



## The Imperatives of Sustainable Development in Ukrainian Higher Education

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### Abstract

This article deals with the problem of the forming an imperative of Sustainable Development. The content and ideological potential of the idea of Sustainable Development are analyzed. The necessity of introducing informational and educational policies in the course of implementation of the principles of Sustainable Development is substantiated. The main disadvantages and problems of the system of higher education in Ukraine are considered in light of the of the idea of Sustainable Development. It has been proven that the content of the concept "ecological" significantly expands the context of expediency in implementing the strategy of Sustainable Development.

**Key words:** sustainable development imperative, educational practices, ecological responsibility, "green knowledge", "green values", "education for future", post-materialism.

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## INTRODUCTION

A modern globalized and unified world needs constructive solutions and universal strategies. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals constitutes such an integrated approach to conscious and responsible future achievements.. The proclaimed goals are intended to change consciousness in order to overcome the inherent and prevalent passivity. This passivity is caused, among others, by the post-colonial system of thinking, governing, management of Ukraine and other developing countries. We assume that the most effective way to change the situation is through the means of training and education. If we optimize such work in the system of higher education, the final result will be very fruitful. Indeed, environmental friendliness as a principle of thinking and activity of future teachers will be reflected in younger generations, future managers will be more plastic and rational in the implementation of solutions, and future engineers will be more inventive in the application of technology.

However, on the contrary, B. Jickling & A. E. J. Wals (2008) declare without exception: "For institutions such as the World Bank, education appears simply and solely about preparing individuals to join the local labour market to nourish the global marketplace and satisfy corporate needs". (Jickling B. & Wals A. E. J., p.3) Are such prerequisites of a social system level as the criticality of thinking, or reflection, and the ethical mode of responsibility still needed? B. Jickling & A. E. J. Wals (2008) establish that "Globalizing ideologies and the corresponding material effects are also having an impact on education. The powerful wave of neo-liberalism rolling over the planet, with pleas for 'market solutions' to educational problems and universal quality-assurance schemes, are homogenizing the educational landscape". (Jickling B. & Wals A. E. J., p.3)

But the situation is such that it is simply not possible to delay with solving urgent problems. The degree of the anthropogenic impact on the environment is demonstrated on an unprecedented scale. Therefore, reformatting the principles of interaction at all levels of the triad "human-socio-nature" has no means to delay. In addition, the modern enchantment of natural and technical sciences limits the possibilities of humanitarian discourse. There is a false and limited position. Pragmatism and operationality in data processing undoubtedly provide the

necessary foundation for adequate and effective solutions. However, as K. Madsbjerg rightly points out, only humanities can "break through the glass ceiling" (Madsbjerg C., p.21), or overcome the prevailing paradigm of thinking and analytics.

The fact is that reflection and moral responsibility are possible just on the basis of critical thinking and a broad worldview. Therefore, we have grounds to agree with Y. Habermas that the Age of Enlightenment is not an end to the process, and the technology of education and self-education are becoming even more relevant and demanding in modern digital civilization.

## 1. METHODOLOGY

The main theoretical thesis, which is consistently substantiated by the authors, is the statement on the expansion of the content of an "ecological" concept to the strategy of Sustainable Development. Accordingly, the theoretical basis of the study is the method of conceptual analysis. Its application enables the authors to analyze this concept, its significance in contemporary humanities, and the influence on the formation of consciousness and the nature of ordinary practices.

The system-structural method is fully effective for researching the implementation of a Sustainable Development strategy. Analyzing the system of higher education in Ukraine due to the effectiveness of its separate structural components, the opinion is based on the fact that the mechanism of forming a worldview on the principles of Sustainable Development in Ukraine has significant gaps from informational and educational work to practical tools for the application of this strategy.

The empirical substantiation of the study, in addition to the personal professional and pedagogical experience of the authors, is presented in the comprehensive work of A. Leszczynska, (2010). A. Leszczynska gives such grounds: "The empirical research was conducted in three countries. In total, 200 managers in public and private corporations nationwide were selected in Australia and Ukraine. In Poland the population of managers was 250." (Leszczynska A, p. 1241) So, the necessary representative base of our theoretical research is presented in significant terms.

## 2. TO THE CONTENT OF THE CONCEPT

In favor of the relevance of this topic, we note that the advanced world is based on and embodies the values of a democratic system. Democracy, in essence, is the coordination of the life of most citizens. In order for this coordination to be effective, adequate and purposeful education in general and an institutionalized education are required in particular. Therefore, education is a significant factor in the implementation of the idea of Sustainable Development.

The definition of Sustainable Development is quite a problematic issue. The basic parameters of the definition of this concept are as follows:

1. H. Stoddart (2011): "This concept of conserving resources for future generations is one of the major features that distinguish sustainable development policy from traditional environmental policy, which also seeks to internalize the externalities of environmental degradation". (Stoddart, H., p.9)

This way of defining fixes fundamental worldviews of the human relationship with the world, as enshrined by international organizations as a strategic program of action.

2. F. Mogensen & K. Schnack (2010): "However, a central element of the approach is to be critical of moralistic tendencies, preconceived ideas and hidden agendas when working with environmental education, health education, ESD or other teaching–learning sequences that deal with societal issues involving conflicting interests". (Mogensen F. & Schnack K., p.67)

This definition focuses on the implementation mechanisms of the Sustainable Development idea. It is clear that the realization of the latest worldview shifts is possible through education, persuasion and enlightenment. The distance from the idea to its realization lies in the set of autonomous subjectivities. To combine this set into a single mechanism is possible by methods and means of education that determines the content and nature of daily practices.

3. B. Jickling & A. E. J. Wals (2008) have analyzed factors that cause difficulties in the implementation of idea of Sustainable Development. They gave such basic positions: "The conflicts that emerge in the exploration of sustainable development, for instance, reveal the inevitable tensions among the Triple Ps (people, planet, profit) or the three Es (efficiency, environment, equity)". (Jickling B. & Wals A. E. J., p.63)

The objective of Sustainable Development is to achieve a balance between these diverse factors in a single coordinate system.

4. A. Reid and P. Petocz (2006) explore the understanding of the idea of Sustainable Development by participants in the education process, largely, lecturers. They concluded that the interpretation of the concept of Sustainable Development is not unambiguous. The variability of

understanding the concept is a kind of dialectical composition, the basis of which is the collision of concepts of 'sustainability' and 'creativity' Furthermore, "our research approach was oriented towards presenting the ideas of 'sustainability' and 'creativity' as two higher-order attributes critical to a learning environment". (Reid A. & Petocz P., p.111) So, the concept of 'creativity' includes the components of 'disparate', 'overlapping', 'integrated', and the concept of 'sustainability' contains of 'distance', 'resources', and 'justice'. These semantic units form the meaningful field of understanding The Sustainable Development.

Consequently, the complexity of the contents of the Sustainable Development concept proves the need for information support in the implementation of this project. Therefore, a wide discussion is needed about the content, goals and methods of implementing of Sustainable Development.

### **3. TO THE PROBLEM OF THE SYSTEM-STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION**

The conceptualization of any strategy is a complicated and contradictory phenomenon. So, M. Hladchenko, H. de Boer and D. Westerheijden sum up "Our exploration has shown the importance of the agents who translate the global idea into national policy and how each of them translated it in a different way. In general, success or failure of reform depends on the interpretation of the idea by these actors in the process of translation, on the context from which they translate and into which they translate, how they see the causes and effects of translation, what problems they aim to resolve and how they formulate new policy." (Hladchenko M., Boer H., Westerheijden D.,p.12) The authors study the problem of the formation of a research university in Ukraine. Many problems in the contemporary educational system are analyzed in the focus of their study. They claim that "looking at the rules of formulation it can be stated that because of the lack of systemic vision on development of the knowledge economy in the country, and a lack of the funding, the idea of the research university was hollowed-out while travelling into the Ukrainian discourse. The state did not create conditions suitable for knowledge transfer between universities and business, and universities had funding for neither equipment for laboratories, nor working conditions that would enable academics to engage in research (salary, conference allowances, etc.). In the normative model of a research university, abundant funding is a necessary condition." (Hladchenko M., Boer H., Westerheijden D., p.12)

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development principles in the education system in Ukraine faces a number of complex problems as well. Gomilko O.,

Svyrydenko D. and Terepyshchyi S. (2016) perfectly characterize the drawbacks of modern higher education in Ukraine: "Cheating, plagiarism, poor regulatory provision, strong administrative pressure, imitation of autonomy, isolation from the real needs of the society make HEU locally unique, but globally unattractive". (Gomilko O., Svyrydenko D. & Terepyshchyi S., p.183) A. Osipian gives a similar assessment of the post-totalitarian system of higher education in Ukraine: "Ukrainian HEIs, with their Soviet-style bureaucracy, institutional rigidity, clear lack of flexibility and slowness in response to emerging new challenges, remain distinct from their Western counterparts. Simply put, HEIs were caught unprepared, as well as the system overall was and still is not ready for major shifts and external impacts." (Osipian A, p.234) Another thesis states that: "Although a clear lack of university autonomy and corruption represent major problems for Ukraine's higher education, other problems persist as well. These problems include weak knowledge of the English language among university professors, near total absence of access to Western academic publications, and self-centered self-serving academic culture." (Osipian A, p.237)

All of these educational problems restrain the implementation of the Sustainable Development ideas in Ukrainian higher education. The educational model does not meet the contemporary need for the implementation of Sustainable Development imperative.

This situation is a result of the following factors:

- Broadcasting outdated knowledge. The gap between education, science and production in Ukraine is difficult to overestimate. Teachers have not been able to change the content of their lectures for decades. However, even fundamental and applied sciences are rapidly developing. Consequently, the best practices of scholars are outside the educational process. Studying physics at the level of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18th centuries on specialized faculties of Ukrainian universities is a common practice.

- Artificial isolation. The way of existence of information is indifferent in its nature. The essence of information lies in the possibility of its application and purpose. Postcolonial mentality, and consciousness of the consumer is inherent in reducing the level of heuristic inquiries and activities. Hence, there is a paradoxical situation: actual access to information is open, and there is no valid request for it. There is a vivid example of limitation in consciousness, but not in reality.

- Lack of motivation. The main moving force of any activity is motivation. However, a number of disadvantages of modern higher education in Ukraine make a stable motivation to research impossible, teaching and educational activities. Gomilko O., Svyrydenko D. and Terepyshchyi S. (2016) list such disadvantages of Ukrainian education: "The outlined above

“isms” of HEU (provincialism, sexism, ageism, speciesism, and nepotism) indicate deep civilizational backwardness of the Ukrainian society, which was resulted from “conservation” of the way of life and thinking of *homo soveticus*, who is the product of the totalitarian ideology implementation" (Gomilko O., Svyrydenko D. & Terepyschyi S., p.194). The basis of the motivation of the postcolonial consciousness is the correspondence with the official ideology. Consciousness of consumption produces conformism. With this tacit consent, regardless of context, it has the aim of combating the strategy of Sustainable Development.

- Fragmentation of consciousness. The pathos of postmodernity, the pressure of everyday life, or the acceleration of civilization processes cause a fragmentation of consciousness, tearing of ideological beliefs and daily practices, ideals and values with plans and strategies for building the future. Thus, the ecological consciousness in the representation of the inhabitant is a separate sphere of realization of life activity. There is an absolutely wrong position. Consciousness, subjectivity, and activity are integral with ontological and heuristic characteristics. Therefore, ecology is a general and universal principle of the determination of life, common at the international, state, and personal level. The culture of environmental consciousness should be understood as the implementation of activity in an optimal way, as a balance of costs and benefits, resources and results, technology and nature.

#### 4. TO THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

A. Leszczynska admits: "Against this background, the state of ecological knowledge in Ukrainian managers looks “dramatic”. They are able to mention only international ecological organizations. The interviewees in this country would report possible environmental threats to the police (33 per cent), the fire brigade (30 per cent). Only four respondents (out of the whole population) were able to indicate examples of eco-labels. A significant part of the respondents in all the countries studied (.40 per cent) show a considerable concern for the general state of the environment. They consider the ozone layer and greenhouse effect to be the greatest threats..." (Leszczynska A, p. 1241) Specifics of management is also characteristic for *homo soveticus*: "The Ukrainian respondents are the most prominent in expressing a desire to have trade sanctions imposed (4.4), and to have local companies exposed to the same degree of environmental compliance as foreign companies (4.0). On the questions of negative construct they are, however, more supportive of international environmental concerns being subordinate to national concerns (3.4), and they believe that the national government should maintain central control over

environmental regulations (4.1). This reflects a more nationalistic and centralized perspective on environmental accountability." (Leszczynska A, p.1243) Even the basic principles of the organization of work in the sphere of environmental management are absent, as well as the motivation in general for this aspect of activity: "The Ukrainian respondents do not perceive any benefits resulting from the implementation of ISO 14000. It is probably due to a very low popularity of environmental management schemes in Ukraine, which are implemented only by international organizations. Moreover, the managers interviewed do not consider it necessary to form environmental committees in their organizations (2.6); they have a negative perception of their own accountability for implementing environmental management (2.3)". (Leszczynska A, p.1243)

As a result, the weakness of the world-view fundament for actualization of Sustainable Development ideas at Ukrainian higher education is obvious. On the other hand, the lack of attention on ecological problematic takes the root from world-view level of students and teachers. The reasons for this state are:

1. The extensive nature of production was inherent in the Soviet way of managing. According to such principles of organization of purpose-oriented activity, an ecological consciousness is not demanded. However, the productivity of such technology is low, and its impact on the environment is high. Obviously, inexhaustible resources do not exist. Therefore, such a strategy did not justify itself, but firmly established itself in the everyday consciousness of post-colonialism.

2. Condemnation as a leading tendency to the world. It is quite logical that A. Maslow represented the hierarchy of human needs in the form of a pyramid. For the overwhelming majority, the satisfaction of living needs is a sufficient level of implementation of ambitions. Therefore, the modern education of Sustainable Development permeates all aspects of human life, changing the nearest range of comfort. F. Mogensen and K. Schnack (2010) argue: "Thus, Bildung cannot be reduced to mere education in the sense of cultivation, normalization, or traditional socialization. On the contrary and in concert with the utopian dimension of critical theory, it has as its aim the fulfillment of humanity: full development of the capacities and powers of each human individual to question preconceived opinions, prejudices, and 'given facts', and intentioned participation in the shaping of one's own and joint living conditions". (Mogensen F. & Schnack K., p.61)

3. Low level of personal consciousness and responsibility. Functional thinking does not imply strategy and responsibility. Therefore, the task of education is to form self-consciousness towards oneself, one's activities, the world as a whole. F. Mogensen and K. Schnack (2010) argue



in this way: "The notion of indicators must reflect this Bildung approach. First by acknowledging that indicators cannot be seen as a mechanism that aims to prescribe and test the 'correct' content (knowledge, skills and values) in ESD, but rather must be formed in ways that stimulate and qualify students to become future citizens, who can make sound judgements, think critically and independently, and who can and will play an active role". (Mogensen F. & Schnack K., p.69)

The main questions are:

1. "Can we modernize direct educational practices using European approaches without fundamental transformations on the mental (world-view) level?"
2. "Which component is more important for essential changes in Ukrainian higher education on the way of sustainable development ideas implementation?"

We are convinced that a lack of sustainable development world-view orientations has a greater priority than the modernization of existing practices. Rebuilding the old system is a rather unpredictable right. Perhaps this is why reforms in Ukraine are slow and difficult to implement today. But the strategy of sustainable development is an optimal alternative to the formation of an effective educational system in the world and, in particular, in Ukraine. Efficiency in this case is based on the existing potential of consolidation of society and the world community.

Educational problems which restrain the implementation of Sustainable Development ideas at Ukrainian higher education

1. Lack of orientation in high level of students' responsibility. Ecological responsibility is a part of an individual's responsibility which should be one of the main directions of educational influence, but is not qualitatively implemented. The educational system is not oriented on forming a series of citizenship values including responsible ecological behaviour etc.

2. The education system is still oriented on the standards of classical education model where an ecological imperative is absent. The classical education model conceptualized in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by Komensky, Diesterweg, Pestalocci and others. This model logically does not contain ideas of global impact of the nature, risks for human surviving in the face of global ecological changes etc. Thus, there is a lack of "green knowledge", "green values" at the center of the education system.

3. No clear vision of "future human image". The anthropological project of the human is not clearly conceptualized. The role of the ecological mentality is not defined for future generations. Thus, educational approaches for a new type of human are not defined and not implemented.

4. Education lives according to the neoliberal ideology. Education is comprehended in terms of economic profits and long-term strategies such as “education for future” have marginal status. Sustainable development ideas with ones’ long-term ideology contradict the economic mechanisms of the contemporary education.

5. Education for Sustainable Development still has not received the prerequisite level of theoretical substantiation. The philosophy of education can formulate the strategies of formation of developed ecological mentality, but Ukrainian modernization processes have stochastic nature having a lack of a clear vision of an educational policy for Sustainable Development.

6. There is a gap between contemporary educational values in Ukraine and those in developed countries. Ecological values are very important for developed countries that correspond with countries’ educational approaches (post-materialism and pro-environmental values are becoming more and more important for people worldwide). In order to become a part of the world of global higher education, Ukraine should perform a revision of key educational values.

7. The cognitive strategies should be based on the flexible non-linear cognitive approaches. Such an approach is fruitful for solving contemporary and future ecological problems, but they are still linear in general in the Ukrainian educational tradition. The ecological problems are very complex and cannot be solved without a new cognitive orientation of students.

The weakness of the world-view foundation for implementing Sustainable Development ideas at Ukrainian institutions of higher education

1. Ecological paternalism. In the situation of world-view nihilism, the majority of individuals have paternalistic sentiments. Thus, they do not comprehend oneself as true subject of social activity (firstly, ecological activity). Students think that their impact of ecological situation is too minimal for changes. They expect that somebody (President, Government, World Bank) will solve big ecological problems on the higher level of social hierarchy and do nothing to change their everyday practices such separation of domestic wastes and so on.

2. The educational community believes in European standards and believes that Oxford or Cambridge educational methods would be a miracle. In reality, an external experience needs to be revised theoretically and implemented on the new world-view platform. Fruitful approaches work only on corresponding fundament of values: blind copying does not work.

3. Part of the educational community overestimates the value of the Ukrainian pedagogical tradition. Thus, rational mechanisms and new ideas (such as Sustainable

Development) get marginalized on the background of irrational beliefs in scientific and cultural heritage.

There are a lot of educational ecological pathologies. It is normal for a Ukrainian teacher of ecology to wear long fur coat. In addition, the outdated principle of the hierarchy of life forms is widespread. According to it, a lot of people in higher education environment actively manifest ecological discriminations such as speciesism (dominant status of the human being at the hierarchy of living organisms; exclusion of all non-human animals from the rights, freedoms, and protections afforded to humans). It also resonates with the ecological nihilism present in Ukrainian society in general (Ukraine has archaic regulatory framework in the sphere of animal rights protection; Ukrainian circuses use animals; charity activity in the ecological sphere is poor).

## CONCLUSION

Consequently, the idea of Sustainable Development is important as given the following factors:

1. The idea of Sustainable Development forms an idea of the purpose and overall strategy of human life. Such a conscious and responsible attitude to the consequences of human activity is urgently needed for the modern world.

2. The overall purpose and strategy of the activity is a powerful factor in consolidating the efforts of mankind. Destructive practices, such as armed conflicts, imperial systems and thoughtless and unlimited consumption are a worthy alternative proclaimed as a program of goals for the transformation of reality.

3. The Principles of Sustainable Development are intended to harmonize the anthropic, social and natural spheres. The level of critical thinking, the development of modern technology and environmental consciousness embodies the preconditions for an optimistic view of the future instead of the pessimistic position of a helpless victim.

4. The implementation of the principles of Sustainable Development appropriately justified on the basis of discursive ethics of K.-O. Appel as a dialectic of social and individual in the communicative space of a democratic society.

5. Thanks to the Sustainable Development Strategy, the universalization of the conceptual content of the "environmental" takes place. Ecology is not considered more than one of the factors of production and economy, but as the initial criterion of life support.

Ukrainian higher education is a fruitful case for understanding the problem of forming an ecological way of thinking. Both developed countries as well as developing ones should make

education policies more “green” in order to implementing of Sustainable Development principles.

Wide processes of modernizing higher education are deeply connected with cultural and historical tradition of each educational system. There are no “ready for implementation” strategies of higher education: the heuristic approaches of American or Polish higher education need deep reflection using methods of the Philosophy of Education for implementation in the postcolonial (post-Soviet etc.) cultural landscape.

Educational strategies for the formation of a high level of ecological mentality and ecological worldview correlate with the general level of society well-being. Education can promote and develop the internal needs of students to be real “agents of changes” for Sustainable Development in the future. Thus, the modernization of education should be only a part of a complex societal modernization project.

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