The Green Political Thought and Sustainability from the Perspective of Postmodern Theories of the State

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Abstract: *The problem of sustainability is one of the most important and pressing problems of postmodern theories of the state. Although the history of the so-called green movement that is linked to the emergence of industrial society in the modern age, (to industrialism), in its contemporary form it is existing also a social movement, and a political ideology - see, among others, green parties - and a state (international) obligations. What distinguishes the green movement today from the earlier conservation movement is its emphasis on science and research. The main aim of this study is to examine how democratic political systems are dealing with the new challenges of sustainability and how they are finding political solutions to the demands of civil society. However, the problem of sustainability is a global issue, the governmental responses and/or the lack of response varies widely. It addresses the climate crisis primarily to the younger generation but also draws attention to the ability of social activism to influence public policy. In addition to social rights, fundamental values such as the right to a healthy environment or the right to ensure the integrity of the environment must be recognized. There are several philosophical approaches to the interdependence of man and nature. What distinguishes the green movement from the earlier one is its emphasis on science and research.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is a social-nature relation in general and has material and moral connotations, which is to be distinguished from sustainable development. (Barry, 1996. p. 115). In moral terms supposes a particular ethical attitude to the future, what kind of duties has the current generation to preserve the World's ecosystem. However, the diversity and complexity of the concept of sustainability is illustrated by the fact that the *right behaviour* can be about animal welfare, a commitment to the use of natural resources (see green energy), averting climate disaster, or even reducing wasteful consumption. What do these behaviours have in common? They presuppose conscious individual behaviour. At the individual level, prior to political decision-making process, we see primarily ethical citizenship (Bourban, 2023), personal ethical relationship to the world, i.e. from the individual's side, active self-responsibility such as conscious participation in recycling or energy conservation. On the political level, on the system level in the Habermas thinking it means participation in political decision-making, political organizations (green parties), or political movements. Democracies are based on the primacy of the representative principle and fundamentally, nation-state democracies face two major obstacles. One is the global nature of sustainability; the other is the strong link to social activism. The individual and the political level operate in a mutually reinforcing or weakening way, with serious feedback. The theory of the separation of civil society and political state, rooted in the eighteenth century, needs to be reframed. The paper aims to analyse how sustainability is embodied in participatory democracy as a decisive type of postmodern state. To do this, it is first necessary to examine the paradigm shift inherent in the term sustainability, which is transforming the relationship between society and the state/political system. Why green thinking can be effectively linked to this type of democracy?

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2.   THEORY: PARADIGM SHIFT IN ECO PHILOSOPHY AND THE SOCIAL ACTIVISM

The theoretical foundation of the birth of the modern state is the theory of the social contract, which became the dominant theory of political philosophy from the 16th century onwards, and despite its fictitious nature, it explained the distribution of rights and duties between governors and governed and focused on the political power's legitimacy. The source of the exercise of power is therefore the consensus of the governed. One of the most important consequences of the concept of contract is that members of the political community obey decisions taken by legitimate authority - laws -. Because of the political development in Europe, liberal values and the idea of popular sovereignty have been combined to create liberal democracy, which is a plurality whose functioning is guaranteed by the will of the electorate on the one hand and by institutionalised and guaranteed limits on state arbitrariness on the other. This political construct, however, seeks to safeguard the socio-economic interests of political communities, which, if we want to link it to the current problem of sustainability, is faced with two major obstacles in particular. Sustainability is a global problem; at the nation-state level, it can be a serious obstacle to finding a legal and political solution to the problem. Above the nation-state, there are international organizations and institutions such as the UN or the European Union, which have many conventions and action plans. It is enough to refer to two relevant documents. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the part of United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in 2015 undertook to address the global challenges of: eradicating poverty; finding sustainable and inclusive development solutions; ensuring human rights for all; and making sure that no one is left behind (European Commission, n. d.). The Green Deal (European Commission, n. d.) that covers the European Commission's proposals for action contains many policy areas: clean energy, sustainable industry; building and renovating; sustainable mobility biodiversity; from farm to fork; eliminating pollution; climate action, which need to be seriously addressed by 2030.

The other major obstacle is that the vast majority of states are not liberal democracies or are not democracies, so neither of these obstacles is overcome in terms of the effectiveness of policy-making. In contrast to the overconsumption of the developed Western democratic countries in the global economic system, the inequality between underdeveloped or poor regions in most parts of the world is increasing because of the unequal distribution of global goods and responsibilities. Beyond the international and state level of political decisions, sustainability requires strong social activism, which will not lead to results without a change of mindset. The arguments from sustainability usually propose wide-ranging changes in the present organization of society. Sustainability as an issue involves the translation from a political and ethical concept to a regulative-social principle expressed in law and politics, so requires deliberation, consent and actions.

The paradigm shift is about rethinking the relationship - the social contract - between humans and humans, concerning humans and ecosystems. Society and nature require a holistic approach, one possible approach being the natural contract of the French philosopher Michel Serres. As bizarre as the idea of Serres about a contract with nature, it points to the essence of a change of perspective. Serres offers a curious vision of Francisco Goya's famous painting. In The Duel with a Stick two men are fighting each other with clubs, knee-deep in a quagmire of mud. The outcome seems clear both antagonists will perish. Looking at the foreground and background of the scheme, you can/should see the difference. The armed conflict that is the engine of history is happening before our eyes, while nature is in the background. The foreground and background are swept up in reinforcing feedback mechanisms. According to Serres (2021), we must decide on peace amongst ourselves to

protect the world, and peace with the world to protect ourselves. Translated into the language of social norms, an ethical system needs to be developed at the global level that focuses not on man's dominance over nature, but on the relationship between man and nature, of which man is only a part. To work, and to exist in harmony with nature is a fundamental normative requirement of social activism. The risk to the survival of humanity and the survival of nature on earth. We have a crisis in which, while man has completely mastered the nature of the earth, his relationship with it is still based on the old principles that he developed thousands of years ago. The Brundtland Report of 1987 (Brundtland, 1987) was already the first to deal in detail with the issue of sustainability, and a new holistic approach is a very important part of this. This means, in a narrow sense, looking at the economic system as an emphatically integrated part of a larger whole, which aims to improve the quality of human life within the carrying capacity of the underlying ecosphere. In doing so, all forms of action are to be included within the framework of a social structure understood in conjunction with culture, the social dimension, the economy and technology.

Hans Jonas emphasizes that changes in the field of technology must be followed by changes in the field of ethics, the basic principles of which can be briefly summarized as follows. Therefore, in relation to these entities, each individual actor must consider the consequences of his behaviour. Jonas believed that "Humanity has no right to commit suicide" (Jonas, 1984, in Tóth, 1984, p. 403). The first condition for achieving harmony is to acknowledge the multidimensional embeddedness of the individual and to mobilize our conscious and mental energies. The individual is part of several micro-communities, cultural communities, the community of humanity, the whole ecological system of the Earth, and the living world. The first principle is the ontological primacy of nature, that nature can exist without man, but man cannot exist without nature. Some ancient philosophies (especially Stoicism and Epicureanism) were dominated by the proclamation of a life following nature. Later, in the teachings and lifestyle of St Francis of Assisi, Giordano Bruno, Rousseau, the German Romantics, Husserl, the critical philosophy of the 1960s, anarchism and feminism, among others, we find elements integrated by green philosophies. In addition, Eastern philosophies (religions), most notably Buddhism, have a very significant influence on ecological thinking. The second principle of ecological values is related to needs. The anthropocentric ethics are based on the dualistic worldview that has dominated since Descartes, with its main characteristic being the rigid separation of object and subject, of things and persons. Anthropocentric ethics often emphasise the privileged position of man, who is embedded in an economy that seeks to subordinate nature. Instead of a man-centred vision, bio centric ethics offers a new approach. The essence of bio centric ethics is that the environment is not to be protected for man, but for the environment itself. The environment is an intrinsic value, a system where changes are not an end in themselves, but are directed towards a state of equilibrium. Jonas translated Kant's categorical imperative for eco-ethics: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life or expressed negatively „Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life (Jonas, 1984, p. 11).

The evolution of natural systems, while maintaining an initial state of self-organisation and self-regulation, is always characterised by the restoration of equilibrium through the principles of cooperation and coexistence of living beings. Moltmann (1990) argues that classical liberties, socio-cultural rights and the rights of the living environment can be integrated into a coherent system. Man's privileged position in the natural competition of species, largely due to technology, must be reintegrated into the harmonious order, without which we can become victims of our own power, by acknowledging the embeddedness of our activity and renouncing the arrogant belief in man's omnipotence.

3. METHODS: CONCEPTUALIZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARADIGM SHIFT AND THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The theorization of the relationship between man and nature, in particular the transformation of anthropocentric ethics into bio centric ethics, is an important prerequisite for the analysis of the dimensions of social activism. The following features essentially characterize green political ideals, despite ideological differences: communitarianism (communitarian ethical approach), the need for global justice in the sharing of resources, non-violence with some extreme exceptions, since peace is a prerequisite for harmony with nature, and the need for sustainable economic development. While classical liberalism emphasizes the protection of self-interests and freedom, the liberal state does not dictate the moral goals its citizens are to achieve. (Dobson, 2007, p. 151). The fundamental principle is that anyone can do anything, provided he does not harm others. The economic liberalism of Adam Smith, and within it the concept of the invisible hand, clearly calls on all actors to seek only their own benefit, assuming that competition and the 'invisible hand' of the market will ultimately lead to the common good. In our time, economic liberalism (see neoliberalism), which is becoming not only increasingly influential but also increasingly doctrinaire, stresses that the individual is responsible at most only for himself, for the pursuit of his own interests, i.e. it denies the responsibility of the actor towards others. In this way, a behavior can only be morally restricted if it clearly harms others. The question arises as to how we interpret the concept of "others". The currently prevailing understanding of 'others' predominantly refers to concrete people living in the 'here and now', i.e. members of a particular community. Hans Jonas pointed out that the problem of harming 'others' who live far away from us in space (e.g. third world populations) and time (future generations) is becoming increasingly relevant. If we include in the concept of 'others' the whole humanity as it exists today, as well as members of future generations, we take a significant step towards an anthropocentric environmental philosophy. Such an interpretation, of course, significantly narrows the range of morally acceptable behavior for members of a given community. Consequently, liberalism may be compatible with a moderate environmental philosophy. Moreover, if we include natural beings in the notion of 'others', we arrive at the platform of a radical (non-anthropocentric) environmental philosophy.

The green political philosophy contains an eco-authoritarian conception. The authoritarian solution is that authoritarian coercive measures are needed to avoid environmental catastrophe. At higher levels (national, supranational), democracy would be confined within ecological limits, for example, a competent elite would be responsible for the allocation of dwindling resources. At the local level, however, the most direct possible grassroots democracy is advocated, i.e. each small community could decide through direct participatory decision-making. The eco radicalism argues for the implementation of direct participatory decision-making through the consistent decentralization of political centers. Eco-radicalism has its theoretical roots in Marxist social philosophy. Marx observed the process of human alienation in the exploitation and inequality characters of the capitalist economy, in which the profit-oriented behavior of the capitalist class leads to the increase of the pauperization of the working class. Wallerstein's theory of the world system, which was based on Marxism, projected the phenomena into global capitalism, the center-states of the Western countries, whose economic development is ensured by exploiting the periphery and semi-periphery states. What both ideological approaches have in common is their emphasis on citizen participation, but while the former is at the local level, the latter is also at the state level. In contrast to the ethical norms that govern individual behavior, political will seeks to respond to the challenge of allocating the global resources that are still available. Political ideals are motivated by ethical norms and values, but political decision-making involves the resolution of conflicts of interest.

4. RESULTS

A change in moral outlook also requires a new style of political leadership, one that does not seek to satisfy short-term interests, but recognizes that timely austerity (e.g. in energy use) will provide greater freedom for all in the long term. According to Caldwell modern man must somehow become better than he is; this is not utopian idealistic advice, but advice necessary for survival (Caldwell in Lányi, 2021, p. 135). In this long-term policy-making process, the participatory democracy model can provide a solution at the national level. One of the greatest failures of twentieth-century democratic political systems was the growth of voter passivity. Is successful cooperation sustainable in a society whose members are bound together by civic obligations, law and self-interest, asks Michael Sandel, a prominent figure of communitarian ethics (Sandel, 2002). The liberal, representative democracies of Western Europe mobilized voters primarily through national elections. The problem of sustainability, on the other hand, requires the promotion of activity between electoral cycles, which undoubtedly has to be carried out at the local level.

At the local level, it is also easier to convince the local population to support a particular issue, and local NGOs, citizens' forums, and professional organizations can get involved in local decision-making processes.

It should also be highlighted that many forms of social activity are possible and that they can promote each other.
1) Improving own life (quality of life), either individually or in a small community (e.g. a residential or workplace community at the level of daily routines) / micro-level,
2) Promoting changes in a particular area, e.g. animal welfare or the preference for renewable green energy sources. This requires a greater degree of social cohesion. Involving NGOs and professional organizations can improve water quality or animal welfare at local and regional level /micro-level,
3) It is possible to raise awareness and sensitize society and policy-makers in a particular area /micro and macro-level,
4) 2-3 influences the state legislative process / macro-level.

Citizen's choices can play an important role in improving the environment and quality of life, but the complexity of environmental problems, the distance of goals and the different perceptions of the good life mean that the willingness to participate in decision-making is lower at national (state) level.

At the same time, sustainability is a global issue, closely linked to the problem of equitable distribution of goods and burdens, but its recognition can be achieved through a range of actions at local level.

Think globally, act locally and immediately could be a call to action, creating micro-communities of citizens and then engaging in the decision-making process at local level. At the level of state legislation, this requires professional and social reconciliation of interests, which varies greatly from one political culture to another. It is hard for people to give up their freedom to consume according to their desires, and it is hard for them to change, because it is against their short-term self-interest. According to the economist David Korten, one of the defining elements of the American mentality is the cultural experience of the abundance of free land at the beginning of their history, which led to the so-called frontier or cowboy mentality or ethic. (Korten, 1996).

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The citoyen, in the Rousseauian sense, (Rousseau, 2001) is capable of weighing the perceived long-term good of the community alongside his short-term self-interest. To do so, however, he must have sufficient information and, if necessary, expertise in the matter to be decided. Awareness of environmental risks is more than a difficult task when it comes to the trade-off between convenience, job preservation and the present versus the unforeseen future. Not to mention interpreting complex concepts such as biodiversity or sustainable development for the average citizen. On the other hand, it also means that the public, when it comes to their own immediate environment, can easily become hysterical in a political environment where they distrust decision-makers and public information. Environmental justice is still a rather weightless value in the world of politics, so the principle that 'doing good pays' is politically false. A parliamentary election, a referendum or an action of civil disobedience offers an opportunity to change the legislation acts. It follows that the creation of a single global environmental law seems essential. In particular, it is important to regulate fairly the use of scarce natural resources and natural capital, and to protect endangered species and areas more effectively. In addition, it is essential to establish strict rules that are commensurate with the environmental pressures on production/service provision and that are binding on all competing economic operators. Such regulation would certainly appear to be a restriction on the market, but on closer examination, it is merely a means of ensuring a more environmentally fair playing field.

Another point of debate relates to the undemocratic political systems in underdeveloped and poor countries. They are vulnerable to the global economy and suffer from global crises. More effective international actions are needed. To get a clearer picture, we need to start by comparing two currently competing ethical concepts.

a)   The so-called lifeboat ethic (Hardin in Lányi, 2021, p. 116) assumes that resources are finite, and therefore that each geographical area, like a lifeboat, has a proposed maximum number of passengers. However, there are few lifeboats, not enough room for everyone, and the distribution of resources becomes unequal on a force-by-force basis.

b)   The so-called 'spaceship ethic' (Shrader-Frechette in Lányi, 2021. pp. 130-131) requires a shift in consciousness from individual ethics to community ethics, and from a society of rights to a society of duties. The Earth itself is a spaceship, of which every single geographical area and state is a part. The community is not only the human world but also, the entire ecosystem. On this spaceship, participants who have little or no share in the resources - think water shortages, droughts and other natural disasters - do not want to travel, while others on the spaceship enjoy and use many services and goods.

A more equitable distribution between the unequal/disadvantaged regions requires a more solidarity-based and consumption-reducing approach in developed regions. The solution must therefore come from the developed countries, and the group of these countries should be the driving force behind the solution. From the state and political actors, we are back to the starting point for a change of perception for a paradigm shift, which is essential for understanding and managing sustainability.

5.   CONCLUSION

The global problem of sustainability has challenged both the social mentality and the political decision-making process. Western individual values, coupled with consumerism have become the norm in liberal Western democracies. The capitalist economy, also globalizing behind the political system, has reached the limits of its expansion. The solution is an environmentally friendly

policy based on the protection of nature and ecosystems, which puts the economy at the service of sustainable development. Its success is highly doubtful. What is needed is a holistic approach to the nature-society relation, an increase in (civil) social activism, and a reduction in inequalities in the global world. Sustainability calls attention to the need for a complex policy-making process that involves both sub-state and supranational levels. Effective state legislation will not be possible if society does not wake up to the challenge of sustainability. Effective state legislation is not possible without consciously coordinated legislation on a global scale and across states. There are many arguments in favor of participatory democracy. Unlike traditional liberal democracy, it can mobilize citizens at the local level and involve them in decision-making. This is particularly important because sustainability seems a distant and abstract goal, in contrast to the interests of the individual in the present and the consumer's desires for immediate satisfaction. For the moment, the global mindset is not working. Being in solidarity and active for humanity is a much bigger challenge than being active for our local environment. Increasing the willingness to participate in local decision-making can have a positive impact on the macro-level of state legislation. This of course requires a community-centered, solidarity-based approach. Community spirit and social/political participation are mutually reinforcing.

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