular, the regulation of consumer standards, lifestyles and a range of productive functions. Owing to the complex nature of these changes, the adjective “naive” may be inadequate when dealing with them, but this is not important. What really is important is the attempt to overcome the current development model, in which society’s political needs become the needs and aspirations of just a small privileged group, which also happens to be the group that enjoys so-called luxury tourism. It is time for creativity and institutional dynamics. New forms of organization need to be encouraged in the economic services sector – tourism – and social sectors – third sector organizations – with a strong component of collective production by those involved and with the necessary material and technical support of the Public Authorities which, incidentally, should redefine their operational agendas.

1. Introduction

Sustainable development emerged from a global awareness of the threats – the demographic explosion and poverty, industrial pollution and predatory use of natural resources – inherent to industrial and technological civilization at the beginning of the 1970s [1]. Since then, the complex web of interrelations between man and the environment has spread rapidly throughout the world. In these discussions, the environmental issue is addressed in its various meanings, which basically fall between two extremes – conservationist and the so-called new naturalism [2].

Generally speaking, the prominent idea in the conservationist view is the myth of untouched nature [3], in which man is seen as the destroyer of the
environment, i.e., the concepts of nature and man are dissociated from one another, with nature being understood as the subject and, in a certain way, man as the object. An example of this is the model of uninhabited national parks, which arose in the United States around the 14th Century, and which permits no human residence within a protected area.

In the concept of new naturalism, the relationship between man and the environment is symbiotic. This perspective arose from the terms “environmental questioning” and “sustainable development”. It can be exemplified by the national policy of local management of renewable resources in Madagascar, [4] where local communities contribute to the management of natural resources in environmental reserves.

The theme of tourism is sometimes discussed either as a typical economic activity (often confused with the term tourism industry), or as an economic, social and environmental activity (sustainable tourism) [5].

The term “tourism industry”, which can easily be linked with the industrial and technological civilizing project, transforms the adjective “economic” into a noun, in contrast to its pairs “social” and “environmental”. This view emphasizes a greater concern with the subject known as the tourist, and his demand for needs, than with the object termed receptive population and its offer of goods and services.

The premise of sustainable tourism, which reverses these roles of subject and object, is to study the impacts of tourism on the receptive population, which is viewed as the subject. In other words, it carries out an interdisciplinary analysis of the community impacted by the tourism activity, which involves the human, social and natural sciences (and no longer just the duo-disciplinary perspective of economy and administration), rethinking the strategies of a new development style in the context of social demand – regulating consumer standards and lifestyles – and of the offer of goods and services – regulating a range of productive functions [6, 7, 8].

2. From Environmental Issues to Sustainable Development

Environmental issues reflect the awareness that the volume of destructive impacts generated by anthropic (human) activity on the ecosystems has enlarged long-term horizons, causing a rethinking of the current forms of development, both neo-liberal and social democrat, and promoting an emotional internalization of the environment in terms of natural resources, space and quality of habitat, which goes beyond concern for its repercussions on a purely biophysical level, and also in the exchange process between the geographical, biological, physical and socio-cultural factors.

In the 1970s, within recent memory, discussion on the ecological question underwent a major process of mobilization, transforming a purely environmental concern into a major presupposition for world development.

Research issues are beginning to be raised. Of these, the one with the most repercussions is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) document – The Limits of Growth, commissioned by the Club of Rome, which is known for
its global model that represents the interrelations between resources, the population and the environment in the worldwide system dynamic [9,10], and which provides a warning about the risks of an economic growth model that fails to take into account the capacity of the ecosystems to support such growth. With a scientific basis, of neo-malthusian inspiration – which states that while the population develops in geometric progression, food production tends to grow in arithmetic progression – The Limits of Growth provides a worldwide plan for the redistribution and use of natural resources and for the reorientation of production towards a less destructive model, together with careful control of population growth.

In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment took place in Stockholm, Sweden. Besides having the merit of bringing the environmental question to the agenda of the great international themes and becoming an important landmark in the increasing universal awareness of the importance of the environment, this conference was also the first initiative of its type taken by the United nations with the purpose of examining this issue in a global and coordinated way, seeking solutions to existing problems and attempting to define future courses of action for discussion of the environmental issue.

This was, without any shadow of a doubt, the first step with worldwide repercussions, though it was not without its critics. What transpired in Stockholm was that governments became concerned with an environmental management strategy on a worldwide scale, which would serve to preserve a liberal developmentalist project. What they were interested in preserving was, in fact, a cycle of wealth accumulation based on a system of production that could be made unviable by the waste of natural resources and the environmental crisis that had been predicted [11].

In 1974, Ignacy Sachs and his interdisciplinary team based at the Centre International de Recherche sur L’Environnement et le Développement (CIRED) re-elaborated the question of eco-development that had first been addressed in Stockholm, widening and diversifying its scope [12].

With the Cocoyoc Declaration in 1974, and the Report Que Faire, presented by the Fundação Dag Hammarskjold at the 7th Extraordinary Meeting of the United Nations towards the end of 1975, the ideas of Sachs and his team were used once again, however, the term eco-development was not explicitly used, but rather the expressions “another development” and “sustained development” [12]. All in all, economic growth was still the ideal form of achieving a healthy consumer society. This is why Third World Countries should make every effort to enter the bloc of developed countries, as a means of overcoming their social and environmental problems. An example of this reasoning was the personification of the Reagan administration – the situation of the rich countries should be improved so that they can kickstart the economy, and this metaphor is also used in the liberal discourse of Delfim Neto – let’s grow then we’ll divide up the cake.

The weakness of this developmentalist promise in solving global problems was shown by the increasing devaluation of the so-called Third World countries,
provoked by an excessive concentration of income, the growth of population contingents in a state of abject poverty [11]. and the accelerated environmental degradation in these countries, all of which indicated the social and environmental insustainability of this model.

Some years later in 1982, in Nairobi, Kenya, at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Program UNEP, a meeting took place to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Stockholm Conference. On this occasion, the results that had been obtained up until then were evaluated, and changes in perceptions of the environmental issue were examined.

In 1983, the World Foundation for Environment and Development (WFED) was set up in response to a decision by the United Nations General Assembly. It was presided over by the Norwegian Gro Brundtland. The commission included governments, non-governmental organizations (ONGs) and the scientific community. Its overall objective was to re-examine the environmental issue, interrelating it with the developmental issue, and provide programmes of action. Four years later, it published the Brundtland Report, which was entitled “Our Common Future”. From this report the expression sustainable development became more firmly established, with the aim of increasing public awareness and showing the need for better environmental management in order to sustain the planet. The definition given for sustainable development was to meet the needs of the current generation without comprising the needs of future generations, a definition which suggested a shared responsibility of all citizens in preserving the environment.

This document goes further than the Stockholm one did, particularly in reviving discussion, at an international level, concerning the precise definition of the criterion for sustainability of development. It does not, however, add any substantial modifications to the thinking on eco-development [12].

Many of the ideas and views contained in the Brundtland Report were discussed at the RIO-‘92 Summit. Among the main topics were: The Earth Letter – a declaration of the basic principles to be followed by all peoples with respect to the environment and development; a proposal for two international conferences: one on biodiversity and the other on climatic alterations; Agenda 21 – a plan of action which outlines the universally-accepted goals of the post-1992/early 21st century period, with priorities, calculation of costs and responsibilities, including environmental technology transfer and the creation of financing mechanisms for environmental projects.

During the period between Stockholm and the RIO-‘92 Summit, developmentalist polarization was prominent, created by the wealth of the North – the developed or industrialized countries – and the poverty of the South – the developing or Third world countries [15]. The Human Development Report 1999, produced by a UN body, indicates that less than 1 fifth of the world’s population is better off than the remaining four fifths. This scenario introduces an apocalyptic perspective to this economic development, which is even more accentuated by the fact that the technology which is being used to reverse the picture is the same technology that caused such wide disparities in the first place. Current awareness of the situation has led to talks aimed at trying to reverse the
picture. The general consensus is that the problems have different effects, or rather dimensions, but their origin is the same: the economist style of development [16].

3. Sustainable Development – The Interdisciplinary Vision of Ignacy Sachs

Sachs re-elaborates the concept of sustainable development, also known as eco-development, as a development style that is applicable not only to rural projects but also to urban ones, as opposed to the mimetic-dependent directive that is traditionally adopted in the poorer countries, which is driven by the search for autonomy or self-reliance [6] and the priority satisfaction of the basic needs of the populations involved [12]. The inclusion of the environmental dimension is thought of not only as a kind of additional coercion, but also as a large resource potential, making use of the criteria of ecological prudence.

Sachs speaks of four hypotheses that link the essential ideas of sustainable development. The first is the priority of achieving social objectives, redirecting the process of economic growth in order to fulfill these priority social objectives, which are interpreted by their material and psychosocial needs such as self-determination, political participation and self-fulfillment. The second is the valorization of autonomy or self-reliance, seeking a greater degree of control over crucial aspects of the development process, through the activity of an organized civil society at local, micro-regional or regional levels, channeling and maximizing the society’s available resources, while at the same time respecting cultural traditions and avoiding self-sufficiency or isolationism. The third is the search for a symbiotic relationship with nature, abandoning the traditional arrogant relationship with the biophysical environment that was formed by modernity in the light of the modernization process. The fourth is economic efficiency, which is an alternative to the dominant micro-economic rationality, in terms of an effective internationalization of the issue of the socio-environmental costs of the development process [12].

These hypotheses on sustainable development may also be united in terms of strategies for a socially fairer, ecologically more prudent and economically more effective development.

4. Planning for Sustainable Development

Sachs points out that sustainable development should be introduced through a planning methodology, as it is an opportunity for social learning, mid-way between the “technicist” and “assemblyist” traditions, and materializing on a pedagogic synthesis. From this perspective, planning offers a new model for government policies, with concrete strategies for corrective intervention, based on the interdependent hypotheses of economic efficiency, social equality and ecological prudence, and new criteria for social rationality based on criticism of the effect of externalization of socio-environmental costs, which is exercised by
the purely economic model [12], particularly when this planning is participative, with social actors, agents and reactors, who have a contractual view of the environment. Participatory planning regains the social participation of society, in such a way that the citizen contributes to the creation of eco-strategies, from the information stage up to the carrying out of the proposed action. It transforms civil society into a third system, and at the same time becomes self-aware and begins to question and discover itself [16].

5. Strategies of a New Development Style

Refining the conceptual structure in a such as way as to widen and diversify the thinking on sustainable development, Sachs describes, with greater precision and rigor, the directives for a standardized dynamic for harmonizing the multiple dimensions of the development process. At the same time, he defines and explores analytically the strategic variables of a development style [17].

Within the context of social demand, these variables of a set of harmonization aspects include the regulation of consumer standards and lifestyles and, within the context of the offer of goods and services, the regulation of a set of productive functions. In particular, it includes the management of the use of technology, of the nature of the products generated by the productive systems, and of the use of natural resources and energy [17].

The redefinition of development styles, not in the sense of non-growth, will occur by submitting its technical modalities to rigorous social control, its own forms of division and its subordination to an objective function based on the logic of social demands, reformulating the dialectic relationship between production and consumption, which tells us on one hand that production does not exist without necessity while on the other hand, makes it clear that consumption reproduces needs [6].

Sustainable development criticizes some crucial points of the economist point of view, including the so-called tourism industry. For example: choosing freely from a wide range of goods and services does not mean being free, but rather, in the most cases, is being adapted to the inflexibilities of the offer [6]. We cannot accept happiness as synonymous with obtaining goods by substituting emotional satisfaction, and therefore, running the risk of becoming slaves to it, requiring an ever-growing technological program to mask our emotional dissatisfaction [6, 7]. We know that the majority of these goods are positional, representing the social improvement of those who seek status. They also correspond to the transactional and management costs that are growing so rapidly in our societies as a result of the downside of affluence, the accidents inherent to contemporary urban lifestyles and means of transport, the degradation of the environment, the diseconomies of scale of “megalomachine” and their twin mega-bureaucracy. To the same degree, the functions of production reproduce economic freedom, which is nothing more than a self-limitation of the appetite for material goods and the desire for affirmation of social status through inequality of consumption, resulting from an economic surplus. We will, therefore, need to reformulate them to create greater cultural freedom, by reducing the working time that generates
this economic surplus, in order to produce an excess of free time that could be used individually or collectively with cultural objectives, such as gaming, religious, social, educational and sporting objectives, among others [6]. A society's lifestyle is therefore defined by the way in which it uses its time.

Even when the value of change is suppressed, this working time continues to be its wealth-creating substance and the measure of costs demanded by production. But free time, or rather, available time, also constitutes wealth itself, dedicated partly to the creation of products and partly to the exercise of a free activity, which must not be performed as work with imposed external goals to be attained, whether as a natural need or a social obligation, matters not. It should be said that from a bipolar perspective of time, the productive – in which the personality is fulfilled – unproductive – or even destructive to the personality –, the frequent opposition between alienating working time and non-alienating leisure time makes no sense. Work can be an opportunity for creation, just as leisure that is forced or passively tolerated is nothing more than a source of tedium [6].

The right of every man to seek the coherence of an existential project in the use of his own collective time, or even to increase his awareness and autonomy, imply that his natural and unique individual characteristics are capable of generating an original or irreducible creature [6].

From this point of view, men are social actors, each one a preserver of his uniqueness, so that he assumes a distinct role in society according to his concerns and potential. Within these roles that each of us comes to perform, certain actions and reactions are expected, as the result of a rationality that is neither economic nor instrumental. It is a rationality that leads to the truth and consequently, to freedom and happiness [18].

The exercise of this substantive rationality inevitably leads to politics and the exercise of choices that are reflected in a society that is subordinated to ethical and aesthetical criteria [7]. Above all, it leads to relationships of power and articulation that surround the production of material wealth for the satisfaction of human needs, both of civil society and of the State as a market, re-establishing social control over technology [6].

Such technology, with a socio-ecological concern for development, is based on sustained, or rather appropriated technology. Appropriated technology is an evolution of intermediary technology [19], and absorbs it in its concept [20]. Schumacher – the author who created the concept of intermediary technology – does not explicitly distinguish one from the other; however, by interpreting his works Small is Beautiful and Good Work, it can be seen that the concept of intermediary technology arose from the need to adopt technologies for the intensive labor force that were quite different from the advanced modernization technologies of poor countries [21]. Due to the existence of an abundant, non-specialized labor force in Third World countries, Schumacher formulated four propositions to combat the negative effects of this high level of technology in these countries: 1) organizations must be created in the areas where people currently live and not, primarily, in the metropolitan regions to which they tend to migrate; 2) these organizations, which include tourism, must in general be
cheap enough for them to be created in large quantities without requiring an unfeasible amount of training, capital and imports; 3) the production methods used should be relatively simple, of the type that will minimize the need for high qualifications, not only in the production process but also in terms of organization, supply of primary materials, financing, commercialization, etc.; and 4) the production should, above all, be dependent on local materials and for local consumption [19].

Within this context, Schumacher introduces an economy of non-violence that can cooperate with nature instead of exploiting it. He has defended the use of renewable resources since the 1950s, an era when technological optimism glorified economic growth and expansion, given the unlimited resources. Schumacher spoke of technology with a human face [22], producing goods and services that were necessary and useful, enabling us to use and perfect our natural talents and abilities, serving others, and working along with them, and thereby freeing us from our innate egocentricity [21]. In his work A guide for the perplexed, Schumacher discusses the philosophy of modernity, condemning its rationality which purges the imagination and the senses, being easily convinced anything, except the evidence of a reasoning which makes us owners and masters of nature [21].

Appropriated technology thus recovers, very competently, precious knowledge that can be applied in a wide variety of ways, of which modern technology is just one [19]. Sachs confirms these thoughts, adding that the detailed set of criteria which the choice of techniques, products and research priorities must obey must result, in each case, from a guideline reflection for identifying the dimensions of technology that are based on the values of the development style, and the formation of social preferences for each of these dimensions [19].

6. Conclusions

This new development style proposes presuppositions that are quite different from the current model of economic development. Among them is the so-called tourism industry, above all in the context of social demand – the regulation of standards of consumption and lifestyles, and the offer of goods and services – in the regulation of a set of productive functions. Faced with this complexity, the challenge is to overcome the development model that currently exists, the main characteristic of which is the social crises arising from poor distribution of income and education, with society’s political needs becoming the needs and aspirations of only a small privileged group. This happens to be the group that enjoys so-called luxury tourism, a concentrator of national wealth, determining and promoting business and the community and creating our tunnel of economic needs, which are supported by an industrial abundance under the blessing of the current natural resources.

An example of this, according to the published results of the Human Development Report 1999, which attempted to compare the degree of social and economic development in 173 countries; in the case of Brazil, the richest 20% of the Brazilian population earn thirty-two times more than the poorest 20%; the
country is given special focus in the section on income concentration, where it occupies the second worst position.

Among the global results, we see an acceleration in concentration of income. In 1960, the richest 20% owned 30%-40% of the world’s income. Today, the same 20% hold more than 60% of the wealth, besides dominating 80% of the economic opportunities, which means access to commerce, savings, loans and investments. Translated into figures, a billion of the richest people on the planet have sixty times more resources than a billion of the poorest.

Meanwhile, our challenge was not to allow pessimism regarding this apocalyptic picture to divert us from the focus of immediately transforming criticism into suggestions for the potential action that is essential in our country at this time.

This transformation is the responsibility of the whole of society. It starts at local level – groups, suburbs, communities and towns – which, incidentally, act as an incubator for these economic (tourism), social and ecological activities, prompting a global perspective. Local sustainable development should therefore be regulated by the town itself, and for this to happen, the different factions in the community should learn to fight each using his own personal bugbear, be it the hotel company that is dismissing staff, the rural or urban exodus, the company that is polluting the local river or the low level of education in schools. Only then can participation take on a truly political dimension [23].

Many agree with Sachs, who affirms that the State should not govern the development its citizens’ needs in a paternalistic way, underestimating the civil society’s capacity to look after its own interests and turning its recipients into passive, dependent assisted beings. It would be much more worthwhile to help them freely exercise their rights and stimulate their capacity to become self-reliant, particularly if they are prepared for educational strategies, in the effort to design learning processes in a way that will enable society to build its culture and experiences of daily life, based its own perceptions of the environment, radically redefining the types of work and of leisure.

The institutional challenges therefore involve participating in the creation and implementation of solutions, giving free reign to the growth of different forms of association that arise from contact with real problems, shared interests, a community with vision that is deciding what it wants to be, big or small, creating at the moment in which they perceive their identities. It is time for creativity and institutional dynamics: breathing new life into existing institutions, encouraging social experimentation at the humblest level. Stimulating new forms of organization in the area of economic services – tourism – and social services – third sector organizations – as a strong component of collective self-production by those interested, with the necessary material and technical support of the Public Authorities. Insisting on greater public participation does not, in any way, remove the State’s responsibility. Rather, it involves redefining its operational agenda.

Central Government, for its part, cannot abandon its function as re-distributor of wealth; as a mediator, ensuring that the objectives of the different sectors of society – including stimulating the tourism industry – are compatible; as a
maintainer of harmony between the short and long terms, which includes harmonizing the social, economic and ecological objectives; as a promoter of local development, ensuring compatibility between itself and the local activities and as a financier of certain rare resources – which cannot be found locally.

References


