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EFFECTIVE STEPS TOWARD GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY: DETERMINING FACTORS AND CONDITIONS

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Abstract

The need for the transition to a new socio-natural world development model which later came to be known as “sustainable development” was realized in the mid-20th century. Nevertheless, the implementation of the sustainable development strategy adopted by the UN countries has been slow, which makes it impossible to reduce the scale and degree of negative anthropogenic impact and to prevent the emergence of new challenges, risks and threats. The article aims to identify the factors and conditions necessary for a more effective implementation of the sustainable development strategy. Sustainable development is considered to be a global civilizational process capable to resolve the global socio-natural contradiction between the growing needs of humanity and the inability of the biosphere to meet these needs. It is shown that the process of transition to sustainable development is hampered by socio-economic, political and conceptual problems-reasons, whose solution will allow implementing the sustainable development strategy more effectively. The authors discuss the areas where there is the greatest need for a transition to sustainable development – the spheres of security and education. It is advisable to use anticipatory mechanisms and tools in these areas, to ensure security through sustainable development in a more adequate interpretation, to provide education for sustainable development and to have the political will of state leaders. These issues are most important for further discussion and research. The results show ways to improve the concept of sustainable development as well as to prioritize the most effective and most timely practical actions to achieve global sustainability.

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1. Introduction

Socio-natural processes have a special place among global phenomena, as the emergence and development of currently existing global problems are related mostly to human interaction with nature. With the increasing globalization, the negative anthropogenic impact has become more noticeable and has acquired a planetary scale. The modern stage of world development is characterized by global changes in social, economic, political, environmental and other spheres (Weizsäcker & Wijkman, 2018). Strengthening of negative trends is added by geopolitical transformations accompanied by increased political instability that threatens security at different levels.

2. Problem Statement

It becomes evident that the current security system fails to cope with a wide range of global problems that also indicates the need for a transition to sustainable development (SD). Despite the fact that in recent years the interest in the ideas and principles of SD has considerably grown, the very process of implementing the SD strategy adopted at the UN summits is ineffective and too slow to fundamentally change the current situation.

3. Research Questions

About half a century passed after the publication of the first report to the Club of Rome, which revealed the contradictions in the system “man-society-nature”, and the number of global socio-natural problems has only significantly increased (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972; UN, 1987; Weizsäcker & Wijkman, 2018). For this reason, it is needed to identify the circumstances and factors hindering the transition to SD.

4. Purpose of the Study

The authors set a goal to identify the conditions and factors necessary for successful implementation of the sustainable development concept and strategy. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were formulated: to analyze the reasons that make the transition to sustainable development slow and inefficient and to highlight priority areas that should be considered in terms of the achievement of global sustainability.

5. Research Methods

The theoretical basis of the study includes research papers of scientists, philosophers, political and public leaders on the problems of sustainable development, education, security and international relations in the context of the issues under consideration. The research materials comprise a number of documents published by the UN and its agencies (including the United Nations Environment Programme – UNEP), the CIA World Factbook, strategies, concepts, messages and decrees of different governments around the globe, reports of governmental and non-governmental organizations, including reports to the Club of Rome, which have had and continue to have a great impact on the development of SD, security and education

issues (Pestel, 1989; Meadows et al., 1972; Meadows, Meadows, & Randers, 1992; Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 2005; UN, 1987; UN, 2015).

The authors apply such general scientific methods as induction and deduction, comparison and analogy, description and explanation, synthesis and analysis, the use of which allows conducting a comprehensive study of the reasons that impede the effective achievement of global sustainability. The article draws on the hypothetical-deductive method, the historical, evolutionary and systematic approaches, as well as on the methods of conceptual modeling and forecasting to determine the prospects for implementing the sustainable development concept and strategy.

6. Findings

The study revealed the key problems that have a negative impact on the implementation of SD. The authors analyzed the nature of the identified problems and established that they primarily cover socio-economic, political and conceptual areas. As it turned out, it is the imperfection of the sustainable development concept that directly or indirectly affects the implementation of the strategy for achieving sustainability in different fields. Further, we examine each group of problems separately.

Socio-economic problems. The central problem of the socio-economic sphere is that the participants of the modern economic model, which operates through market mechanisms, are unwilling to make changes necessary for the transition to SD. Despite the growing number of crisis phenomena in the economy, proponents of the current economic system still hold the view that market mechanisms are able to independently regulate internal processes and respond to external negative impacts. The leading economic principle is the use of natural resources aimed only at the economic efficiency, although it has long been proven that this approach leads to the environmental deterioration, the lack of resources and, as a result, to degradation and even the possible death of civilization.

The desire to preserve the economocentric model of the world is reinforced by the concerns regarding the transition to alternative models of economic development: “green economy” and circular economy (Milios, 2018). Despite the denials contained in various UN studies and reports, SD is often seen as a threat to the existing level of economic growth and employment (UN, 2015). It is believed that the transition to SD will lead to a significant economic slowdown, which in turn will affect the increase in unemployment (Khovavko, 2016). This is confirmed by the financial difficulties and the lack of access to innovative technologies by many countries.

There is also a widespread point of view that the SD model is a tool of “soft power” used by Western countries to consolidate their leading positions in the economy and maintain low levels of development in other countries by controlling their resource capacity, economic growth and energy sector (Khovavko, 2016). A substantial impediment to SD is the lack or total absence of economic incentives in many countries and state support for enterprises favoring the restructuring of production in accordance with new principles.

Initially, the resolution of the main socio-natural contradiction associated with the inability of the biosphere to meet the rapidly growing needs of humanity was a basic reference of the sustainable development concept and strategy. However, it has become evident over the years that, in addition to the global contradiction mentioned above, there is an apparent contradiction between the modern economocentric unsustainable development and the transition to SD by the world community. The

implementation of the “sustainable transformation” has proved incredibly complicated and has highlighted a lot of problems that had not been previously thought of.

Political problems. The transformation of the geopolitical landscape and, as a result, the formation of a polycentric international system leads to different contradictions between countries and even to non-cooperation. When losing the positive results of globalization, human civilization cannot be considered as an integrated whole that runs counter to the global idea of SD (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). Increasing volatility and the further erosion of the existing international system are reflected in international and, moreover, global insecurity and widen the gap between security and development. Meanwhile, without ensuring various forms and types of security it is impossible to go ahead with SD, which in principle should be the safest type of development from all previously existing ones.

Another important problem in the political sphere is the lack of political will among many state leaders that makes difficult to achieve the implementation of SD strategy at both national and global levels, because it is the head of state who usually determines the path to development. The pressure on the government policy by the fuel and energy companies and other business entities also negatively affects the transition to SD. A change in the course of development seems to be disadvantageous for traditional energy companies because they associate sustainable development with the loss of influence and profits.

Similar to the situation in socio-economic sphere, the incorrect interpretation of its ideas and goals is an obstacle to the transition to SD. Sustainable development is considered as one of the tools of “soft power” that poses a threat to the sovereignty of states and their national interests. Political problems of the transition to SD are controversial and have not been sufficiently developed, especially in connection with the need to form global governance.

Conceptual problems. The third group of problems covers the deficiencies in the content of the very SD concept (dating back to the 1990s), which includes only three spheres of human activity: social, economic and environmental. At the same time, environmental aspect, prevailed in the SD concept, makes it one-sided and impedes the transition to global sustainability.

As the research in the field of SD was mainly focused on environmental aspects, the challenges and threats related to socio-natural interactions were considered as the most dangerous. The very idea of transition from unsustainable development to a safer one arose the awareness of global environmental problems that lead to an anthropogenic planetary catastrophe. After a while, global problems that affect not only environmental but also other spheres became more acute, but the concept continued to be seen as a way to prevent mostly environmental threats. However, due to the above, it is hardly appropriate to focus on environmental and natural resource security types only.

There are many types of security that the modern concept of SD does not adequately address (Bartenev, 2015; Yudin, 2017). The issue of security has not been fully realized by a number of countries when negotiating the sustainable development goals and for this reason has only been partially raised. Today, there is growing evidence that shows a close interconnectedness between development and security. It means that SD and the world community as a whole are directly dependent on the level of different security types. That is why the content of the SD concept should include the security sphere and a number of other areas of social activity.

Attention should also be drawn to the contradiction between the globalization processes and the narrow triad of directions for achieving global sustainability. It is especially important to direct other globalization processes, which in their essence are objective consequences of world development, to the transition to sustainable development.

All the problems described above reduce the opportunities for developing adequate measures to deal with existing problems and prevent the emergence of new contradictions and difficulties in implementing a new civilization strategy. An integrated and full-fledged transition to a new development form requires the expansion of research field of a wider range of problems, especially in the global dimension. It is clear that the transition to SD will need an improvement in its perception that will make it possible to overcome difficulties, some of which seem to be now even insurmountable (especially demographic problems).

By examining the main factors that have negative impact on the implementation of the SD strategy, it becomes possible to determine the conditions and measures necessary for effective achievement of global sustainability. Further, we identify priority areas that may have the most effective influence on achieving global sustainability. These are the spheres of security and education.

Attention should be paid to the fact that the means of ensuring security (and especially global security) have to be mainly anticipatory. The existing mechanisms are local and short-term and are used to respond and eliminate threats that have already arisen. The emerging threats are not only local and regional; they also appear on a global scale. That is why it is necessary to be able to anticipate such problems and make efforts to prevent their development and spread, and therefore the security mechanisms and means must be anticipatory and not only protective.

Each and every sphere should be secured through SD, although the humankind will have to identify priority areas due to the limited forces and resources. Of course, the issue of environmental security is acute and requires special attention, but this does not mean that attention to other areas and forms of security must be weakened.

In the modern globalized world, where processes and phenomena occurring in different spheres influence each other to some extent, it is not enough to change the national security strategy of one state without making changes to the security system of another. Negative factors that violate the principles of the integrity of the state, its sovereignty and national interests, conflicts and wars that take place on the territory of one state and any other security threats will at some point break the security system of the countries neighbouring this state. Unilateral actions will not succeed in achieving goal of preserving human civilization and planet biosphere as a whole. Ensuring security, especially on a global scale, is a complicated process, the implementation of which requires taking appropriate measures in all the most important areas.

It is the education sphere, in our opinion, that is intended to have a positive impact not only on ensuring security through SD, but also on the whole process of effective global sustainability achievement. According to the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, education is “a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and an essential tool for good governance, informed decision-making and the promotion of democracy” (UNECE, 2005, para. 6).

Educational processes contribute to the formation of public consciousness that determines the behavior of society and its relations with the outside world (Ursul & Ursul, 2018). The knowledge and

values obtained by humanity influence the decision-making process that, in turn, affects the future both human civilization and entire planet.

In contrast to the security sphere, where the link with sustainable development has been underestimated, education for sustainable development (ESD) is considered as a priority direction for the development of the modern world. In the list of goals adopted at the UN Summit on SD in 2015 the goal to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” takes quite high fourth place after the issues of combating poverty and hunger, as well as ensuring healthy lives and well-being (UN, 2015). To achieve this goal, at the World Education Forum the Incheon Declaration was adopted, which determined the status of education as a “driving force” of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2016).

Education for sustainable development has acquired special significance and place thanks to the success of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) from 2005 to 2014 and the ensuing development of the Global Action Programme on ESD and the Roadmap for its implementation (UNESCO, 2013; UNESCO, 2014). At the UNESCO World Conference held in 2014 in Japan, state representatives announced the results of their activities in the field of ESD and confirmed the importance of the further ESD development (Mazurov, 2015; UNESCO, 2014).

Despite the significant success in the spread of ESD and its inclusion in the governmental agendas (with particular success in such countries as Japan, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands), it is notable that there are certain problems on the way of promoting “sustainable education”. There is still a lack of awareness and education of society and especially its representatives. The use of the phrase “sustainable development” in the speech of politicians often occurs solely due to the relevance of the topic, rather than from understanding of the ideas behind this concept and desire to change unsustainable development model.

The problem of ESD identification with environmental education only is an important issue to be solved (Ursul & Ursul, 2018). Environmental education should certainly be a kind of subsystem for the whole ESD, but the subject of sustainable development is much wider than environmental issues. For example, most educational institutions teach such disciplines as Ecology and Environmental Management, but it does not mean that these courses provide suitable information on the SD model and the importance of its implementation. There is a need to include and conduct self-contained courses and disciplines on SD issues that will focus on the study of ideas, objectives and goals of sustainable development. In addition, it is important to improve university education as well as high school education that promote the initial stage of developing careful attitude towards the environment and the sense of responsibility for the future of the state and all humanity.

Experience has shown that the overall process of the SD strategy implementation lags behind the formation of ESD within it. On the one hand, changes in the educational sphere are the driving force for other areas, because education for sustainable development contributes to the formation of anticipatory global collective consciousness, focused on co-evolutionary interaction with the environment and decision-making on the overcoming and prevention of new dangerous challenges and threats. On the other hand, the process of creating such an intelligent environment will be implemented over several generations, but the development and application of anticipatory mechanisms and tools are needed now, since even the provision of ESD requires a safe and sustainable socio-natural environment that could be provided by the

system of security through SD. This once again confirms the fact that in order to achieve global sustainability it is important to integrate the ideas and principles of SD into all spheres of human activity. The priority areas, without which it seems impossible to achieve mentioned goals, remain the spheres of security and education.

7. Conclusion

Formally, the transition to SD, started with the decade 2005-2014, not merely coincided with the UN Decade of Education for SD. During that time, it became obvious that the process of achieving global sustainability turned out to be unprecedentedly complicated and has not yet yielded expected results, although some mindset transformation and partial change in the modern development towards a new civilization model were initiated. A new generation educated on SD issues will have to significantly accelerate the transition to global sustainability.

The study revealed that among the reasons for the slow and inefficient movement in “sustainable direction” there are such problems as one-sided vision of the SD concept, the lack of political will of most UN member states’ leaders, active opposition composed of the big capital-holders, the use of defensive and local mechanisms and tools to combat challenges and threats and reluctance of the majority of world’s population to implement the SD strategy in its present form.

The existing problems primarily demonstrate the imperfection of the modern interpretation of SD itself rather than contradictions between the SD concept and practical actions on its implementation. Today, the SD concept is often presented as a range of measures aimed at changes in the economic, social and environmental spheres of human activity. In our opinion, such interpretation of the transition to SD has already ceased to meet present-day realities. Undoubtedly, if we compare the current situation with the time when the concept was considered solely in terms of ecology, we can note a gradual understanding of the fact that SD should be implemented not only in one particular field.

Nevertheless, the forms of activity not covered by SD impede the process of achieving global sustainability, therefore it is necessary to review approaches to the subject field of the emerging SD theory. Further improvement of the SD concept by including different spheres of human activity will deliver a more holistic approach to the problem of establishing a new system of relationships both within society and between society and nature.

At this stage of the transition to SD, the spheres of security and education are the most important areas of human activity requiring the incorporation of “sustainability” elements. The existence of mutual influence and close interconnectedness between security and development confirms the possibility of an effective transition to SD only if the ideas and principles of this development are introduced into a modern security system not just at the state and regional, but also at the global level. The globalization processes and the systemic nature of biosphere require human society to make common efforts to ensure security in accordance with the SD principles. The tools for ensuring “sustainable security” should be mainly anticipatory and aimed at predicting and preventing the emergence and spread of possible risks and threats.

Contrary to the issue of security that was given insufficient attention to in the process of developing and implementing an SD strategy, education was put on the path to transition to sustainability earlier than other fields. In spite of significant breakthroughs in education in the achievement of global sustainability,

there are still a lot of difficulties and problems in this sphere. Among them we can mention the identification of ESD mainly with environmental education, the shortage of specialists on SD issues, the lack of public and policymaker's awareness, the lack of interest in ESD in many states, etc. The removal of these obstacles will accelerate the overall process of the SD strategy implementation, which nowadays is considerably hampered in other areas. After all, education is the driving force for the achievement of ideas, principles and goals of sustainable development.

Paying more attention to the issues of security and education based on the SD strategy could allow moving away from the prevailing model of unsustainable development through the formation of a global collective consciousness aimed at the coevolution of humanity and environment and forging a sustainable and safe world.

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