

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ETHICS IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING OF TERTIARY EDUCATION: BUDDHIST VALUES AS A PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

The existence of our global civilization depends on how the mankind will manage its most urgent and difficult problem – the sustainable development. So far, the general understanding of the global seriousness of the situation does is not in line with the responsibility and measures taken. There is a lack of ethical thinking and moral values. Egoism and unscrupulous consumerism prevail.

My goal is to (i) characterize the United Nations Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals from the point of view of tertiary education as a key area of formation of the young generation on sustainable development and ethics in all ways of life; and to (ii) compare and confront selected the National Review Reports of selected European Union States and Asian countries with a main attention to whether and how they deal with the key categories of sustainable development and ethics.

My conclusion is that to fulfill the sustainable development goals despite the global efforts and urgent warnings is more than challenging and without a fundamental ethical and philosophical change impossible. The reason lies in the still persisting Western neoclassical economic thinking oriented on profit maximalization. Buddhism, despite its

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long tradition, has a strong potential to address the most urgent issues of our present world. Fundamental principles and teachings of Buddhism provide theoretical foundation, methodological guidance, humanistic, ethical and moral background, most urgently needed in Western society and in consumerist society in general nowadays. This is a very important dimension of Buddhism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is an issue touching nowadays with an increasing intensity our concerns. Our environment is in a highly alarming state, its perspectives for the future are pessimistic and the irreversible changes - whether it be a depletion of natural resources, climate changes or an environmental contamination and diminishing of natural habitat of flora and fauna - severely threaten every being. Undoubtedly, these are major stressors of our globalized world. Most of media expose us to information ranging from serious articles to quasi serious information and even fake news. Consequently, the stress among people is rising and they become passive, fatalistic or lazy. Shortsighted and selfish behavior corresponds well to the Latin proverb *Carpe Diem*, on the other hand the atmosphere sometimes resembles the hysterical expectations of an Apocalypse in Middle Ages.

We can not say that in the past no one was interested in the environmental issues and did not take care for the environment. Period of Enlightenment of the 18th Century and following that the Industrial revolution could be named as two opposite thresholds – on one hand fascinating examples of landscaping, and first devastatingly polluted industrial areas on the other hand, described by such famous writers as Charles Dickens, Polish Wladyslaw Reymont, and also Friedrich Engels, if we speak on the Western world. In the 20th Century, the approach of the Soviet Union and of its satellite countries toward the environment is another example to mention. There was a strong pressure on extensive exploitation of natural resources and on heavy industry. Lack of consideration and inefficient economy which could not afford the “unproductive” expenditures on environmental protection led to the neglecting of wastewater treatment and to tons of pollutants and chemical waste discharged without any filters in the air and in the rivers. This

caused a heavy damage to the environment and to the health of people in industrial areas and led even to a decrease of the average life expectancy and exodus of people from these regions which was prevented by various administrative measures. A bank note of one hundred Czechoslovak Crowns from 1961 which was for many decades a bank note with the highest value and was a symbol of prosperity and wealth shows clearly this ideal: a steelworks worker and a collective farm women are featured standing against the background of factories spraying clouds of smoke. Symbol of education was not accepted among these indicators of prosperity.

After the countries of Central Europe – Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia started in 1998 their accession process to the European Union, one of the most demanding tasks was to regenerate and recultivate these devastated areas and to modernize the industries including compulsory installation of modern filters and wastewater treatment plants.



Fig. 1 bank note of one hundred Czechoslovak Crowns from 1961

Sustainable development has much larger meaning and goals than an environmental protection. Calling for environmental protection, responsibility and ethics is not enough. It is imperative that the sustainable development becomes an integral and substantial part of education at all levels of educational systems globally. It is indispensable to reorientate university curricula so that the sustainable development be an integral component of any program of study. But most importantly, we have to change substantially our mindset, we have to change our values. The spiritual dimension of sustainable development is a concern of everyone. In my paper,

I will focus on the goals related to education and to responsible consumption as this is an area where we can clearly demonstrate the need, usefulness and indispensability of a Buddhist approach.

2. SEVENTEEN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The policies, norms and conducts of Western society resulted in the 2nd half of 20th Century in an alarming notion of an approaching catastrophe. This led to a calling for a sustainable development and subsequently to a launching of global actions to achieve this goal. This concept of sustainable development was however influenced by the scientific-materialist philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries and the Western neoclassical economic thinking, which has been always oriented on maximalization of production, profit, benefit and expansion. A lasting discrepancy and struggle between the urgency to achieve a change and chances to achieve this change are imbedded here. Despite sincere and determined intensions these chances would be limited, unless the mentality, the mindset and the system of values changes. For this, Buddhism can provide the best guidance.

The term “sustainable development” appeared rather recently. The first quite alarming studies on the environmental deterioration appeared in the beginning of 1970’s in the influential elite think tank called Club of Rome¹. Their prognosis was a depressing picture of 21st Century. Then the issue of securing an environmentally acceptable development reached the United Nations platform and world wide and globally coordinated initiatives came to the existence, later on under the motto “think globally, act locally.”

The definition of sustainable development was however formulated not earlier than in 1987 in so called Brundtland report² called *Our Common Future*, which said “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without

1. Club of Rome defines itself as “an organisation of individuals who share a common concern for the future of humanity and strive to make a difference.” (Club of Roma, 2019).

2. Named after Gro Harlem Brundtland, Norwegian Prime Minister from 1981 to 1996 (with interruptions), Chair of the *World Commission on Environment and Development* — WCED (from 1983) and Director –General of the World Health Organization. She is one of the most important world leaders in this area sustainable development.

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (International Institute for Sustainable Development, n.d.). In the first half of 1990’s, this term and concept started to spread widely and represent today a dominant approach.

The Earth Summit of the United Nations in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 resulted in an adoption by 178 governments of the world of a document Agenda 21 (stands for 21st Century). Even if it was a non-binding action plan, it had a very strong authority and initiated an adoption of corresponding Agenda 21 at a level of individual countries. Agenda 21 has been structured into four sections. In this document, the education was defined as an essential tool for achieving sustainable development.

The next key step was a Sustainable Development Summit which was held in 2015 in New York. Its main outcome was a document *Transforming our world: Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*³ (par. 54 of the Resolution RES A/RES/70/1). The Agenda 2030 identified seventeen so called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015, pp. 14-27).

Agenda 2030 represents a program for global sustainable development of the world in the fifteen years from 2015, we so are now in one third of this process. Agenda 2030, as is the Agenda 21, has a not binding character and positions of countries are voluntary. All 193 nations however participate and there is a strong central apparatus supporting this agenda.⁴ The United Nations yearly publishes a report on fulfillment of the goals, so called *SDG Index*. From 2015 when Agenda 2030 has been adopted, three SDG Indexes were published (for 2016, 2017 and 2018). Some countries reported every year, some submitted just one report so far which is the most common case, some announced a publication of their first report in 2019.

Agenda 2030 and its SDGs has been so far the largest and most

3. Adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015.

4. At the top international level, there is a UN Commission on Sustainable Development which is in charge for preparation of summits and sessions on the implementation of Agenda 21 and Agenda 30 respectively. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs’ Division for Sustainable Development monitors and evaluates the implementation country by country.

complex development strategy in which all the UN member states participate. The intention is also to achieve in each country a large public engagement and therefore representatives of academia, governmental and non governmental institutions, business, civil society organizations and other sectors have been invited to take part in Open Forums on Sustainable Development.

The Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030 are these: 1. No poverty, 2. Zero Hunger, 3. Good Health and Well-Being, 4. Quality Education, 5. Gender Equality, 6. Clean Water and Sanitation, 7. Affordable and Clean Energy, 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth, 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, 10. Reduced Inequalities, 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities, 12. Responsible Consumption and Production, 13. Climate Action, 14. Life below Water, 15. Life on Land, 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, 17. Partnership for the Goals. The goals have been elaborated in more detail, structured in targets and responded at international and national level.

3. SELECTED VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS, EDUCATION AND ETHICS

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) which is the main focus of this article has a full title “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” It has ten subdivisions and one of them names explicitly the sustainable development: (4.7): “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” (United Nations, n.d.a).

This subchapter examines the implementation of the SDG 4 based on their Voluntary National Review Reports⁵ (Division for Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.).

5. Full title of the reports is *Voluntary National Review Reports on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals presented to The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations.

From Central Europe, Czechia (Czech Republic), Slovakia, Poland and Hungary have been selected, from Western Europe Belgium and France have been examined, taking into account also Germany, and from Asia we will see India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Japan, Singapore and Vietnam.

The Czech Republic adopted, based on the UN 17 SDGs, a *Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030* (Ministerstvo životního prostředí ČR, 2019). This document is divided into six major blocs, on the first look not corresponding to the 17 SDGs, but these UN goals are strongly intertwined among and across them.⁶ This should be a fundamental document of the state administration in the area of sustainable development and its aim should be an increase of the quality of life of the people. The education in general has been paid a large attention in the Czech Strategic Framework, yet on the education on sustainable development and reasonable consumption we read just: “[The education] must be oriented towards development of life long competencies needed to enter the path of sustainable development.” In my opinion, just “to enter the path” is at current situation not sufficient. There is also a plan to support the consumer education with priority on children, young adults, seniors and handicapped people (sic!), which is in my opinion also a weak statement. It is not clear why the consumer education of these particular groups should be supported and why some stratas were excluded. The goal “to waste less, to produce more economically, to recycle” is not interconnected with the educational system and a clear interconnection between the education in sustainable development and practical life is missing. The Czech National Review Report from 2018 stemming from the Strategic Framework states that “A good education system accessible to all is vital for the creation of sustainable societies. The ability to use innovative approaches is crucial to raise awareness about sustainable production and consumption and to increase the general understanding of natural ecosystems (abbr.) The report does not mention the ethics, ethical values or any spiritual categories (Office of the Government of Czech Republic, 2017).

6. These chapters are People and society, Economic model, Durable ecosystems, Communities and regions, Global development and Good governance.

The Slovak 2018 National Review Report refers only to the Slovak Methodological and Pedagogical Centre offering training programs on global issues including environmental education for teachers to be integrated in the subjects and curricula (Deputy Prime Minister's Office for Investments and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, n.d.).

Poland, unlike Czechia and Slovakia, took in consideration the importance of ethical values. A Minimum Standard of the Ethical Programme should be developed jointly by Global Compact Network Poland and Partner Institutions and the Coalition of Ethics Officers and be applied in every organisation of any size (Council of Ministers, 2018).

Hungarian report more than any other examined European reports reflected both the spiritual and ethical and traditional approach.

Hungary *verbis expressis* stated that the sustainable development due to its nature requires a holistic approach. Importance of cross-sectoriality appears in a number of other country reports, but the Hungarian emphasis on holistic thinking is unique, particularly for Europe. Hungary underlines a need of a more substantial reform of education: "Sustainable society requires people that understand systems-based approach, who are able to identify the interrelations and act accordingly; that is why an education reform is necessary. We must pay much more attention to education aiming at raising awareness of global issues and their interconnectedness. We must strengthen the role of ethics and consciousness related to sustainability in politics, society and economy."

Hungary is one of few countries speaking on ethics as a key factor: "To implement the Sustainable Development Goals, the concept and the values of sustainable development should be integrated in the everyday and long - term decisions. This requires the change of our behaviour; we have to create a new system of ethics and values. Therefore, the issue of sustainability cannot be managed as only a political or governmental matter."

Responsible consumption and production are crucial for the achievement of sustainable development while education and raising of awareness have a pivotal role in the sustainable

consumption and production. The driving forces which create the problems should be changed (Ministry of foreign affairs and trade of Hungary, 2018).

Belgium reports environmental and sustainability principles at all educational levels and emphasizes particularly “the green” aspect of sustainable development (Pathways to sustainable development, 2017).

France as one of first countries submitted its report in 2016 and announced its next publication in 2019. The Frech report from 2016 differs from most of other reports by its brief statements on domestic situation and strong accent on international dimensions of each goal which left the text at rather general level. We will see how the next report will be. Very similar approach – shorter report on domestic situation and large international context – chose Germany even if its report from 2016 was larger. United Kingdom did not submit any national report yet and will do that for the first time in 2019 (United Nations, n.d.b).

Asian Buddhist countries reports differ from European reports. This undoubtedly stems from Buddhism and philosophical traditions of those countries. This is very clear already from the opening statements of national reports.

India refers to its spiritual and philosophical traditions, saying that “an ancient Indian phrase meaning “the world is one family”, pithily captures the spirit of India’s approach to all aspects of life including economic development. The Sustainable Development Goals are, thus, part and parcel of the country’s longstanding tradition and heritage. The SDGs are understood as identical with the national development strategy and plans of India and cooperation is named as inherent to India’s civilizational values.⁷ The Indian report pays a strong attention to education and reports successes in meeting targets of the respective goals. Overall it is very positive about Indian achievements which reflects recent economic progress of India (NITI Aayog, 2017).

7. Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi in his speech at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 said: Sustainable development of one-sixth of humanity will be of great consequence to the world and our beautiful planet. (Modi, 2015)

Also Sri Lanka refers to its legacy of culture that had embraced the principles of sustainable development in its actions throughout the history. The national report emphasizes the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions. Its structure is brief but to the topic, with each goal clearly indicating current status, trends, gaps and way forward.

The problems Sri Lanka has to face to meet the SDGs requirements are huge: for example its consumption of energy is constantly growing which is interconnected with the economic development, but the country is fully dependent on imports of fossil fuel. Sri Lanka sees the necessity to integrate the Sustainable Consumption and Production Policies to all national policies and plans which should be supported by education (Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and Regional Development, 2018).

Bhutan entitled its report *Sustainable Development and Happiness*. In European reports, the word happiness does not appear. Bhutan even established a Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat which coordinated the preparation of the national report. Bhutan states that its goal is not just to achieve an economic development. A holistic goal of maximization of Gross National Happiness which is the nation's principal philosophy, ideal and practical policy is more meaningful. Bhutan states that both the 17 UN SDGs and the Gross National Happiness have the same goal and that the sustainable development was integral part of its policy well before the inception of Agenda 2030. Bhutan's document strongly emphasises the ethics in various context. Problems Bhutan has to face are however very serious: Bhutan reports that emissions from waste increased by 247.45% between 2013 and 2016 which is enormously alarming. There is no legal framework on sustainable consumption and production (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2018).

Japan and Singapore are two economically highly developed Asian countries. Japanese report states that Education for Sustainable Development is essential for achieving the aims of the SDGs as a whole. Ethical consumption behavior is subject to rising awareness which takes into consideration people, society and the environment, including regional revitalization and job creation, which is called "ethical consumption." Among Asian countries,

Japan paid in its report the largest and most comprehensive attention to consumer behavior and education toward it. Japanese government holds symposia “Ethical Lab” in local regions and is actively introducing advanced cases of ethical consumption. There are also initiatives across the area of ASEAN aimed at cooperation in sustainable consumption. Part of ethical consumption is ethical business management, socially responsible to build a sustainable and desirable society (Government of Japan, 2017).

Singapore was is the only country which included in the Goal 4 a special paragraph on Education for Sustainable Development. This should guide the students to develop “soft skills” as part of their educational process. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

Cambodia did not submit any report yet but announced its submission in 2019 and Thailand did not submit its report either. The last Asian country examined here is Vietnam.

Vietnam claims that the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs are in line with the long-term development strategy of the country. Education is defined as the top national priority and Vietnam reports that 20% of government budget is dedicated to education and training.⁸ Vietnam faces many difficult challenges in the area of sustainable development which are beyond the focus of this article - for example Vietnam claims that it was more than any other country affected by a climate change. The sustainable production and consumption is examined from the point of view of exploitation of natural resources, greener production and access of the poor and vulnerable to benefits from sustainable and safe products. Excessive consumption and all its negative consequences which are one of major problems of developed countries does not appear in the national report of Vietnam (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2018).

4. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ETHICS

Providing the education is nowadays considered a profitable

8. For comparison: Among the OECD countries, the Czech Republic is one of the four countries (with Hungary, Slovakia and Italy) with the lowest investments in education. In Czech case, it is of 4% of GDP, while OECD average is 5,2 %.

business. Openly this was stated in the article called „ When I was bored shopping I got the idea to establish a school “ published in a leading Czech newspaper (Brzybohatá and Kania, 2019).

How fits the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)⁹ in this educational environment? The education, the formation of young people, is an indispensable key tool to the sustainable development. But are the educational structure and the curricula today prepared to fulfil this crucial task? The United Nations and Unesco claim that it should be an integral part of all levels and forms of education. There has been some progress made which is very positive, but it is still not adequate considering the seriousness of the situation, yet I see in this area good perspectives for the future.

At least twenty to thirty Master's Programs of study in sustainable development, sustainable and innovative resources management, environmental leadership, interdisciplinary studies in environmental, economic and social sustainability, global sustainability governance etc. exists at various universities around the world and these programs are mushrooming. This is a substantial step forward in education of sustainable development experts.

The top ranked universities offering these progressive programs are these, but not exclusively only these:

i. United Kingdom: University of Sussex, University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, London School of Economics and Political Science, School of Oriental and African Studies-University of London, University of East Anglia, University of Manchester, University of Leeds, and University of Edinburgh;

ii. Netherlands: Utrecht University, Wageningen University and Research, Erasmus University Rotterdam;

iii. Denmark: University of Copenhagen;

iv. Austria: University of Vienna;

v. United States and Canada: Harvard University, Stanford University, University of California Berkeley, University of California Los Angeles, Princeton University, University of

9. Also used as Sustainability Education (SE) or Education for Sustainability (EFS).

Chicago, Brown University, University of Toronto;

vi. Australia: Australian National University, Melbourne Business School, University of Queensland, University of Sydney, Monash University;

vii. Asia: University of Tokyo, University of Malaya and University of Hong Kong;

viii. South Africa: University of Cape Town and University of Witwatersrand (Studyportals, 2019).

There are also frequent calls for doctoral or post-doctoral students in sustainability related fields.

The ethics is very closely related to sustainable development, it is a connecting thread of all aspects of sustainable development.

Programs of study in ethics are represented at a number of universities, but they do not focus on sustainable development, or just marginally. Ethics has been so far mostly taught as ethics in specific scholarly fields – Ethics in medicine, Ethics in psychology, Business ethics within programs on Business Administration. Programs and courses on ethics related with computerization, data science, as, for example, Ethical and Social Implications of Data (Marquette University), Ethical and Policy Dimensions of Information, Technology and Media (University of Colorado, Boulder) are developing very dynamically. Ethics is also an important part of education at Christian educational institutions (Glanzer et al., 2004).

However, in respect of sustainable development, the ethics is one of the most underdeveloped field in the area of Western civilization.

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BUDDHIST VALUES

How is Buddhism related to sustainable development? From a superficial, uninformed or “non-Buddhist” point of view, Buddhism may be not very helpful and may be even unfortunate for sustainable development, particularly because of unattachment and teaching on impermanence. According to Buddhism, nothing is everlasting, unchanging, permanent or stable. Three fundamental characteristics of our world are impermanence or

transience, unsatisfactoriness or painfulness, and no permanence or an unchanging self. Western world, unlike Buddhism, always aimed to achieve the opposite, and the changes, instability and the unknown cause a fear and terrify it. In Buddhism, all phenomena come into existence and inevitably are coming to an end. Shouldn't we ask a question, whether, from the Buddhist point of view, the environmental catastrophs such as climate change and exhaustion of resources do not mean this inevitable end which is approaching? Shouldn't the humans better stay unattached if the attachment to the world phenomena is meaningless?

Hungarian expert in Business Ethics and Buddhism Gábor Kovács¹⁰ says: "The clinging to the sustenance of phenomena is a kind of suffering in Buddhism – it is not praised, especially if it is connected with worldly material things... .. Sustainable development for a Buddhist implies rather an inner spiritual quality which has to be realized by ongoing practice of virtues, wisdom and meditation." (Kovács, 2011, p. 21).

The characteristics of Buddhist economy should be not struggling for maximalization of production, benefits and expansion and then to self-imposing its limitation due to the sustainable development requirements. In contrary, "the practice of the Buddhist economic strategy involves sustainability in the strict sense as a byproduct (on individual, social and environmental level) towards the realization of non-harming." (Kovács, 2011, p. 22).

Why to struggle in futile attempts, such as 17 Sustainable Development Goals? Is not the second Sign of Being - unsatisfactoriness, pain, suffering – an expression of seeing the stable, permanent and materially prospering Western world disappearing? The central doctrine of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truth. The Second Noble Truth identifies the origin of unsatisfactoriness in ignorance and unchecked craving for the ephemeral phenomena of the impermanent world. Attachment or clinging to the illusion of phenomenal permanence is suffering – especially if it is connected with worldly material wants (Kovács, 2011).

10. Gábor Kovács received M.A. in Buddhist studies from the Budapest Buddhist University and is a Ph.D. candidate in Business Ethics Center at Corvinus University in Budapest.

Sustenance is a preservation of a given situation. The dominant concept of sustainable development set up by the United Nations and then further elaborated, lays on technical and material parameters and the ethical values are making slowly their space in it. As Kovács says, “if one is clinging to the realization of sustainable development, and pegging away at economic and technological development, than the result will be suffering.” (Kovács, 2011, p. 27).

Buddhist economic theory is based on different paradigm than the Western economy. Question is, whether in the field of economy the Buddhist specifics will be able to resist the inexorable pressure of the globalization which is predominantly Western influenced. Can Buddhism contribute to the current interpretation of sustainability and sustainable development?

The first and foremost goal of Buddhism is the final cessation of suffering which can be achieved, as the Third Noble Truth teaches. The path known as the Middle Way refers to right behavior that leads to the full cessation of unsatisfactoriness. Its eight divisions form three parts: 1. Wisdom (Right View and Right Decision), 2. Virtues (Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood), and 3. Concentration (– Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration) (Kovács, 2011).

The concept of development can be found in the teachings of the Buddha, but with three main differences from the common Western perception. Unlike in the concept of 17 Sustainable Goals, the Buddhist development process has an inner, spiritual nature. The development is not goal per se, but a by-product of the purification of the human character, which is the pursuit of the Threefold Practice for the cessation of suffering. According to Buddhism, the development is not sustainable, rather is emerging as a byproduct of ongoing practice.

Gábor Kovács praises the writings of Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, a German-born English economist who in 1973 was the first who mentioned Buddhist economy as an alternative to Western economics (Kovács, 2011, p. 29). Kovács also claims that a number of other authors affirmed that Buddhist economics is able to be an alternative of the traditional paradigm of Western economics. Its distinguishing axioms are:

i. According to the third Sign of Being the starting point of Buddhist economics is non-self in opposition with the Western basic paradigm of self-interested individual.

ii. The main goal of Buddhist economics is the reduction of suffering by fulfilling non-harming business activities, not profitmaximization as it is in Western economics.

iii. According to the ongoing practice of the Noble Eightfold Path a developing cognitive consciousness makes the background of economic actions rather than rationality and rational choice theory.

iv. Based on sympathy the main motivator of actions in economic relationships is cooperation rather than exquisite competition (Kovács, *ibid.*, according to Payutto, 1994; Puntasen, 2007; Zsolnai, 2007; Zsolnai, 2011).

According to Buddhist thinking, sustainability and sustainable development must be the consequence of non-harming economic activities, rather than their fundamental goal. “Economic sustainability is a byproduct of Buddhist economic practice, which allows an inner sustainable spiritual development and accomplishes the goals of the modern concept of sustainable development, as it satisfies the needs of present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Furthermore it contributes to the preservation and the restoration of environment. (Kovács, 30, according to Welford, 2006).

6. LASZLO ZSOLNAI SUMMARIZES IN THE CONCEPT OF BUDDHIST ECONOMICS STRATEGY

There are five basic characteristics of Buddhist business activities: 1. Minimization of suffering: it is the main principle of Buddhist economics, which is extended to all sentient beings; 2. Simplification of desires: Western economics is based on the cultivation of desires as profit motive requires ever-increasing demands. The Buddhist strategy is the opposite of this as it recommends moderation in consumption; 3. Practice of non-violence, market is not the tool of problem-solving; 4. Genuine care; 5. Generosity. (Kovács according Zsolnai, 2007 and 2008).

Buddhism does not teach to resign on economic activities.

Also satisfactory standard of living, health care, education etc. are necessary. Not always is true, however, that liberation from a scarcity will bring people to devote themselves more to their own spiritual growth. As an example may serve the post-communist countries, such as Czechoslovakia, where after the collapse of communism instead of returning to spiritual values the country, as the President Václav Havel predicted and hoped, the country fell in 1990's in a wild "Gründer Kapitalismus" and insatiable consumerism.

A glimpse in the real situation today provide two articles summarized below. They represent just a top of the iceberg of problems of implementation of the goals of the SDGs. Czech plan of the improvement of environment elaborated for the European Union by the Ministry of Industry has been criticized for staying half way. Environmentalists and representatives of modern energies criticize it for not being modern enough and for not using sufficiently renewable resources. Traditional industrial lobby fears to lose a competitiveness and argues that the increased costs of the „modern“ energy will be covered from the pockets of consumers. This is an argument that brings to these influential circles political benefits. Czech Republic declared that tried both: to satisfy the requirements of the European Union and at the same time to minimize the financial impact on energy consumers. (Petříček, 2019).

Poland uses the coal highly extensively and produces 92% of its electricity from coal.¹¹ In his report on 2018 world conference on climate change in Polish city of Katowice¹² former Czech Minister of the Environment Bedřich Moldan said, that the individual commitments of countries were in total not sufficient, that it was a paradox to convene the conference in the largest and highly polluted coal mining area in Poland. Moldan also reports that Polish President Andrzej Duda in his opening speech stated that his country can not and will not give up the coal. One of the most dramatic debates was about a prognosis of global climate change, when some delegates called for an immediate and radical action,

11. The emissions from burning of coal contribute in most significant way to the climate change.

12. This conference took place based on the resolution of Paris Climate Change Conference (2017) to organize every year a world conference.

otherwise the climatic catastrophe would be imminent, on the other hand Russia, the United States, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait did not see the situation that dramatic. Now, everyone waits for a world conference in two years where all the countries should submit their more strict commitments.

Bedřich Moldan thinks, and the author of this article joins his observation, that the current development does not give us many hopes in a positive change. There is a large general public which does not care. Many governments, cities and businesses proceed as nothing is happening. Global change of climate is progressing faster than it has been expected. From 1992 the concentration of greenhouse gas emissions increased for 15 % and in the last year only for 2.7%. Moldan associated the current situation with the orchestra still playing on the deck of sinking Titanic. (Moldan, 2019).

7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The consumer behavior as a whole has to change. Lavish consumption and wasting does not guarantee more happiness. The “must have” mentality, fueled by an obtrusive marketing, is very negative.

The prominent world Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hahn monk and teacher said: “The situation the Earth is in today has been created by unmindful production and unmindful consumption. We consume to forget our worries and our anxieties. Tranquilising ourselves with over-consumption is not the way.” (Confino, 2010).

The program on Seventeen Sustainability Development Goals which was initiated and developed by the apparatus of the United Nations is very complex. There are critics and skeptics expressing doubts that such global plan can hardly be fulfilled by 2030. Considering the fact that we are now approaching the year 2020, then in ten years only, the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources has to be achieved.¹³ Even more unrealistic

13. Sustainable Development Goal 12.

sounds the goal to “by 2020¹⁴ achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment “(United Nation, n.d.c.).

Taking in account, that even if the countries report a progress in some areas, overall the reality is much worse than it should be and in most of parametres any or little progress was made, the skepticism is in place.

There is one fundamental document which was not yet mentioned, and this is the *Europe 2020* strategy. It was issued in 2010 just after the shock of financial crisis of 2008. The language of this material differs from the other official materials examined in this article: José Manuel Barroso in the preface said that the crisis was a wake-up call “for Europe and the world”, that this was a Europe’s moment of truth, that the short- term priority was to get out of the crisis but the longer strategy is a sustainable future, Europe must act etc.

This material emphasises a need to enter into a new economy, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as a way to overcome the structural weaknesses in Europe’s economy, improve its competitiveness and productivity underpinned by a sustainable social market economy. There are many ambitious, attractive goals, but sloesly related to increase of productivity. There is however no ethics mentioned in this material. *Europe 2020* says: We need a strategy to help us come out stronger from the crisis and turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion and that Europe must act to avoid decline. (Barroso, 2010).

Sustainable development as interpreted officially today means technological and economic advancement which rightfully takes into account the interests of the needy and the present and future generations. As Kovács says, this concept does not go beyond the prevalent paradigm of our age and it can’t solve the ever increasing

14. Unless this is a printing error which in top UN materials could also (but extremely exceptionally) appear.

problems of today's modern world. (Kovács) This paradigm has its limitations and therefore also limitations to succeed. A fusion of both attitudes, or, as Kovács says "the adaptation of Buddhist thought to this subject (sustainable development, author's note) – merging the prevailing Western philosophy with the ancient, but useful Eastern wisdom of Buddhism and with the practice of Buddhist economics" (Kovács, 2011, p. 23) is, in my opinion, the only way forward.

The United Nations appreciation of Buddhism as a United Nations Day of Vesak is a strong argument to be mentioned. Signs of the fusion could be indentified already, but it is still the beginning of the process. Buddhist approaches are identifiable in governmental materials of Buddhist countries responding on the Western style initiatives. Studies on Buddhism and its application on the modern world are increasingly published also in the West.

In July this year, there will be a meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council. The theme will be "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". Not all the seventeen goals of sustainable development will be reviewed, but six selected goals, among them the goals on quality education and urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts are on the agenda.

The issues discussed in this article are the most pressing and their urgency is high. As a person culturally Christian, religiously unaffiliated and philosophically Buddhist I hope that we will notice an advancement of the merging the two large paradims- Western and Buddhist, into a global paradigm. The world globalizes, the problems of sustainable development are global and without a global approach, they can be hardly solved.

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