

## THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN FALSE VALUES AND ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE: THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A NEW VISION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



<https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n2-296>

Submitted on: 01/26/2025

Publication date: 02/26/2025

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the concepts of sustainable development and sustainability from the human-nature relationship, its implication in production modes, consumption patterns, its influence on the cultural heritage of peoples and biodiversity. It seeks to demonstrate that such concepts are being appropriated by Cartesian-mechanistic reasoning, dictated by the technoscience of a globalized world, ordered by the capitalist vision and the logic of markets. In addition, this article, of an exploratory nature and based on a bibliographic review, is developed with the use of the deductive method to question the aforementioned paradigm of dominant knowledge and proposes a critical reading of such themes, through environmental rationality, which emerges from interdisciplinary environmental knowledge, founded by systemic visions, to rescue the subjectivity of the *being*, through the concepts of alterity and responsibility and, in the end, present a new vision of human development.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development. Human Development. Human Values. Otherness.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article does not intend to delve into specific environmental problems, such as: concentration and poor distribution of income, population growth, global warming and climate change, ozone layer depletion, loss of biodiversity, access to treated water, acid rain, air, soil, rivers and oceans pollution, energy consumption, transgenics or pesticides. Such themes allow us to understand that we live in times of great crisis of humanity, which presents itself as a civilizational crisis, and not a mere isolated and watertight social, economic or environmental crisis.

But how did we get here? What are the paths that have led us to live with the preponderance of false values? What are the false values prevailing in today's world? Why has the individualistic view overlapped with the view of *otherness*? Why has consumption, the ideology of having, and the culture of flaunting increased people's anxiety, irritation, violence, greed, and alienation?

The answers to such questions are very complex, and the article in question will not answer each of the questions presented. These questions aim to promote debate and reflection on true values, in the ontological-existential sphere, which involve the whole *being*, as well as reveal that false values are those acquired and are expressed as mere mechanical and formal gestures that bring out a superficiality, which imprisons the *being* in obligations or slavery and promotes an internal imbalance, which results in the growing external chaos, which we are increasingly experiencing.

For thousands of years, the main way to reflect on true values was to move away from the bosom of society and take refuge in monasteries, seeking self-knowledge through a rigid ascetic discipline. Currently, however, although some still opt for the aforementioned model, the path should be different. The complexity of today's world demonstrates that the excess of technologization, combined with globalization and the process of appropriation of nature by the economy, has generated the exponential emergence of external forces of violence, exploitation and indifference that lead to the dispersion and deconstruction of *the being*. The current challenge, therefore, is not only with the dispersion of subjectivity, but with the possibility of uniting our egos, in harmony for the construction of a collective being, for the well-being of all humanity.

Thus, to identify false values, it is first necessary to be clear about the Socratic maxim of *know thyself*, which implies that one must be true to oneself, to know reality and seek new knowledge aiming at change and reorientation of the world. We must be clear

that in today's society we predominate false values, because human passions are based on a consumption model, which is guided by the search and possession of material goods, aesthetic appearance and individualistic power as synonymous with success and individual happiness.

In addition, there is the predominance of economic theories, which allowed the concentration of income in the hands of a few people, allied to the Cartesian, mechanistic, simplifying, one-dimensional and fragmented model that led the world to a struggle for power, through capital, generating a civilizational crisis, which emphasizes discrimination, dehumanization and the devaluation of the *being*.

As a result, in current times, there is a vertiginous increase in violence in all its forms, the growth of unemployed, the sharp loss of housing, with thousands of people living on the street and the growth of poverty in the world, the result of a mercantile fundamentalism.

Selfishness and narcissism begin to occupy the space in the understanding of the *being*, which turns to the context of *living for oneself*. In this way, the sense of *alterity* is emptied, because there is no more room for the *being to* see himself in the *other*, to feel himself as other, to identify a piece of *himself* in the *other*, which denotes little consistency of the *other in himself*.

The absence of compassion, solidarity, generosity and altruism causes the enclosure of the *being*, which implies that the *other* only matters to me when I have the possibility of obtaining some advantage. However, only by finding myself in the *other* can one rescue subjectivity and the concept of responsibility. The fetish of treating *the being* from the perspective of capital, seeing it as a mere commodity, is opposed to the concept of honor and dignity and exacerbates the civilizational crisis that is present in today's world.

For this reason, on the fringes and inconsistencies of the globalized world, founded on the dominant Cartesian-mechanistic rationality and the false idea of a market without limits, environmental knowledge emerges, whose search is the resignification of the concepts of progress, development and growth without limits, conducted by the culture of capital.

The environmental rationality that emerges from environmental knowledge is a synthesis of what constitutes the being today and how it should be projected into the future and, therefore, this epistemological adventure makes use of an interdisciplinary scientific

study, guided by systemic visions. Thus, this article proposes to discuss development, sustainability and globalization from a critical perspective.

Thus, revisiting the work of Enrique Leff in certain points and assisted by other authors, the present article, of an exploratory nature and based on a bibliographic review, is developed with the use of the deductive method to question the dominant paradigm of knowledge, which already appropriates the term *sustainable development*, transforming it into a formula found by capitalism to minimize or appropriate the debate on environmental issues. Thus, the central idea of the article is to put the term *sustainable development* back in its proper place, as a project to improve the quality of life for all humanity.

## THE CURRENT CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The understanding of the term sustainable development takes us back to the Stockholm Conference (1972) that gave rise to the notion of *eco-development*, later called sustainable development and led the world to think about the ecological issue from another perspective, through the motto: "One Earth", responsible for the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) by the UN.

As Ignacy Sachs (2008, p. 13) points out:

In the historical context in which it emerged, the idea of development implies the atonement and reparation of past inequalities, creating a connection capable of bridging the civilizational abyss between the former metropolitan nations and their former colonial periphery, between the modernized rich minorities and the still backward and exhausted majority of the working poor. Development brings with it the promise of everything – inclusive modernity brought about by structural change.

In this sense, Maurice Strong, in the preface to Ignacy Sachs' work *"Transition Strategies for the XXI Century - Development and Environment"* (1993, p. 7), emphasized:

We have lost our innocence. Today we know that our civilization and even life on our planet will be doomed unless we turn to the only viable path, for both the rich and the poor. For this, it is necessary for the North to reduce its consumption of resources and the South to escape poverty. Development and the environment are inextricably linked and must be addressed by changing the content, modalities and uses of growth. Three fundamental criteria must be obeyed simultaneously: social equity, ecological prudence and economic efficiency.

Then, in the 80s, the critical revision of social models gained emphasis, which opposed industrial development, the generation of pollution and the misery of a large part

of the population. Within this context, the concept of sustainable development is established and the principle of sustainable quality of life is designed.

Thus, the term sustainable development originated in 1987, when the then president of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Gro Harlem Brundtland presented to the UN General Assembly the document called "Our Common Future", which became known as the Brundtland Report.

In this document, sustainable development was conceptualized as "that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the possibility of future generations meeting their own needs". From the aforementioned report the following can be extracted (1991, p. 10):

For there to be a sustainable global development, it is necessary for the richest to adopt lifestyles compatible with the planet's ecological resources – in terms of energy consumption, for example. Moreover, rapid population growth can intensify pressure on resources and slow any rise in living standards: therefore, sustainable development can only be pursued if population size and growth are in harmony with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem. After all, sustainable development is not a permanent state of harmony, but a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the orientation of investments, the directions of technological development and institutional change are in accordance with current and future needs. We know that this is not an easy process, without stumbling blocks. Difficult choices will have to be made. Thus, in the final analysis, sustainable development depends on political commitment.

In addition, sustainable development can also be synthesized and better defined as a duty to protect and restore the integrity of terrestrial ecological systems, as expressed in the text of the Earth Charter, under the definition of an imperative of ecological<sup>2</sup> integrity (UNESCO, 2000, p. 3).

However, although the document does not bear the status of a hard law norm, and it is not possible for it to recognize the status of an imperative norm of international law – being closer to a norm of *soft law* as conceived by Bosselmann and Taylor – the importance of the concept of ecological integrity is not mitigated by virtue of this circumstance. (Bosselmann; Taylor, 2005, p. 172).

Thus, the Earth Charter conveys the commitment of a diverse set of cultures and peoples from the perspective of civil society, and represents a broad consensus never

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<sup>2</sup> The Earth Charter defines a principle of ecological integrity in the form of an imperative, the implementation of which depends on the implementation of the principles defined throughout the text. From this perspective, he defines ecological integrity by relating it to the need to: "protect and restore the integrity of terrestrial ecological systems with special consideration for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life".

before obtained on a set of global principles with pretensions of universality and on a theme that is central to humanity, namely, the conservation of the quality of the environment as a prerequisite for the development of life on earth<sup>3</sup>.

Subsequently, this concept gave rise to sustainability, which is an action in which the elaboration of a product or the development of a process does not compromise the existence of its sources, ensuring the reproduction of its means (Faria, 2011, p. 15).

Therefore, on the basis of an imperative of sustainability and taking into account the irradiation of its effects on the national legal order, it is clear that all of it is committed to the duty to ensure the viability of life on a lasting time scale, a task to which state and social duties to protect the foundations that guarantee them must contribute.

This is how the collective commitment to the protection of essential ecological processes should be understood in the Brazilian context. This commitment is also in line with the aforementioned article 225, caput and item I, of the Federal Constitution of 1988, since it conditions the exercise of all public functions to require them to be carried out through all instruments that can make commitments.

In addition, the objective of sustainability proposed as a guideline of the National Environmental Policy<sup>4</sup> aims, firstly, at the conformation of a global commitment and an imperative for the benefit of future generations, on a better and fairer society than the one in which we live, and secondly, it constitutes the most evident normative manifestation of a domestic imperative of sustainability provided for in Article 225, caput and item I, of the Federal Constitution of 1988. The concept in question encompasses the figure of a healthy quality of life, in turn, it presupposes respect for the right to an ecologically balanced environment, which integrates the dignity of existence – objective of the economic order (FC/88, art. 170) – and the well-being of all – objective of the social order (CF/88, art. 193).

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<sup>3</sup> One of the manifestations that reflect this conciliatory approach expressed by a principle of sustainability can be identified in the ecological approach to fundamental (and human) rights, giving rise to the recognition of environmental rights in national legal experiences (the affirmation of a right to the environment and its extensions) and in the conventional order. In this regard, Bosselmann recognizes that the ecological human rights project contemplates the reconciliation between the philosophical foundations of human rights with ecological principles. They maintain that the objective is to link the intrinsic values of humans with the intrinsic values of other species and the environment. In this reading, human rights need to be able to respond to the fact that individuals are not only inserted in a social environment, but also in a natural environment. (Bosselmann; Klaus, 2007: 20)

<sup>4</sup> Of the Objectives of the National Environmental Policy. Article 4, item I, of Law 6.938/1981: "The National Environmental Policy shall aim: I - to make economic and social development compatible with the preservation of the quality of the environment and ecological balance";



Therefore, the reading of the aforementioned provisions removes the possibility of adopting a technical-scientific model of domination of nature or the view that it is a mere reservoir of raw material to favor man. In this regard, Vidal Souza (2020, p. 300/301) emphasizes that:

A healthy life is ensured through criteria of a dignified human existence, in which man cannot live dissociated from nature. Therefore, article 225 of the FC/88 must be read in line with the following articles of the Larger Text: a) article 1, III, which provides for the protection of dignity; b) Article 3, I, which provides for social solidarity; c) Article 3, III, which establishes as objectives of the Brazilian State the eradication of poverty, marginalization and the reduction of social and regional inequalities; d) Article 7, IV, which establishes the minimum family wage.

In view of this scenario, it is difficult to define what is understood and the spectrum of action of Environmental Law. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Leme Machado (2014, p. 58-59) does not present us with a definition, but guidelines for the understanding and construction of its correct meaning, when he clarifies that:

Environmental law is a systematizing Law, which articulates legislation, doctrine and jurisprudence, concerning the elements that make up the environment. It seeks to avoid the isolation of environmental issues and their antagonistic approach. It is no longer a question of building a Water Law, an Atmosphere Law, a Soil Law, a Forest Law, a Fauna Law or a Biodiversity Law. Environmental Law does not ignore what is specific about each matter, but seeks to interconnect these issues with the mortar of the identity of the legal instruments of prevention and separation, information, monitoring and participation.

However, Bosselmann warns that the definition of sustainability presupposes economic prosperity (economic development) and social justice (social development) as reconcilable values and determining elements to ensure satisfactory levels of well-being, from an individual and collective perspective, on a lasting scale and concludes that:

There is no economic prosperity without social justice and there is no social justice without economic prosperity, and both within the limits of ecological sustainability. A norm could be formulated as an obligation to promote long-term economic prosperity and social justice within the limits of ecological sustainability (Bosselmann, 2008, p. 53).

However, it is clear that Klaus Bosselmann's thinking (2015, p. 36) seeks to demonstrate that the term sustainability is very old, dating back to the time of the Enlightenment, with the publication of the work of Hans Carl Von Carlowitz when he published the work entitled, in 1714, "Forest Economics or Guide to the Cultivation of the Tree in Conformity with Nature", in which he discussed the conservation and cultivation of

wood that "can be managed in order to provide the use of continuous, lasting and sustainable".

However, it is evident that the term in question used by the then German engineer Von Carlowitz cannot be transported to the present day, if we take into account, even that, at that time, there was not even the idea of ecology, created by his countryman, the German scientist Ernest Haeckel, in 1866, to designate the science that studies the relationships between living beings and the environment.

Furthermore, the thought of Klaus Bosselmann (2015, p. 123-129) is explainable, because in his understanding there is the possibility of reconciling and coexisting peacefully and harmoniously different visions such as anthropocentric and ecocentric, from a utilitarian and liberal vision, along the lines idealized by John Rawls' theory of justice.

Thus, for Klaus Bosselmann (2015, p.35) the concept of sustainable development is only significant when related to the central idea of ecological sustainability, since for him "sustainable development should be understood as the application of the principle of sustainability, and not the other way around".

However, this reading cannot be disconnected from the percussive observation of Enrique Leff (2010, p. 31) in the sense that "sustainability points to the future" and presents itself as "a way of rethinking production and the economic process, of opening the siege of the world and the closure of history imposed by economic globalization". Thus, all subjects are ultimately bound to a long-term commitment to the protection of life and the indispensable bases for its development, represented here by the essential ecological processes.

However, from the 1960s onwards, the reality changed with the intensified extraction of natural resources, as well as with the increase in solid waste deposits in the environment itself. Unbridled industrialization increased the search for natural raw materials and, consequently, the plunder of nature, which proved to be saturated, making it evident that the stock of matter existing on earth is finite (Soriano; Silva, 2011, p. 1).

In the 80s of the twentieth century, the internalization of environmental costs (which are usually evaluated and calculated in monetary form) was perceived through the introduction of market stimulus systems, usually with the help of environmental taxes and fees or the trade of pollution bonds.

From this conception, the model of unbridled growth is restricted, which must now take into account environmental and social impacts. Thus, the possibility and the need to



pay for the pollution generated arises, and productivism and competition for scarce resources are further emphasized, which allows companies and richer nations to acquire a very favorable position in the increasingly globalized competition.

In this way, it cannot be ignored that both the proposal for pollution bonds and, perhaps even more, the proposals for the internalization of environmental costs via taxation or environmental fees, in their essence already contradict the fundamental idea of liberalism, since such proposals represent by themselves an interference in private choices.

The second approach, called ecological-technocratic, defends the conception of planned sustainability. This approach is based on the idea that the overcoming of environmental problems is pursued by managerial means, in a technocratic perspective, generally based on the centralism of the decision-making process, relying on the technical capacity of the planner (Faria 2011, p. 18-19). Here, state intervention arises through planning and is considered indispensable to reduce or avoid the harmful effects of economic growth processes, as well as to eliminate or repair existing damages.

A third approach is the biocentric one, named by its opponents, in a pejorative way, as radical environmentalism, which takes a holistic position and presents a universalist-integrative pretension. Its proposal is that all social policies and activities be subordinated to the requirements of nature's sustainability. The biocentric posture is based on the philosophical conception of deep ecology, in which actions are focused on the cultural transformations that occurred with the strengthening of the environmental movement and social movements in general.

This position argues that man is only an integral element of nature and that nature has a value in itself, regardless of its usefulness to man. It is a preservationist view of nature, which seeks to ensure that the natural environment must remain untouched in its primitive form.

Similarly, the radical environmentalist approach rejects the consumerism prevalent in modern societies in order to allow for the inclusion of the goals of satisfying the basic economic needs of the population and social justice, especially with regard to developing countries.

The fourth and final approach is the so-called democratic or popular participation policy, for which participation is a fundamental part of environmental policy and indispensable for a substantial change in the current public policy framework. Planning

should be understood not only as guided by the needs of the population, but also as conducted by it (Faria, 2011, p. 19).

The model of interposition of public will led by the base (which is also defended by the ecological movement as a preferential political order) bets on confrontation rather than on cooperation (the guiding principle of eco-development).

In contrast to ecocentric approaches, whose focus of attention is nature and its protection, the political approach of democratic or popular participation is based on the assumption that man and society should be at the center of attention and reflection, hence why this is considered to be a "sociological approach to sustainable development".

The sociological approach to sustainable development can be observed from three distinct orientations, namely: a) the struggle of the popular classes, especially the excluded, against the power of the traditional elites; b) the strength of civil society, as the driving force of the political system and as the driving force of a sustainable development project, and c) the democratic struggle capable of implementing an organized representative system.

The emancipatory vision now posed does not ensure happiness. In this sense, Jürgen Habermas (2005, p. 166-167) emphasizes that:

If we want to interpret the word "emancipation" correctly, we have to take into account that it makes people more independent, but that doesn't mean that they will automatically be happier. We have no choice between a more conscious and a less conscious conduct of life, because the possibilities of choice are only posed through an act of awareness. On the other hand, however, the criteria for happiness and for the clinical evaluation of a more or less non-alienated, non-failed life are a precarious matter. And anyone who still dares to make use of such criteria – and this is no longer the subject of a theory of society – will probably not come to the conclusion that, in this clinical sense, modern forms of life are better than other forms. The concept of modernity is no longer linked to a promise of happiness. Even so, and despite all the talk about a postmodernity, we do not see any rational alternative capable of replacing such forms of life. And if that is the case, the only alternative left to us is perhaps to seek practical improvements *within* these same forms of life!

Notwithstanding these considerations, it is certain that with economic theories, the principle of sustainable development came to be accepted and used as a philosophy of development (Gerent, 2006, p. 40).

Currently, it is essential to be aware not only that the available natural resources must be exploited rationally, but also that production must consider its negative impacts, all so that development takes place in a truly sustainable way.

However, social responsibility refers to the search for sustainable development in which three basic criteria must be obeyed: social equity, ecological prudence and economic efficiency.

In the same sense, Faria (2011, p. 16) lists the sets of elements that motivate sustainability, which are:

The first is related to the growing industrialization and its consequences, such as the consumption of raw materials, pollution and waste generation, without losing sight of the fact that care for these issues would be fundamental for sustainable development.

The second concerns the proliferation and interconnection of interest groups that make companies operate in a responsible and transparent manner, aiming at the formation of a well-informed and active base.

The third is related to emerging technologies, insofar as they would offer innovative solutions and could make obsolete the foundations of industries that use energy and raw materials intensively.

Finally, of a social nature, it concerns the increase in population, poverty and social inequality, which would be leading to social decay as a consequence.

In this sense, Ignacy Sachs (2008, p. 15) observes that the concept of sustainable development is based on five pillars: social, environmental, territorial, economic and political, and must be added to the dimension of environmental sustainability that leads to social sustainability. Thus, the dimension of environmental sustainability is founded "on the double ethical imperative of synchronous solidarity with the current generation and diachronic solidarity with future generations" and complements his thinking by highlighting that environmental solidarity:

(...) It compels us to work with multiple scales of time and space, which clutters the conventional economist's toolbox. It also impels us to seek triple-winning solutions, eliminating the wild growth obtained at the cost of high negative externalities, both social and environmental. Other, short-term strategies lead to environmentally destructive but socially beneficial growth, or environmentally beneficial but socially destructive growth.

Therefore, at first, the feasibility of development must be analyzed, avoiding the conception of blind economic growth and at any cost, prioritizing the search for full citizenship rights for all, thus allowing the appreciation of diversity and cultural creativity and reinforcing the feeling and responsibility of all both in social life, as well as in relation to the environment.

Therefore, as Enrique Leff (2010, p. 224) observes, "happiness thus shines on the horizon of human existence as the utopia that impels us to walk in search of the very meaning of life".

This leads us to question the fragile social sustainability model that exists in much of the world, which exposes the fragmentation of environmental sustainability. Like this

Nowadays we cannot walk around the world believing in unlimited growth or idolizing positivist science when we see the social disintegration and environmental degradation brought about by the poverty of one-dimensional thinking and the corruption of the spirit generated by the economicized and narcotized world by the flow of narcotic goods, the unleashing of cynical violence and an unscrupulous death that accentuate the malaise in culture. The effects of climate change add to the unhappiness of poverty and socio-environmental risks and catastrophes. Today we need to apprehend environmental complexity through new knowledge. (Leff, 2010, p. 224)

Thus, it is verified that the capitalist model is not able to fulfill such objectives, since it does not allow to satisfy human needs without reducing the prospects of future generations.

Furthermore, we cannot forget that in the Western world there are few signs that allow us to change the current capitalist vision, and the environmental paradigms are those of greater intensity and capable of shaking the structure of industrial societies and promoting a political-social implosion of this model. Thus, it is not by chance that Ignacy Sachs (2009, p. 65-66) recalls that, in his opinion:

[...] development is the historical process of universal appropriation by peoples of the totality of human rights, individual and collective, negative (freedom against) and positive (freedom for), meaning three generations of rights: political, civic and civil; social, economic and cultural; and the collective rights to development, the environment and the city [...].element.

However, having presented the entire path to the consolidation of the term sustainable development, it is not possible to think about it without taking into account the current vision of consumption implemented by the capitalist model. In fact, data from the Second Human Development Report 2006 (2006, p. 269) of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) already warned that:

The 500 richest people in the world have an income of more than \$100 billion, without taking into account asset wealth. This exceeds the combined incomes of the poorest 416 million. The accumulation of wealth at the top of the global income distribution has been more impressive than the reduction of poverty at the bottom. The *World Wealth Report* 2004, prepared by Merrill Lynch, states that the wealth of

financial assets of the 7.7 million "high net worth individuals" reached \$28 trillion in 2003, with a projected growth of \$41 trillion by 2008.

More than a decade later, OFXAM (2018, *passim*), a non-governmental organization dedicated to humanitarian aid for people in emergency situations around the world, confirmed an exponential growth of billionaires during the year 2017, highlighting the following:

Currently, there are 2,043 billionaires worldwide. Nine out of ten are men. The wealth of these billionaires has also increased considerably, to a level that would be enough to end extreme poverty by more than seven times. Of all the wealth generated last year, 82% ended up in the hands of the top 1%, while the poorest 50% saw nothing. (...) However, there is growing evidence that the levels of extreme inequality currently recorded far exceed what can be justified by talent, effort, and willingness to take risks. In fact, in most cases they are the product of inheritances, monopolies or clientelist relations with the government. Approximately one-third of billionaire fortunes can be attributed to inheritances. Over the next 20 years, 500 of the world's richest people will leave \$2.4 trillion to their heirs — a sum larger than the GDP of India, a country of 1.3 billion people. (...)

OFXAM (2018, p. 10) by exposing the wealth of some also reveals the growth of extreme poverty in the world by revealing that:

Between 1990 and 2010, the number of people living in extreme poverty (i.e., on less than \$1.90 a day) fell by half, and that number has been declining ever since. This immense achievement is something the world should be proud of. However, if inequality in countries had not increased over this period, another 200 million people would have been lifted out of poverty. That number might have risen to 700 million if the poor had benefited more from economic growth than their wealthy fellow citizens. Looking ahead, the World Bank has made it explicit that unless we close the gap between rich and poor, we will not be able to achieve the goal of eliminating extreme poverty by a wide margin. Even if the goal of reducing poverty by 3% is achieved, we will have about 200 million people still living on US\$ 1.90 per day in 2030.

These data can be added to those presented by Leonardo Boff (2010, p. 176):

"(...) After more than 300 years of exaltation of reason, we are witnessing the madness of reason. For only a crazed reason organizes the society in which 20% of the world's population holds 80% of all the wealth on Earth; the three richest people in the world have assets greater than all the wealth of 48 poorest countries where 600 million people live; 257 individuals alone accumulate more wealth than 2.8 billion people, which is equivalent to 45% of humanity; in Brazil, five thousand families hold 46% of the national wealth. The insanity of productive and consumerist reason has generated global warming, which will bring already visible imbalances and the decimation of thousands of species, including humans."

More recently, Oxfam Brazil, a Brazilian civil society organization, created in 2014, whose objectives are to build a more just, sustainable and solidary country, seeking to

eliminate the causes of poverty, social injustices and inequalities, published a report, which corroborates the above considerations, presenting the following data:

Right now, the richest 1% of the world's population owns the same wealth as the other 99%, and only eight billionaires own the same as the poorest half of the population on the planet. On the other hand, poverty is a reality for more than 700 million people in the world. This is an extreme situation. Inequality and poverty are not inevitable. They are, first and foremost, products of unjust political choices that reflect the unequal distribution of power in societies. Changing this reality requires new political choices, reiterated over time, and sustained by a society with equal access to democracy. (OXFAM BRASIL, 2017, p. 11).

The report entitled *The distance that unites us - a portrait of Brazilian inequalities* (2017, p. 6) presents extremely worrying figures on the accumulation of wealth in the world and in Brazil, which reveals that it will not be possible to eradicate poverty in the world without a drastic and vehement reduction in inequality levels, because:

In the world, eight people hold the same wealth as the poorest half of the population. At the same time, more than 700 million people live on less than \$1.90 a day. In Brazil, the situation is worse: only six people have wealth equivalent to the wealth of the poorest 100 million Brazilians. What's more, the richest 5% hold the same share of income as the other 95%. Here, a worker who earns a minimum wage per month will take 19 years to receive the equivalent of the income of a super-rich in a single month.

Therefore, the theses that enshrine sustainability must seek new, agile and efficient mechanisms to demonstrate the viability of balanced development both in the environmental and social spheres, taking a step forward from the preservationist environmental discourse and ecological fundamentalism, which is merely denunciatory (Souza, 2012, p. 217).

## **THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A NEW VISION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

In another work, I have already stated that if the concept of sustainable development "is not well examined and reflected, it can become porous and serve as a basis for elitist and conservative thinking, through utilitarian instruments, failing to promote any structural change, ending up being easily assimilated and swallowed up by the dominant classes, in a rapid and efficient rearrangement of forces, completely reducing its potential as a new paradigm and modifier of social thought" (SOUZA, 2011, p. 106).

This assertion stems from the current consumption patterns dictated by the capitalist model, guided by science and high technology, which increasingly consecrate a distance



between the model idealized by countries of the North and an equitable distribution with the countries of the South.

In this way, we are moving towards what Gilles Lipovetsky (2007, *passim*) calls a society of hyperconsumption, endowed with turbo-consumers, in which the individual is moved by the empire of consumption and bombarded, daily, full-time, by the desire to consume, without having time to reflect, under the atmosphere of a diversified market that sustains the structure and creates a hedonistic aura that this is the only and safest path to individual happiness.

In this sense, I have also emphasized on another occasion that this model does not have the "capacity to enshrine the same pattern of wealth distribution, because there are no conditions for the sustainability of the planet", and a good example would be to imagine "if the majority of Chinese and Indians could have the same economic condition as the American middle class, with the same consumption habits. The fragmentation of the model would occur through the environmental route, since the acceleration of destruction and the scarcity of natural resources would be abrupt and practically instantaneous" (Souza, 2010, p. 79).

All this thinking allows us to conclude that the concept of sustainable development has been captured by the paradigm of Cartesian scientific rationality and technologization, which are incapable of solving the problems arising from the appropriation of nature.

Therefore, we have to resort to critical theory that seeks the incessant social contradictions, seeking to identify them in the actions of individual and collective subjects in social and historical processes and relations, because its essential objective is to understand the questions of the current social structure and history. In this way, the apparent reality is always questioned, becoming the object of investigation.

In this sense, the path of critical theory is necessary, because as Enrique Leff (2003, p. 58-59) emphasizes:

If science has lost its certainties and its predicative capacities, if the possibility of building a centrally planned world on the basis of a scientific rationality and a rationalization of social processes has been overturned, then education must prepare the new generations not only to accept uncertainty (an education with preparation for ecological disaster and the capacity to respond to the unforeseen); it must also prepare new mentalities capable of understanding the complex interrelations between the objective and subjective processes that constitute its world of life, in order to generate innovative skills for the construction of the unprecedented. It is an education that allows one to prepare for the construction of a new rationality; not to a culture of hopelessness and alienation; not to a culture of hopelessness and alienation; on the contrary, for a process of emancipation that allows new forms of reappropriation of the world.

In effect, critical theory intends to express the emancipation of individuals and promote a growing awareness of the need for a society in which collective interests prevail over individual ones, in which individuals are subjects of their own history, writing it collectively.

To treat reality critically is to question whether social actions are not mere remedial attitudes; it is to inquire about the acts of the subjects who have their own history as their objective, aware of their responsibilities and their collective attributions; it is to promote a reading with multiple interpretations, different methods and different perspectives to analyze the cultural spheres and the social, political, historical, anthropogenic and evolutionary contexts of human civilization.

Furthermore, we must take into account the warning formulated by Enrique Leff (2007, p. 362) to the effect that:

The discourse of sustainable development and environmental legislation do not unequivocally and incontrovertibly shape a regime of rights that support a new ecological and social solidarity. Environmental conflicts arise from the confrontation of interests and differentiated strategies of economic-ecological appropriation. In the field of environmental justice, the construction of rights emerges from the positioning of social groups and social movements in the face of the ecological impacts caused by the patterns of exploitation of natural resources.

In view of this, the analysis of the concept of sustainable development had to take into account several instances and promote an analysis of relevant points of the reality of the contemporary world. Therefore, the concept of environmental development must be appreciated under the following points:

- a) analyze the existence of contradictions in the dynamics of reality, actions and policies involved in the theme;
- b) to appreciate the existence of the ideology that dominates the proposals, projects, policies and conceptions for the concreteness of the concept;
- c) to verify the existence of exploitative, dysfunctional, oppressive and prejudiced practices, which must be banned;
- d) appreciating the social-historical context by understanding the development of a given social fact with the understanding of the historical trajectory involved;
- e) to provide emancipation, through the incessant search for the autonomy of the individual and society;

- f) to promote collective and individual awareness, which implies the fact of knowing oneself and having emancipated collective consciousness, with the understanding of collective life;
- g) to be able to spread the idea of awareness of collective responsibility in the use and conservation of environmental goods.

That said, the paradigm of modernity has allowed the emergence of a fundamental ethical dilemma, which focuses on whether the majority of humanity should still remain under the yoke of a capitalist model, guided by science and high technology, without having access to the benefits it generates (Souza, 2012: 212). In this regard, one cannot lose sight of the emphasis made by the Brundtland Report - Our Common Future - (1991, p. 29) in the sense that:

There is only one Earth, but not only one world. We all depend on a biosphere to conserve our lives. Yet every community, every country strives for survival and prosperity almost without regard for the impact it has on others. Some consume the Earth's resources at such a rate that there will probably be little left for future generations. Others, in much greater numbers, consume too little and live in the prospect of hunger, misery, disease and premature death.

However, in the face of the current reality that places human life under intense intervention by technology and domination by the economy, it is a concept of *environmental knowledge*, which in the explanation of Enrique Leff (2007, p. 336) "is not constructed by the objectivity of nature apprehended through a preconceived economic order. It is, above all, the reconstruction of knowledge based on new visions, potentialities and values, guided by new meanings".

It is from this perspective that the influence of globalization on the concept of sustainable development should be examined. First, globalization must be clear as a social phenomenon that intends to promote integration on a global scale, in the economic, social, cultural and political aspects.

In addition, it should be taken into account that the phenomenon of globalization as a producer of a global village is the result of a mythical reading of reality, because as Milton Santos (2001, p. 19) "An overwhelming so-called global market is presented as capable of homogenizing the planet when, in fact, local differences are deepened."

Added to this is the statement of Enrique Leff (2007, p. 337), in the sense that "globalization, guided by a one-dimensional technological rationality and economic

rationality oriented towards the maximization of economic profit in the short term, has resulted in a contaminated planet, a saturated world and an unsustainable economy".

In this way, it is possible, for example, for a company to produce in a certain country, make investments in other countries, with the requirement to improve infrastructure and tax incentives in another country and remain in that place and also pay taxes in a third country.

On this new dynamic, we should add the pertinent observation of Acselrad, Mello and Bezerra (2009, p. 135) by highlighting that capitalism today "shows itself [...] as a system that paralyzes and captures social actors within 'infernal alternatives' – situations that seem to leave no other choice than resignation or impotent denunciation in the face of the unavoidable economic war." And these 'infernal alternatives' limit the political field and begin to impose themselves as a norm, a mechanism of discipline and control. This makes "individuals imprisoned in the imperatives of 'competitiveness', in the requirements of being able to attract to themselves and their localities the investments available in the market".

Therefore, this development model sees nature as a mere natural resource or raw material made available to those who own the capital and man is seen from the perspective of human material capable of generating the production of material goods.

The synthesis of this model is the production of wealth for a small number of people and the distribution of poverty for many. The empire of this model generates an authoritarian and exclusionary relationship (Souza, 2012, p. 213).

The demonstration of such an assertion can be seen routinely in recent decades. In fact, in the Third National Monitoring Report of the MDGs it highlighted that in Brazil "the income of the poorest 10% grew at an annual rate of 9.2% between 2001 and 2005, the income of the richest 10% fell at an annual rate of 0.4%" (2007, p. 28).

However, the Fourth National Report – MDGs (2010: p. 24) observes that the supposed improvement in income in Brazil does not affect the poorest, because "the fraction of national income flowing to the poorest 20% is small compared to the share received by the richest 20% and the share that belongs to the 60% between the extremes". In addition, between "1990 and 2008, the fraction held by the richest fell considerably, from 65.2 to 58.9% of income." However, the share of income that the rich lost "began to flow mainly to the middle stratum, leaving little left for the poorest".

A careful reading of such data, as observed by Souza and Cabrera (2012, p. 122), implies a threefold critique of the economic model in force under the aegis of capitalism:

First, the orientation of this development model sees nature as a mere natural resource or raw material made available to those who own capital, and man is seen under the gaze of human material capable of generating the production of material goods. The synthesis of this model is the production of wealth for a small number of people and the distribution of poverty for many. The empire of this model generates authoritarianism and exclusion. Secondly, exclusion leads to uneven development that produces violence. The degrees are varied and so are the shapes. Initiated in the economic sphere, urban violence generates ghettos, favelas, areas of forbidden access for some people, in a spiral of contradictions and conflicts that, on a global scale, include segregation, xenophobia, ethnic massacres, which feed hatred and resentment and give birth to fanatics of various kinds. Thirdly, the first two are complemented by the last, of an ecological nature, which demonstrates the deterioration of the quality of life for the majority of the Earth's inhabitants and the production of environmental degradation.

Furthermore, globalization further intensifies the problems and exposes the cracks of the neoliberal model adopted, because, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2005, p. 201), "the concentration of wealth in a few hands, with the widening of inequalities and exclusion on a global scale" has advanced and now results in the "destruction of the common heritage of humanity", that is, "the natural resources of planet Earth". Thus, "the sustainability of life, not just the system, is at stake".

In short, exclusion leads to uneven development that produces violence. The degrees are varied and so are the shapes. It begins with urban violence, which generates ghettos, favelas, areas of forbidden access for some people, even acts of terrorism, which congregate discontented people around the world, feed hatred and resentment, and give birth to fanatics of various kinds (Souza, 2012, p. 213).

Then there is the ecological exclusion, which demonstrates that the deterioration of the quality of life for the majority of the Earth's inhabitants is the production of environmental degradation.

All this, as Souza and Cabrera (2012, p. 122) point out, "allows us to say that the world economic model adopted is unsustainable both in the social and ecological spheres".

With this, initially, there is the appropriation of nature by man with the use of Bacon's empiricist view, according to which the important thing is not to know why things are one way and not another, but how things work, and the search would be to promote the good of man through nature and the advancement of humanity would come through progress.

Then, supported by the mechanistic scientific view, Bacon's thought of domination of nature finds reverberation in the context of capitalism, which begins to see nature as raw material at the service of man, for the purpose of development and progress. As Mário Bunge (1980, p. 16) minimizes, "man dominates nature, not by force, but by understanding.

This is the reason why science has been able to succeed where magic has failed, that is, it has not tried to cast any magical spell on nature."

Finally, the globalization process understood as a dynamic process of interaction between nations, generating technical progress in the means of transport and telecommunications, with emphasis on the informational advances of the last decades, consolidates the concept of market. In this journey, it is seen that man initially appropriated natural resources to build the market model. However, the market has become gigantic and now appropriates man and nature.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, it is extremely important that the current paradigm of the economy be changed for the construction of a new economy based on new knowledge and principles of rationality. In this sense, as Enrique Leff (2010, p. 37) explains:

Sustainability reopens the debate on the assumptions with which the economy operates, questioning the functioning and fulfillment of its individualistic and mechanistic principles: marginal utility, optimization in the allocation of scarce and exhaustible resources to different purposes; the market as a place where subjects express their individual preferences. While environmental economics follows the theoretical strategy of extending the arms of economics to recode all forms of nature in terms of economic values, encompassing environmental goods and services in the totalizing concept of natural capital, ecological economics has been built with the intention of adjusting the mechanisms of the economy to the laws of thermodynamics and ecological cycles. opening up to the interrelations with other systems, in a desire to build a systemic-interdisciplinary-sustainable paradigm.

Within this bias, the idea of *sustainable development* will only be possible to have a broad debate on the fundamental points that for now sustain capitalism, such as production and consumption patterns, the regime of accumulation of wealth, modes of regulation of capital by the State and integration of the economy with social interests, avoiding the destruction of nature and man in his identity, inaugurating an era of solidarity and global and cosmic respect.

As Leonardo Boff (2010, p. 25) emphasizes: "despite the criticisms, it is important to recognize that the concept of 'sustainable development' can be useful to qualify a type of development in delimited regions and defined ecosystems". In other words, "it is possible to

<sup>5</sup> The explanation of this trajectory of appropriation of nature and man can be seen in the article entitled *Perceptions about the appropriation of nature by man, globalization and sustainable development*. Environmental Law III [Online electronic resource] Coord. Cunha, Belinda Pereira da; Albuquerque, Leticia; Souza, Leonardo da Rocha de. Florianópolis: CONPEDI, 2014, p. 153-173. Access mode: [www.conpedi.org.br](http://www.conpedi.org.br) in publications Theme: (Re)thinking Law: Challenges for the Construction of new Paradigms.



preserve natural capital, to make a rational use of resources and to maintain the capacity for regeneration of the entire ecosystem".

Thus, the proposal of sustainable development represents an advance in the theoretical field of world thought regarding the crisis of the current economic model, but in practice, the absence of mechanisms to solve the transformation of economic, social and political institutions, which sustain the current developmental style, demonstrate that this proposal is moving towards becoming a term that translates utopian expectations, of an empty nature, incapable of promoting an emancipatory project.

This is because the official actors of sustainable development are those who constitute the social basis of the dominant style, who have much to lose and little to gain from its transformation. As a result, the foundations of sustainable development are distorted and ideologically used by different actors, whose logic is based on the market, and not on nature. In this sense, Leroy, Maia, Guimarães (1997, p. 17):

(...) sustainable development would suppose a vision of the future, a project for society, public policies and strategies for the future country; it is assimilated to business strategies, the market and, worse, to the volatile movements of financial and speculative capital. They want to reduce sustainability to an economic category, a guarantee that the production/consumption cycle, the basis of the mercantile world, can reproduce indefinitely.

However, as Vandana Shiva (2003, p. 161) observes, development "is seen as what science and technologists produce". Scientists and technologists, on the other hand, "are seen as that sociological category that has received traditional training in Western science and technology, either in Third World institutions or associations that imitate Western paradigms."

As a result, the term sustainable development is constructed within the limits of the market economy, which begins to offer solutions to the ecological crisis and evidently generates a false interpretation of sustainability.

In fact, Vandana Shiva (2003, p. 162-163) also observes that economic inadequacy stems from the disastrous association between the needs of society and the demands of the technological process, because:

Technological processes create demands for raw materials and markets, and both control over raw materials and markets becomes an essential part of the policy of technological change. The lack of theoretical knowledge of the two ends of technological processes, their beginning in natural resources and their end in basic human needs, has created the current paradigm of economic and technological development that requires increasing extractions of natural resources and

generates ever greater increases in pollutants, while marginalizing and throwing an increasing number of people into misery. taking them out of the production process. These characteristics of contemporary industrial and scientific development are the main causes of the ecological, political, and economic crisis. The combination of ecologically destructive types of science and technology, and the absence of criteria for evaluating scientific and technological systems in terms of efficient use of resources and ability to satisfy basic needs, has created conditions in which society is increasingly being driven towards ecological and economic instability, and lacks a rational and organized response to halt and control these destructive trends.

This false notion is based on three ontological errors: the first is the ontological primacy of capital; the second is the ontological separation between production and conservation, making the latter dependent on capital, and the third error is to take for granted the substitution of nature by capital.

Finally, as Leonardo Boff (2010, p. 29) points out: "more than talking about 'sustainable development', it is important to ensure the sustainability of the Earth, of life, of society, of humanity".

In this way, true sustainability will require the market and the production process to be reformulated. This implies recognizing nature as the basic organizing principle of society, thus maintaining the integrity of its processes, cycles and rhythms.

Building an alternative style of development that is truly sustainable requires, as Enrique Leff (2006a, p. 161) explains, environmental knowledge, understood as knowledge about a field "externalized by the economic, scientific and technological rationality of modernity; but, in turn, it connotes the marginalized and subjugated knowledge by the centrality of the scientific *logos*".

Thus, it is necessary to build an environmental rationality that involves productive, social and cultural processes. It is, therefore, a political and social process that confronts opposing interests and reorients consumption practices, in search of a new logic of production and new technological standards.

However, as Enrique Leff (2006, p. 18) reveals, it is between the folds of modern thought that the following emerges:

environmental rationality that allows us to unveil the perverse circles, the imprisonments and chains that have loved the categories of thought and scientific concepts to the core of the rationality of their strategies of domination of nature and culture. Environmental rationality thus inquires about the foundation of the one and the ignorance of the other, which led to the fundamentalism of a universal unity and to the conception in the process of globalization in which terrorism and the environmental crisis erupt as the decadence of life, as the desire for suicide of the being and extermination of the other, as the loss of meanings that entails the objectification of the world and the commodification of nature. Environmental

rationality seeks to contain the alteration of opposites as a dialectic of history in order to build a world as the coexistence of diversity.

Therefore, it is evident that this rationality will not be an expression of a market logic, but the result of a set of norms, interests, values, meanings and actions that do not occur outside the laws of nature of society, but that only imitate them.

Throughout the course of modernity, numerous economic changes have created several cultural and social changes in countries, and the predominance of instrumental, Cartesian-mechanistic reason, combined with technique, has come to permeate all spheres of social life. Nowadays, this utilitarian, pragmatic and technocratic thinking has become generalized and has become more intensely disseminated by the phenomenon of globalization and capitalism.

The profound transformations of the world, however, have led to an unprecedented civilizational crisis. This civilizational crisis has aggravated the environmental crisis. In this regard, as Leonardo Boff (2012, p. 19) points out: "the Earth has already exceeded its regeneration capacity by 25%. We are not going to face a major crisis – we are already in it."

Thus, the search for a new civilizational pattern must take into account the observations of Enrique Leff (2012, p. 19), in the sense that the "environmental crisis is a crisis of knowledge".

The lack of perception of this reality and the desire to maintain the current Cartesian rationalist model lead us to maintain that we live in times of crisis, which forces us to assume a humble posture for the correct understanding of *learned ignorance*, as Nicholas of Cusa (2012, p. 4-5) puts it when explaining it, as follows:

If this is so, as the very profound Aristotle also affirms in the First Philosophy that in things that are most manifest by nature we encounter a difficulty similar to that of bats that try to see the sun, then, if our desire is not in vain, what we desire is to know that we are ignorant. If we can fully arrive at this, we will reach learned ignorance. For no other knowledge more perfect can come to man, even to the most studious, than to discover himself supremely learned in his ignorance, which is proper to him, and he will be all the more learned the more ignorant he knows.

Therefore, one must look at the past, understand the present, with the existing structural and conjunctural environmental problems and seek inspiration for the future, aiming to overcome the environmental crisis now installed in the heart of human civilization.

Environmental knowledge proposes an expanded view of the crisis, based on the reading of modern knowledge, the analysis of the exercise of power formulated by positivism, under the bases of rational, Cartesian, scientific, universalist and utilitarian thought, as well as its ideologies and failures, seeking to transcend it aiming at a new mode of production and consumption patterns.

This "nomadic and wandering thinking", as stated by Enrique Leff (2012, p. 14) requires critical interpreters who can understand that:

Environmental epistemology is an adventure of knowledge that seeks the horizon of knowledge, never the return to an origin from which the human being departs with his language load; it is the eternal return of a reflection on what has already been thought that navigates the seas of exiled knowledge, thrown into the ocean in the conquest of epistemic territories by metaphysical thought and scientific rationality. (Leff, 2012, p. 16)

In view of all the above, it is clear that the concept of sustainable development only has a deep meaning and is capable of changing the current reality if it is structured by environmental knowledge, founded on a new epistemology and expressed by environmental rationality, in such a way that economic development is linked to social development, with the overcoming of the current logics of consumption and preservation of natural capital, aimed at present generations and legacy for future generations.

The fragile future forces us to face the challenges posed by the environmental and global crisis. The overcoming of the arrogance and foolishness of Cartesian technoscience that intends to control the future, through the imposition of a single universalizing way of thinking and, thus, determine the end of history, can only be overcome with the rupture of the anthropocentric vision and cultural individualism and the recovery of values that encourage respect and responsibility that allow us to leave a fruitful legacy for future generations.

In this sense, the concept of *Otherness*, as proposed by Lévinas, that is, to see the other as a face, a human being determined and expressed by his uniqueness, which allows the *thinking-for-the-other*, is extremely important for the paradigmatic changes proposed here. Thus, it is convenient to explain the thinking of Lévinas (2009, p. 269) when he clarifies that:

This human inversion of the in-itself and the for-itself, of the 'each one for himself', in being ethical, in priority for the other, is subordinated to the for-itself of the ontological obstinacy of the I henceforth unique, but unique by its election to a responsibility for the other man - irrefutable and incessant - this radical turnaround

would be produced in what I call the encounter of the face of the other. Behind the posture he takes - or endures - in his appearance, he calls me and orders me from the depths of his defenseless nakedness, from his misery, from his mortality. It is in the personal relationship, from the self to the other, that the ethical 'event', charity and mercy, generosity and obedience, leads beyond or elevates above the being."

Therefore, the notion of environmental citizenship will be outlined, starting with *the self*, which is not to be confused with the *self* or with a selfish or greedy vision, in fact this vision must be removed to allow the world to be seen from oneself or according to the formula expressed by the Japanese philosopher, Kitaro Nishida quoted by Katsuhito Inoue (2009, p. 35): "the self identifies itself with the self itself, to the extent that it transcends itself" and becomes immanent.

From this notion of consciousness, it will be perfectly possible to change the pillars that support the structure of the current world, founded on technocence and capitalist bases, which benefit few global actors.

With this, collective life will have a new meaning and the States a new role in the context of the regulation of society, because, as Milton Santos (2001, p. 173) explains, when appreciating the history of man on Earth, we already have:

(...) of the objective, material, intellectual conditions, to overcome the deification of money and technical objects and to face the beginning of a new trajectory. Here it is not a matter of establishing dates, nor of fixing moments of the leaf, milestones in a calendar. Like the clock, the leaf and the calendar are conventional, repetitive and historically empty. What really counts is the time of the possibilities actually created, what, in its time, each generation finds available, what we call *empirical time*, whose changes are marked by the irruption of new objects, new actions and relations, and new ideas.

In this way, the critical rationality proposed here aims to develop justice and solidarity between generations, to see reality in an interdisciplinary way, to educate with attention focused on prevention, through the concurrence of diverse and new knowledge and moved by a cooperative reason.

In the end, the concept of sustainable development will be built through awareness, education and responsibility to avoid the degradation of nature and ensure the needs of future generations.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Throughout this article, the concept of sustainable development has been examined, since its embryonic phase at the Stockholm Conference in 1972, which aimed

to combine the term development, of economic origin, with the term sustainability, originating from ecology and biology.

It was also demonstrated that the concept of sustainability is very broad and has several dimensions: social, economic, ecological, spatial and cultural. As a result, the expression sustainable development has come under numerous criticisms, as a result of the contradiction inherent in the two terms. Thus, the concept of sustainable development was gradually appropriated by Cartesian reasoning, dictated by the technoscience of a globalized world, ordered by the capitalist vision and the logic of markets.

In other words, first we had the appropriation of nature by man, based on the empiricist vision of Bacon and the method of Descartes. Later, with the improvement and diffusion of capitalism around the world, the rules of the market began to appropriate man and nature.

Thus, it was observed that we are experiencing an unprecedented civilizational crisis. This implies a global environmental crisis, which refers to a fragile future, which must be anticipated to avoid the dangers inherent in human predatory actions, which compromise planetary life, for present and future generations.

It was found that this environmental crisis has as its main foundation the modes of production and the current patterns of consumption dictated by the capitalist model, guided by science and high technology, which increasingly widen the distance between the model idealized by countries of the North and an equitable distribution with the countries of the South, allowing the concentration of world income in the hands of a few.

In view of this scenario, we present a critical analysis of the current complex real. The proposal to face the global environmental crisis presented presupposes a change in paradigms and behavior, with the overcoming of the model dictated by technocratic Cartesian reason.

The search, therefore, involves various knowledges, which promote the rescue of values that preserve both the capital of nature and the original cultures. To this end, it is necessary that this knowledge be founded on an epistemology capable of aggregating isolated and exiled knowledge.

Within this perspective, the concept of sustainable development starts to consider: the existing material conditions; the different degrees of political consciousness among the various subjects, social groups and communities; both the specific knowledge on certain subjects involving the issue of sustainability (economic, social, cultural, technical-



technological, ecological, territorial, biological, legal, pedagogical, health, among many others), as well as the condition of working on this knowledge in an interdisciplinary way; and, differentiated ethical and moral conceptions.

A rationality along these lines aims to combat discrimination, dehumanization and the devaluation of the being and, consequently, the contempt for looking at the other, which is revealed in each one for himself.

In this way, this thinking-for-the-other aims to overcome the current model that consecrates selfishness and narcissism and feeds on false values in search of a pseudo individual happiness.

Finally, environmental knowledge aims to rescue values such as respect, responsibility and solidarity among human beings and their relationship with nature, thus allowing the concept of sustainable development to be seen as a new vision of human development.

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