
Enhancing a Mechanism of Transition to Sustainable Development: Environmental Justice and the Inherent Value of Nature

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Abstract:

The necessity for a sustainable development strategy has been internationally institutionalized and substantiated by numerous interdisciplinary studies.

Nevertheless, the technogenic-consumer concept retains its influence due to a psychologically induced and temporally expanded character of the formation of public ideals, values, and purposes that determine an interaction between society and nature.

Dependence on the past development way is traceable in the existing legislative contradictions (when currently applicable or newly adopted laws contradict the sustainable development strategy). The legislation is a quintessence of public ideas on the character of human society's development (current and projected).

This article aims to justify the necessity to acknowledge the inherent value of nature to resolve the civilizational crisis.

Entrenchment of the "inherent value of nature" (contrary to the prevailing instrumental value) as a legal principle can resolve not only the existing problems of environmental legislation (and the associated national security threats, and challenges to prospects of an indefinitely long harmonious and just development of society), but also prevent them from forming in the future.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development, Inherent Value of Nature, Environmental Justice, Civilizational Crisis, Environment, Environmental Issues*

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1. Introduction

Human civilization faced a deep systemic crisis as a result of a discrepancy between the current developmental vector and the long-term goals of the humanity. Extensive natural resource development, predacious and consumerist attitude to the world around, an urge to "conquer" nature are the legacy of the previous way of development, irrelevant in today's reality. However, the attitude to the world around that had been forming for centuries, the urge to compete, and the willingness to show aggression for the survival display path dependence, when the entrenched way of thinking and acting retain their influence.

Such images had not contained a critical danger for the future of the civilization until the technological revolution changed a balance of power in the Man-Nature system. As a consequence, humanism triumphed. It is the humans who determine not only the course of their own lives but shape the reality for all living beings of Earth. Humans decide which organisms will exist, what will grow on this of that land plot, how the landscape will change in a particular locality. The humanity is "force shaping the planet," and environmental justice acts as an instrument of modeling the world, defining everything, from global atmospheric chemistry to species diversity in certain territories (Purdy, 2015).

Normative legal acts express a public will concerning modeling of the world around. They define the procedure and places of logging (which, if large-scale, can lead to catastrophic consequences), degree of air pollution (atmospheric emissions of harmful substances), water poisoning (industrial waste discharge in water bodies), possibilities of hunting various animal species, degradation of biodiversity, as well as other relevant issues.

The dimensions of human-made impact are rapidly approaching the ecological capacity of the biosphere. Overstepping this limit will make it impossible to restore the previous balance. At the same time, the humanity has not enough knowledge about the existing interrelations in the world around to realize the consequences of disturbing a natural ecological balance. It is necessary to understand that preserving the balance is of vital interest to the man himself since he can live and develop only under preset living conditions. Nature will continue to exist without humans, but humans will not survive without it. It is not just a matter of physical conditions (air quality, availability of fresh water, sufficient sustenance), but also psychological health and ability to cope with stress, which can be assured only in harmonious relationships between society and nature.

The urge to develop science and technology as such does not cause the civilizational crisis. However, the acknowledgment of the inherent value of technologies and machines, which must carry merely instrumental value, makes all civilizational development senseless. The inanimate and artificial is placed higher than natural,

sensing and full of doubtless inner harmony, leading to a degradation of a human spiritual world, without which any further development will be inadequate.

2. Literature Review: Dialectical Realism as a Way of Learning about the World

This article stems from the postulates of dialectical realism, such as the unity of opposites, and interdependence of the ideal and the material, human-made and natural, self-organization, and management, changeability and traditionality, order and chaos (Golovko, 2013).

Dialectical realism as a basis of a worldview and understanding of the world expresses the contents of sustainable development as a dynamic process that presumes a search for the ways to efficiently meet various human needs (ideal and material) while the system generally strives for sustaining co-evolution of a higher order system – a socio-natural one (Mantatov and Mantatova, 2015; 2017).

Dialectical realism allows comprehending the interconnection between material and spiritual values, social and naturally occurring, present and future. For the restoration of balance in the social and socio-natural systems and provision of the conditions for the sustainable development, it is required to restore the subjective world picture. In this connection, we speak about a necessity to mainstream the “environmental justice” and acknowledge the “inherent value of nature.”

One should note that within the frameworks of classical realism defined by R. Hirst as “a viewpoint, according to which material objects exist apart from us and independent of our perceptions” (Hirst, 1967), the scope of consideration does not embrace a dependence of the external reality on a subject’s consciousness. Meanwhile, the contemporary scientific progress confirms that the reality is made not only from the material, but also ideal objects (information, values, ideas, meanings, and consciousness) (Teilhard de Chardin, 1959).

In the structure of reality, one can also single out the subjective and the objective levels. In a simplified form, subjective reality is a reflection of the outside world in human consciousness in the form of assessments, values, meanings, and ideals. In its turn, objective reality is the outside world independent of the subject’s attitude. Because its structure is so complex and due to the way man can perceive it objective reality is transcendent. According to Losev, human cognition cannot be exhaustive. Our knowledge will always remain incomplete and relative (Losev, 2009).

Absolute knowing of the outside world is impossible. Therefore it is impossible to predict the result that the influence of subjective reality renders on the objective realm (valid for the opposite too). The subjective level is not only the result of how the world around reflects in the structure of immanent understanding of the world, but it also forms objective reality since the direction the development of the society-

nature system will take depends precisely on a conscious choice of individuals (an aggregate of individuals).

Thinking about freedom of tastes and their variability Herder concludes that there is no primacy of one understanding of the beautiful over the other and the nontemporal norms of their definition (Herder, 1959). Consequently, not a single subjective reality can be absolute and claim the value of the other's life or the absence thereof. Hence the ideal toward which the system's development should aim for must be harmonized by a combination of various world pictures: both social and naturally occurring.

Ignoring of objective reality by individuals will inevitably lead to different destructions in the development of the social and socio-natural systems. The social system gets a lopsided development when a spiritual component is stagnating, and the material one is being praised. This lopsidedness results in a loss of human individuality, aggravates frustration and loneliness and determines social and economic injustice (with regards to the present and future generations). The man betrays the supreme value of being – the desire for life – and disturbs the supreme cosmic law – the aspiration to harmony. A contradiction with the socio-natural system turns into environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and ecological catastrophes. There emerges a real threat to the existence of the social world with its false values and ideals.

Love to all living beings can overcome human egocentrism. It is possible to replace the artificially imposed values by the real ones via respect to the subjective world pictures of other living organisms, which will act as a center of their subjective reality (Leopold, 1986; Schweitzer, 2009).

Heidegger notes, *“The whole is arranged not as individual items: those are obtrusive while the Whole is impossible for us to comprehend outside of our effort”* (Heidegger, 1996). The shaping of conscience relevant to sustainable development and the transition from the consumerist attitude to the world requires coordinated efforts. Self-organization of the system should combine with its reasonable management. It presumes to create a comprehensive picture of the world taking into account interests of both the natural system and future generations of men.

It should be noted that the existing model of civilizational development that allows emerging of multiple socio-economic and socio-ecological destructions is a result of conscious modeling of the objective reality by the individual ideas, such as a practical application of the theoretical constructs of economic theory). The predacious and consumer attitude not only to nature but also to other people is inherent in the modern civilization. In the pursuit of the realization of the inadequate values people *“risk their lives and readily kill each other, at the same time believing that mutual slaughter is absolutely justified from the moral viewpoint”* (Hessle,

1993). Rubinshteyn points out, life is the principal motif of any human activity since without it all other values lose their significance (Rubinshtein, 2008).

Problems of the material world come from the contradictions in the sphere of the ideal. Subjective ideas, opinions, values, and meanings confront the highest value of being – life itself. The shaping of a comprehensive worldview, expansion of the existing world picture, and a co-evolutionary development of the socio-natural system under the conditions of an impending ecological catastrophe cannot fail to rest exclusively on the self-organizing mechanisms of the system. A mere comprehension of the utter futility of the presently chosen way is not enough. Planned strategic transition to a new quality of development and formation of a new ecological (noospheric) civilization is needed. Meanwhile, the entrenchment of a new value paradigm in public conscience encounters opposition on the part of the previous value system.

3. Methodological Framework

The purpose of this article is to explain the potential of "environmental justice" and "intrinsic value of nature" concepts in resolving global problems of modern civilization. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to establish the relationship between the civilizational crisis and the limited worldview, to determine interconnections between values and the nature of social development, to consider the influence of "environmental justice" and "intrinsic value of nature" on social development.

As a methodological base, dialectical realism orientates to the understanding of the integrity of a multidimensional structure. The most efficient mechanisms are the assurance of the sustainable development of the human beings, and the mutual relations between the competing values, interconditioned and interdependent in their essence, and the balance between the rotation of opposites.

Institutional approach allows to reveal aspects of the public structures functioning. The systematic approach helps to establish roots of social development problems. The culture-historical approach explains problems of social future modeling and promotes integrated worldview. Dialectical realism allows comprehending the interconnection between material and spiritual values, social and naturally occurring, present and future.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Path-dependence and civilizational development management

The overcoming of human egoism and egocentrism is a linchpin for shaping a right attitude to the world around. Acknowledgment that the various levels of objective reality beyond the limits of the subjective perception do exist contributes to

harmonious personal development. On their basis, a person's creative potential for the construction of a society of justice with a high eco-social culture is unleashed.

Human essence is multi-sided, and its manifestation largely depends on a conscious nurturing of certain qualities. At the same time, it is the inclusion into the whole that ensures the most harmonious personality development. *"A man comes to himself not through himself, yet not without himself"* (Dyachenko, 2011).

The crisis nature of the technogenic and consumer civilization is internationally acknowledged. However, the transformation of public ideals and values and mainstreaming of a holistic world picture cannot occur in a single moment. Transferring to the new quality of development is long-lasting. It presupposes overcoming of the "path-dependence" effect (Auzan, 2012) of the previous development path and the system's isolation when it is shielded from institutional and technological innovations (Auzan, 2015; 2017; Draskovic, 2017; Nureev, 2010). Despite the relevance of the proposed development paradigm, subjects of interrelations strive to preserve the previously applicable model of meeting human demands. High financial, time, intellectual, and other costs to carry out changes, and a high degree of uncertainty of the result due to its remoteness in time explain the developmental inertia.

Values are somewhat stable being a reflection of the cultural ground, which shaped a person. They act as his or her worldview. Transformation of these foundations is a threat for the subjective reality, immanent ideas about the purpose in life, and about the supreme good despite their objective inadequacy. The community-wide shaping of green consciousness requires significant efforts to overcome the existing behavioral patterns.

Self-organization and self-government will be insufficient. Decisive moves demand a synergetic transition to organizational and managerial relationships regulating the transformation. Here we spoke about institutionalization as a comprehensive process touching all spheres of human activity and expressed in the formation of new public values and conduct standards (Kravchenko, 2010). Formalizing of these relationships may be both independent and preset. A transformation of social relations along a preset development vector appears to have priority in the socio-natural system's crisis. The transition to the sustainable civilizational development presupposes a high-quality, comprehensive transformation of the existing socio-natural and social relations. For the systematization and harmonization of such transformations, it is necessary to determine the value base. Congruity with it will determine the adequacy of the adopted laws and implemented measures.

The necessity to combine limitations with the societal goals in modeling the civilizational development connects with the peculiarities of administrative management and a regional structure of environmental problems on the global, regional, and branch level (Pegov, 1986). In this connection environmental ethics

stands out as the conceptual and value basis of civilizational development since it contains both an environmental imperative ensuring sustainability of the socio-natural system and an ethical imperative giving the development direction.

The existing civilizational model is also a result of conscious modeling of the societal development. The urge to increase the economic efficiency of land management coupled with limited worldview and disregard for the systemic socio-natural interconnections resulted in the creation of environmentally inefficient institutions. A search for environmentally and economically beneficial ways of natural resource management requires considerable time and financial resources. At the same time, their profitability will take effect only in the mid-term and long-term perspectives.

To overcome dependence on the previous path of development we need the creation of efficient mechanisms capable of working on the personal and social levels reinforcing the awareness that the future of the social is inseparable from the future of the environmental.

4.2 Environmental justice and acknowledgment of the “inherent value of nature”

Environmental degradation both threatens human existence in future and prioritizes problems of inequality in the modern world since the consequences of pollution and loss of biodiversity primarily strike impoverished regions and developing countries aggravating the internal socioeconomic tensions.

It seems plausible that the "environmental justice" movement emerged in connection with the defense of the most vulnerable social categories, fair distribution of the environmental responsibility, racial equality, organization of safe working environment, and other social-democratic institutions of a healthy society (Purdy, 2018).

Unlike the traditional environmental rights action associated with environmental protection and non-human life forms, environmental justice appeals to the protection of humans themselves (Cole and Foster, 2001). According to Taylor “*environmental justice arises from racial, gender, and class discrimination.*” Historically, the emergence of a new trend in environmental law can be linked to the “Three-Mile-Island accident” and “Love Canal case” when poisoning of soil and water caused severe illnesses in the local population (Purdy, 2017). Inhabitants of the environmentally unsafe territories joined environmentalists in a fight for their human and civil right to a clean environment and against racial and class discrimination.

Environmental injustice is linked to the domination of a privileged group invested with authority and economic resources over a social minority subject to cruel treatment (Cole and Foster, 2001). Inequality coupled with the backward concepts of

economic development as a here-and-now material profit turn rich natural resources of the territory into a “curse.” (Van der Ploeg, 2011). The profit made from natural resources is not being used for further development of the region. It is profitable for the economic subjects to keep the territory underdeveloped and the locals legally illiterate and socially undefended, by minimizing the internal costs and turning them into external diseconomies. The region gets no new assets, corruption level grows, natural wealth shrinks, and the environmental problems multiply and mainstream. What makes such a state of affairs possible is the existence of unjust laws, inadequate regulation mechanisms, and anti-social policy (Mascarenhas, 2009). Business representatives are lobbying their interests encouraging the weakening of environmental legislation, propaganda of consumerism values, withholding of vital ecological information from the population, and dissemination of fear and self-distrust.

Impoverished regions with no economic and technological capabilities to successfully oppose the "imperial capitalism" are forced to exchange their internal natural and labor resources for the inclusion into the global economic turnover and access to the benefits produced in the developed countries (Alternatives in a world of crises, 2018). Rich states prosper at the expense of the weak states, rich people – at the expense of the poor, humankind's prosperity rests upon nature. It is all based on the unfair distribution of profits, responsibility, social guarantees, limitation of development capabilities of individuals, communities, and regions.

Social justice and environmental justice are essentially interconditioned and cannot be realized one without the other. Any individual must have equal economic, social, and environmental rights regardless of race, gender, nationality, religious background, age, material wealth, and other secondary factors. The environmental justice concept frequently arises in academic literature, legislation, NGO recommendations, court judgments, and other legal practice (Rechtschaffen *et al.*, 2009). As a result of civic activism, enormous changes took place in the institutional structure. They involved the level of informal institutions and determined the development of ecological culture in the masses.

The characteristic of the ratio between economic benefits and environmental consequences exclusively based on economic indicators reflects only limited subjective understanding of the world. At the same time, as D. Moellendorf argues, the problem of accounting for the noneconomic value of nature may be resolved by combining environmental and economic indicators (Moellendorf, 2014).

Environmental degradation as the flip side of the industrial production is an inseparable part of social, economic, and political development. A culturological template is formed: different prioritizing and fair distribution of profits and responsibilities are unthinkable in the existing economic practice. Social and political institutions become the next sacrifice to consumption after nature as they turn into ugly and lifeless simulacrum. Beck concludes that the economic,

environmental, and social problems are preprogrammed in the existing developmental imperatives (Beck, 1992). Until nature is viewed as an object, not a subject of the socio-natural relationships, people will not take into consideration the interests of species and balance of natural systems in the course of their economic activity. Meanwhile, consideration of such factors and understanding of the inherent value of nature are necessary for a person to build an objective world picture and form moral and conceptual foundations for a long-term co-evolutional development.

On the other hand, acceptance of the inherent value of nature also carries a potential threat to the development of humankind. Competition between the human demands and those of the non-human systems can bring to life a multitude of new conflicts in the development of the socio-natural system (Schlosberg, 2013). In this connection, it is necessary to prioritize the shaping of an ethical foundation (qualitative indicators), but not striving for the expression of a ratio between nature's and society's interests in economic, normative, and other quantitative indicators. All possible developmental problems of the institutes of the "inherent value of nature" and "environmental justice" fade in comparison with the potential utility of these ethical constructs in neutralizing the imminent threat to the development of humankind.

5. Conclusion

The development of humankind is a dialectical process. Its goal is the provision of an indefinitely long co-evolutional development of the socio-natural system. Concepts of "environmental justice" and "inherent value of nature" reveal a considerable potential in resolving the emergent contradictions of civilizational development and the transition to sustainable development. Environmental justice is not merely an ideal which the system must pursue. It is a practical instrument determining political, legal, economic, educational, and culturological changes.

Environmental justice as a qualitative indicator of state development presupposes a fair distribution of resources and responsibilities between the present and future generations, and respectful treatment of all species and life forms stemming from the acknowledgment of the inherent value of non-human life forms, natural objects, and nature in general. Environmental justice and the acknowledgment of the inherent value of nature encourage the shaping of the comprehensive understanding of the world around and ensure that the measures undertaken by the state to overcome the path-dependence effect are not contradictory. From this viewpoint, we can consider them as legal principles forming the legal system of the Eco-social civilization.

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