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Axiological Foundations of the Sustainable Development Strategy¹

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Abstract

Environmental degradation and economic underdevelopment of resource-rich territories occur as a result of the shift in the development of the nature-society system towards false goals and ideals. The sustained limited worldview has led to the formation of an unsustainable economic model along with the consumer attitude towards the world (nature and people) and unfair distribution of responsibility for the overexploitation of natural resources. Without overall strategic leadership of the state, the evolutionary resolution of arisen developmental contradictions will take a long time. Meanwhile, the approach of the bifurcation point in the form of the environmental catastrophe indicates the need for modeling social development by the state for the quick and efficient overcoming of the entrenched patterns of thought and conduct. To enable complex and uncontroversial development one should define the axiological foundations of the strategic development. Thus, the goal of this paper is to determine the overarching ideological principles capable of ensuring the co-evolution of Man and Nature for an indefinitely long perspective. This paper exposes the role of axiological foundations in the development of the nature-society system, and of the necessity to realize the destructiveness of the existing model for coping with path dependence. The principle of environmental and social justice, as well as the principle of the inherent value of nature, are highlighted as the principles transforming the system of nature-society interaction and shaping the right to sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable development; value foundation; cultural economy; regional strategy; ecological and social justice, the rights of nature

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“Ecologic effectiveness of Strategic development: valuable basis and mechanism of evaluation (a case study of the Baikal region)”

1. Introduction

According to the internationally acclaimed and supported sustainable development concept, meeting the needs and aspirations of modern humanity should not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [27]. Consequently, sustainable development includes the following concepts: the concept of need in education, eradication of poverty and hunger, clean drinking water, clean air, economic growth, and gender equality; and the idea of limitations necessary for ensuring the natural state of environmental balance. A reasonable combination of needs and limitations determining the most harmonious way of the long-term nature-society development is correlated with the problem of justice, which is among the axiological foundations of sustainable development.

As a measure of balance in the universe, justice is opposite to the injustice that generates disharmony, crisis, and degradation of the entire system. As a principle of social development, justice determines a measure to which the human needs are met. It aims to limit overconsumption by the rich and to struggle against under-consumption of the poor. A harmonious combination of the interests of various social groups is a matter of resource allocation and distribution of responsibility for the environmental disorder [8].

According to the Declaration on the Environment and Development environmental protection is an integral part of civilization's sustainable development strategy [27]. This imperative can be viewed as the central principle of the right to sustainable development. In alignment with the principle of justice it presupposes social (creation and preservation of the most favorable conditions for human existence) and natural (in the context of the rights of nature and non-human organisms) aspects. Environmental requirements to be considered in the course of development and taking of the environmentally crucial decisions (adoption of normative acts, running of a business and economic activity, and so on) define the content of the society's right to a healthy environment and of the immanent rights of nature, including the inherently valuable non-human organisms.

As the development principles of modern civilization social and environmental justice along with the acknowledgment of the rights of nature determines the overall direction of social-natural development involving all spheres of public life and impacting personal development.

A controlled pre-arranged development based on ethical imperatives presupposes a qualitative development and social transformation, but not the achievement of transient economic indicators at the expense of environmental degradation and violation of the rights of specific population groups.

The path dependence effect when the pre-formed patterns of thought and conduct retain their power despite the understanding of their contradiction with the very essence of life (the real value of life) stands in opposition to the establishment of a new axiological foundation of the civilizational development [10, 11, 26]. The practical shift from the market economy, from the pursuit of high GDP indicators by the states, from the prevalence of the national interests over

the global ones and of the corporate interests over the universal human ones appears to be quite tricky. A new understanding of the world order is required: the understanding of our similarity, but not differences, which is only possible by open worldview and strategic thinking.

2. Methodological framework

This paper aims to define the axiological foundations required for a transition to a new quality of development. Due to the multidimensionality of the phenomenon under study, we chose to use a multidisciplinary approach that allows naturally bringing together knowledge from various scientific disciplines, such as economics, sociology, philosophy, and culture studies. By a comprehensive analysis, we managed to reveal the universality and the overall significance of the exposed principles in coping with the problems and contradictions of the technocratic civilization.

For the understanding of a potential of "environmental and social justice" and "recognition of the rights of nature" as the overarching ideologic principles of sustainable development we utilized the systemic approach that allowed unveiling the existing patterns and interconnections in the socio-natural development.

The dialectical method allowed revealing the specific features of civilizational development, such as the interconditionality of economy and culture, the dependence of the new development path on the old one, and unity of social and environmental future.

Due to a combination of these methods, it is possible to form assumptions about the real (objective) world landscape. A study of development tendencies allows forecasting the efficiency of the axiological foundations under study in the sustainable development of the society.

3. Axiological foundations of the sustainable development strategy

3.1. Crisis as a need for new foundations of social development

The significance of the previous path of social development in the interiorized individual mindsets is so high that the criticism of the existing social values is perceived as endangering the life itself by an individual whose worldview is being ruined. However, a transition to a new quality stage of development is impossible without an acknowledgment of the crisis character of modern civilization and without realizing the falsehood of the propagated ideals. The scale of deforestation, the decrease of biodiversity, global warming, air pollution, and social inequality should be neither taken as something acceptable, nor as a natural element of social development.

For quite a long time the world community was reluctant to acknowledge the fact that our civilization entered a stage of the socio-environmental crisis [9, P.98]. However, the recognition of the problem per se is not the problem's solution. It requires a decisive shift in the orientations of social development, as well as a transformation of the value foundation as the central motif of any human activity.

Values reflect cultural and historical reality. Their formation takes a long time. Instead of scientific-philosophical ideals and values, mass consciousness underwent enveloping of the mundane consciousness into a scientific theory. The result caused a contradiction between individual and public interests and between immediate and long-term needs.

Under such circumstances, the technological progress exacerbates the existing disproportions. On the other hand, science and technology do not necessarily presuppose parasitic attitude to the natural environment. They are capable of averting much destruction in the process of development advancing in alignment with the sustainable development imperatives [13, p.60-62].

Recognition of the imminent environmental and economic catastrophe allows realizing the nullity of false development goals and ideals because all values that form the *raison d'être* lose their meaning without existence as such [28, p.266-271].

It is precisely through a search for the reason to live that man sets free from everything false and alien to the human nature. However, a person lacking in spiritual development, devoid of comprehensive thinking and broad mindset more often than not will find his reason to live in possession of material goods and pleasures. Higher needs, such as the pursuit of the public good and understanding of inter-conditionality of everything in the world come with the development of awareness [23, P.72]. Thus we should speak of the interconnection between values and a level of individual and societal consciousness in general. Promotion of values relevant to sustainable development will contribute to the formation of the necessary personal qualities forming the institutional basis for the transition to a co-evolutionary noospheric civilization.

The *raison d'être* cannot be reduced to mere satisfaction of physical needs leading to a fragmentation of the holistic worldview into subjective realities and to a public degradation. The man needs a higher purpose that will allow the system to develop itself towards an unachievable ideal harmoniously.

The purpose of human life is defined by an answer to the question “what for?” filling meaningless existence with the spiritual benefit. The growing awareness broadens the worldview and leads to the understanding of the integrity of the I-World system enabling to express himself through creative activity and to feel the interconnectedness with everything living through the creation [23, P.73]. Acquiring spirituality as the understanding of his selfhood not only in the physical body but also in the products of his labor and the interconnection with the world makes the man immortal to a degree to which he sees his reflection in reality around. The connection with the world develops a responsible attitude to the results of one's deeds. The understanding of the essence of justice comes through compassion.

Meanwhile, the development vector of our civilization is shifting towards meeting the egoistic needs that oppose the individual to the public. A replacement of social norms by economic ones occurs. Individualism gains on the scale and this feeds the growing level of entropy in the social system [3, P.152]. Mechanisms of coping with the crisis become ineffective. Therefore the transition to sustainable development is urgently needed.

3.2. Interdependence of culture and economy as a factor of dependence on the past

As dependence on the specific features of a previous development path and dependence of the current choices on the historical and cultural past, the path dependence correlates with the idea of “cultural determinism” [2, 25]. Through the institutional structures, cultural peculiarities adjust a character of the long-term social-natural development [24]. That is to say, economic growth and crisis are the consequences of a particular worldview in a society. Orientation towards strong work, self-discipline, and future stipulate conservative attitude to the available resources and their most appropriate use [22, P.23]. Meanwhile, the presumed reduction in value of the resources (due to a progress of science and technology and an emergence of alternatives with the best quality-price combination), orientation towards high economic development indicators (sacrificing the environmental and social ones), and consideration of the average per capita income (with the colossal and still growing income divergence between the rich and the poor) is the guarantee of further development crises.

Exactly the assumptions about the desirable and the valuable form market demand and supply, affect the way natural resources are exploited, consumption level and production volumes. It is possible to conclude that the disharmony in social and natural relations is a result of:

1. Limited rationality in the behavior of subjects: a choice of not the best available variant, but still the lowest-cost variant [29]. Such a choice is not always similar to a social utility. Therefore, even an unsustainable product that is contrary to progress and human needs and engenders various destructions continues to be in high demand due to the unwillingness of economic actors to spend their resources on implementing a more harmonious solution.

2. Opportunistic behavior of the subjects, that is, a tendency towards violation of the existing rules and norms for personal profit whenever there is a chance [30]. Notably, such behavior reflects the values of not only individuals but the society as a whole. Orientation towards high monetary indicators is connected with a higher hierarchy of material values relative to the spiritual ones.

3. Influence of the transaction costs on system development [25]. The transaction costs are the costs that a subject bears for the achievement of the set goals. Unlike the transformation costs, which take into account the aspects of the human interaction with nature, the transaction costs reflect the relationships between people.

Subsequently, the worldview specificities of the economic actors impact the character of economic development. Culture and economy are ontologically intertwined since they are both aimed at the resolution of the single task, which is the “competitive selection of the best ways of human survival and realization of their relevant living needs” [16, P.268]. Human capabilities are limited, unlike human desires. This situation presupposes a need to choose from a multitude of alternatives of the most suitable variant following the set criteria and within the available resource limits. Individual desires are under the influence of social stereotypes, traditions, and assumptions about the good and the valuable. On the other hand, the subjective level also influences the shaping of public cultural patterns.

Not only are a subject's capabilities to satisfy his desires limited, but the human mind itself is unable to take the most rational decisions at all times. The rules created by man do not always conform to the public good, and the adopted development strategies can be fatal in a mid-term perspective despite being seemingly profitable in a short-term perspective. In practice, a gradual evolution of social relationships when the traditions and rules of behavior accepted by the majority and most suitable for survival are rooted presupposes a long duration and approbation of a multitude of dead-end development variants. On the other hand, an accelerated transition to new norms and rules of economic development and socio-natural interaction through strategically state-supported development faces a contradiction with the cultural background (relevant to the previous economic system).

As practice shows, the new rules of behavior take root only in the case when they assist in creating more materially well-to-do social entities [14, P.482]. Consequently, mindsets and action patterns non-compliant with the mainstream culture, but capable of providing necessary social guarantees virtually to all groups of the world population will very likely take root in the society.

Culture and economy cannot remain unchanged. They must develop like science, technology, law, morals, and other aspects of human life. However, to provide an indefinitely long co-evolution of man and nature, one should select the correct imperatives and moral benchmarks for development.

3.3. Values relevant to the sustainable development concept

By recognizing the crisis character of civilization's development and the growing reality of social and environmental catastrophes the humanity realized the necessity to search for a change of the present development vector. Undoubtedly, values are the leading element in the definition of culture, type of economy, policy and law inherent to civilization [15].

The sustainable development concept presupposes strategic development based on the systemic approach to ensure social justice and environmental protection. As noted previously, interests of all population groups on the planet should be optimally balanced for the inculcation of the new axiological paradigm. Therefore, such a complex system also requires a mechanism of self-regulation and self-improvement. Only by the organic combination of regulatory, cultural-ideological, and environmental-economic mechanisms, it is possible to overcome the dependence on the worldview principles of the technocratic civilization.

Owing to comprehensiveness and systemic nature of the mechanism institutionalizing the sustainable development the results of the ongoing transformations are subordinated to the overarching ideological principles. Values as the basis of culture determine the level of allowed behavior and the role of man in society and the world and orientate towards decent, responsible behavior. "Humanistic worldview and methodological focus on the world, which ensure unity of the spiritual and the practical" are formed by values [17, P.23].

At the same time, during the postmodern epoch culture and its social functions transform: a person is not suppressed by a group, but acquires a dominant role in social development [12, p.437-448]. A shift like this is caused by a deontological interconnection of economy and culture:

the "resource-based economy" gives way to the "human capital", the power of social traditions, rituals, regulations, and rules transforms into a form of individual power of professionals who set the course for the development of many spheres of modern society. Individual rights and freedoms have grown in a hitherto unprecedented scale, taken his or her equality with other group members. Freedom of expression has replaced limitations and duties. Institutes, norms, rules, and values inherited from the previous stage of development turn out to be irrelevant to the new period. They were made to cope with the tasks of the "entirely different time, created by other conditions and circumstances" [12, P.447]

In the absence of the regulators of the past, which determined a proportion between "must" and "maybe," the socium becomes unstable and loses its self-regulating and long-term planning abilities. Therefore, one of the recommended strategies under circumstances of uncertainty is "flexibility and suspicion to all long-term obligations" [4]. Assuming long-term obligations the humanity limits its capabilities, which may turn out to be more beneficial and efficient in the future.

The criterion of "flexibility" of a development strategy assumes an orientation of a system towards not quantitative, but qualitative benchmarks. In this case, criteria assessing the qualitative changes should replace the economic indicators of state development. On the other hand, accurate quantitative indicators are required for the understanding of progress in achieving the set qualitative goals of sustainable development.

Thus, the targeted benchmarks of civilization's development must take into account the following contradictory provisions: a necessity of long-term orientations and undesirability of long-term quantitative planning; a growing role of an individual and his creative initiative that comes with the realization of dependence of man on the socium and of the socium on nature; a necessity of economic development under the conditions of environmental limitations; humanity's responsibility to future generations for the results of its deeds and a recognition of the rights of nature (its subjectivity).

The following can be highlighted as the value foundations harmoniously combining these criteria and capable of ensuring efficient interaction between nature and man: the immanent value of biosphere and its components, reverence for life, non-violence as the only way to reach [20, p.28-32]. The recognition of nature's inherent value and its special significance as a "source of life," understanding of the dependence of human well-being on meeting the interests of the natural environment around (preservation of natural environmental balance) instead of juxtaposing man and nature, this and future generations, instead of imposing limitations by a framework of subjective (fragmented, biased) worldview forms a comprehensive world landscape reflecting the real mechanisms of socio-natural development (a socio-natural system is a higher order system relative to the social one, and thus the development laws of the latter should be subordinate to that of the higher order).

Law is undoubtedly one of the critical mechanisms of transition to sustainable development that influences the formation of the relevant consciousness. Since law relies on the coercive power of the state, not only does it regulate the existing social relationships, but also shapes the

future relationships. However, to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness of transitions, as well as to overcome the inertia of the old patterns of thought and action (along with the limited worldview of subjects and a tendency towards opportunistic behavior) the development strategy of the state should rely on relevant legal principles. In addition to current principles (democracy, rule of law, humanism, equal rights, justice, and correlation of rights and duties), which became the key to social progress in the previous development period one should consider recognition of the rights of nature, environmental justice (as an equal ensuring of the right to healthy environment regardless of income level, national or religious identity, and so on), social justice (just distribution of benefits from the exploitation of natural resources and risks of environmental responsibility).

Humankind's development is non-linear. The future that we form is a result of a conscious choice. The problems that the post-modern civilization has faced are reflections of false assumptions about the way society functions, the essence of the natural environment, and the world in general [5, 21]. The period of the mathematization of economics and deprivation of its cultural meaning alongside with the formation of assumptions about overconsumption and hoarding as the principal components of human life have become the reasons of a misbalance in the socio-natural system and caused the destruction of modern development.

3.4. Regional specifics of the transition to sustainable development

A territory characterized by its geographic, economic, historical, and legal value due to the dependence of the economy on culture will possess common specifics of further development. This circumstance conditions the efficiency of the use of a regional approach in the course of transition to sustainable development [19, p.16-20].

In the Russian Federation "autocracy and serfdom" are the central nodes of an interaction of the state, society, and nature [1, p.56-57]. On the one hand, strategic development demands consideration of the existing institutional milieu, since the efficiency of the transition mechanisms and means largely depends on this factor. On the other hand, one must overcome the influence of the traditional institutions because it is precisely they, which cause the destructions of the present. That said, the traditional institutes are not the reliable tools of the growth, and after first successes, they merely contribute to bringing the system back to its old framework [1, P.58].

At the same time, moving away from path dependence presupposes a quality transformation of the entire development paradigm, recombination of elements at work, and discarding of self-identity, which will inevitably lead to the identity crisis problem [1, P.54]. Indeed, the existence of inefficient institutes is the result of not only a desire of the dominant groups to conserve the current rules for the realization of their interests but also by bringing in a degree of certainty into the social relationships.

Entrenchment of the unfortunate initial institutional choice led to a misbalance in the "state – private property" system. The central line of economic development of the country is formed by a rational combination of needs of state authority and business, as well as mutual limitation of their ability to affect social development. The fusion of state power and business gives rise to

monopolies in the economy, stimulates corruption, hampers innovation and development, and causes a preference of the resource rent in the economic structure [1, P.56; 7].

Under such circumstances law turns from the regulator of social relationships oriented towards ensuring justice, equality, and humanism into a tool for the protection of the elite monopoly on natural resources, decent living standards, and quality education [1, P.58]. Oriented towards the interests of a narrow group of people claiming their right to natural resources, national development forms ugly developmental disproportions. These are the impoverishment of the population when there is a real chance to provide a decent living standard for everyone, demoralization, and degradation of the population, deterioration of ecology and, as the overall result, reduction of the national security level. Uncompetitive regions find themselves economically dependent on the more well-to-do neighbors. There is an outflow of professionals to the central regions of the country or abroad.

Meanwhile, nature cannot be someone's property because it is not human-made [6, p.134-136]. Claims of individual subjects to natural resources and natural objects testify to low spiritual development and a high degree of egoism in society. Nature is the common good, and as such, it cannot belong to any social subject.

As is evident from the above, Russian society is in need of new benchmarks for development. Attempts to resolve individual contradictions in the development produce only a temporary effect. A decisive partition is required from the system that ensures the prosperity of a narrow group of the population at the expense of the deteriorating living conditions for the rest, environmental degradation, rapacious attitude to the non-human organisms, and general depreciation of life and its meaning.

As the World Bank recommendations suggest, regional development strategies are capable of a better effect if they are oriented towards ensuring justice, but not qualitative economic indicators [31, P.47]. Axiological criteria of development provide the systemic character of planned transformations and allow to avert the identity crisis when separated from the traditional institutions. They radically change the situation without losing their relevance with time.

In the fast-changing postmodern society, the strategic goals must be flexible and independent from economic conditions. Otherwise, the development plan of the state can get obsolete already at the development stage as was the case of the long-term development concept for Russia until 2020 [18]. The problem of economic benchmarks is also aggravated by a large number of documents intermediating various levels and aspects of social development. Reliance on qualitative criteria is required for ensuring their uniformity.

Recognition of the rights of nature and ensuring of justice (from the social and environmental standpoints) as legal principles reflecting the environmental and ethical imperatives of sustainable development contribute to the formation of sustainable development legislation and noospheric comprehensive consciousness. They also allow avoiding the identity crisis while overcoming path dependence. Ignoring the nature of social development in the post-modern epoch, the mathematization of economics while ignoring the culturological factor, and reliance on traditional institutions is a denial of the objective worldview. The development

strategies based on values of the materialistic technocratic society lead towards unsustainable decisions when environmental and social well-being of a region are exchanged for temporary economic benefits. Therefore, the future of humankind depends on the axiological foundations of development.

4. Conclusions

The future of humankind depends on axiological values of development. Ignoring the interdependence of economy and culture, man and natural environment, past and present forms limited assumptions about the objective reality. Development imperatives that contradict the real laws of socio-natural interaction engender various systemic destructions in the development.

Environmental justice and recognition of the inherent value of nature, proposed as the axiological foundations of civilizational development, carry a significant potential of shaping comprehensive worldview and sustainable development-relevant consciousness. The qualitative benchmarks of development take into account the specific features of the postmodern society and can bring certainty into the rapidly changing social relationships.

As one of the principal tools of modeling the society, the law can ensure a comprehensive transition to the new quality of development. As criteria that determine whether the normative acts are relevant to the goal of an indefinitely long co-evolutionary development of nature and society, environmental justice and recognition of the inherent value of nature allow shaping sustainable development legislation and overcoming dependence on the assumptions about a necessary balance in the previous path.

The correctly set axiological foundations also impact the transformation of the institutional milieu and form a sustainable economic system that determines an endless cycle of innovations in reaching the ideals of the environmental-ethical development. Instead of an increase in the production scale and consumption of single-use goods that cause overexploitation of natural resources and growing waste, the economic development is driven by the increased demand for intangible benefits, recyclable materials markets, and demand for knowledge and production technologies.

Implementation of environmental justice principles and the recognition of the inherent value of nature manifest themselves in the evolution of legal, economic, and public institutions following the essence of sustainable development. It is realized by the equitable distribution of profits and responsibilities from the exploitation of natural resources, equitable economic development of society, and harmonious socio-natural relationships.

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