

ECOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC CONCERNS IN THE TERM "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT"

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Abstract. *The collocation "sustainable development" first appeared in 1987 in the official report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development entitled *Our Common Future* (or the *Brundtland Report*). The term was initially devised to denote the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs". The ultimate intention seemed to be ecologically-motivated i.e. it was concerned with the preservation of the environment. Unfortunately, what was to be preserved was the ever-growing economic development of the rich countries which relied on the poor countries' natural resources. As this vague intention resulted in the formation of the term "sustainable development", its linguistic outcome or expression was also vague. This term was later translated into Serbian as "održivi razvoj". The Serbian term is also far from the originally-meant intention. This is the reason why this paper has tried to propose some better solutions.*

Key Words: *sustainable development, economic development, preservation of the environment, linguistic expression*

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The collocation "sustainable development" first appeared in 1987 in the official report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development entitled *Our Common Future* (or the *Brundtland Report*).

The Commission was actually appointed by the UN General Assembly in 1983 for the purpose of examining potential conflicts between environment protection and economic growth. The primary goal was to investigate how to reduce poverty in much of the developing world while at the same time sustain and preserve their natural resources for the current and the coming generations. Rather, the conflict between the need of economic growth to grow further on the basis of the existing resource base and the need of the current and future generations to live on the same resource base resulted in the formation of the term "sustainable development". The term was initially devised to denote the "devel-

opment that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (Marshall 1998: 656). This formulation shows clearly that the imperative of the Commission was to preserve the development at all costs. In other words, the Commission was to propose alternative patterns of development for the future while at the same time take into account the impact of that development on the environment. "The central notion of the report is 'sustainable development' - which has now become the latest in a series of trendy buzz-phrases." (Porritt-Winner 1988: 229). The "trendy buzz-phrase" was actually devised to reconcile the two conflicting trends, the inherent tendency of economic development to grow and the tendency of the nature preservation principle to let nature and natural processes run their course and consequently slow down any economically forced or man-driven development. When the true nature of these two processes was revealed due to the rising interest in the environment, it became clear that if the life-preserving or the life-sustaining environment was to be saved, the whole basis on which society and economy were organized would have to be changed. As the issue was found to be one of "either-or", the "conflict" was to be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties. The assumption of the Brundtland Report was that industrialism should be perfected, or at least improved, to the point where it no longer endangers the environment. The economic growth process "will have to change radically in terms of the *quality* of development", (Porritt-Winner 1988: 229). The new-fangled collocation to denote this meaning was "sustainable development", "sustainable" meaning the opposite of "destructive". Therefore the development ought not to have been destructive.

There obviously arose no question of slowing down development. Quite the opposite, it was to be promoted and enhanced. Or, to relate it to the ever-diminishing resources that it has to use, development was to be saved at all costs. It is, unfortunately but rightly, often represented as a giant beast devouring everything at hand. In order to live, it needs natural resources as its food and, therefore, if there were no resources available it would have to be restrained.

Developed countries, which thrive on the process of development, do not want to get rid of it. The process of development belongs to them, whereas the resources that development depends on belong to developing countries. The development of the developed countries had devoured their own resources. Development means profit, which the rich countries want for themselves. They therefore reached for the ample (abundant) and unused resources of the developing countries. They soon realized that unless the tapping of resources from the poor countries stopped immediately, they would be left without them and, by implication, the profit-making development itself. Some steps had to be undertaken so that the situation (or the distribution of wealth and power) could remain unchanged. Moreover, it had to acquire the form of growing concern for the poverty of the developing countries.

As a result, in 1974 The United Nations undertook to restructure international economic relations and reduce the inequalities between the developed countries of the North and the developing countries of the South. They created a new concept "New International Economic Order" (NIEO). It was admitted that the existing economic order perpetuated the inherent inequality between the North and the South which had to be significantly reduced.

Similarly to the Brundtland Commission, the Brandt Commission (even the names resemble each other) was formed with the aim of creating the economic policy that would close the gap between the North and the South by encouraging the economic growth of the South. With this aim, a certain number of measures were proposed: allowing the de-

veloping countries to gain more control over their own resources, price stabilization measures, a code of conduct for multinational corporations and a commitment by the governments of the developed countries towards increased foreign aid, international monetary reform, and the relocation of commodity processing and manufacturing activities in the raw material producing countries. The prospects for a NIEO have receded with economic stagnation in the 1980s when the leading industrial nations were preoccupied with domestic issues. The Brundt Commission presented its findings in 1980 when there still existed a hope in a more equitable world.

In 1983, though, it was realized that something more radical had to be done. The environmentalists had also become much stronger. Namely, the Brundtland Commission or World Commission on Environment and Development was created by the UN General Assembly for the purpose of examining potential conflicts between environment protection and economic growth. The Commission which numbered 21 members was chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway. "Its report *Our Common Future* to the Governing Council of UNEP was presented in April 1987. The Commission envisaged a new era of economic growth, one based on policies of 'sustainable development', coupled with an expansion of the environmental resource base. Such growth was seen by the commission as essential to the relief of poverty in much of the developing world, and to sustain coming generations". (Gilpin 1996: 232)

The term "sustainable development", devised by the Brundtland Commission, was really a means of promoting the process of development in the North and the developing countries in the South were actually to be helped in order to promote that development. The developing countries were hypocritically included in the programme of the developed countries, which was to create an equal distribution of the world's wealth. The wealth, however, was to be reserved for the developed countries only.

The hypocrisy of the intention was also reflected in the linguistic formulation of the key concept "sustainable development". Namely, syntagmatically, this term consists of two lexemes: "sustainable" (adjective) and "development" (noun), the first one modifying the second one. "Development" is obviously the central part of the collocation and because it is coupled with "sustainable", all the meanings of the modifier "sustainable" will be related to "development". "Development", as an uncountable noun, is defined as 'the gradual growth of something, so that it becomes bigger or more advanced' (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2003)). According to the comprehensive *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1983), it is synonymous with "expansion, elaboration, growth, evolution".

"Sustainable", on the other hand, is an adjective derived from the verb "sustain". Referring to the collocation "sustainable development" it could be paraphrased as "the development that can be sustained" or "the development that can sustain". In line with the intention of the Brundtland Commission, it is the environment which should be sustained. Therefore, the development will be such that it will make the environment continue to exist, it will give support to it, it will keep it up, and it will aid and nourish it. With the state-of-the-art technology this task is highly unlikely to be fulfilled because, as has already been mentioned, the line of economic development is contradictory to the preservation of the environment. And finally, considering the multiplicity of the meanings inherent in the collocation 'sustainable development', the initially-meant relationship between development and the environment, in terms of the lexical logic, does not seem to be self-evident. Lacking the necessary complement to make this relationship clear, the meaning

of this collocation often remains hidden. That is why the need for a certain correction in English has arisen. This is also the reason why different dictionaries have been trying to improve the phrase in different ways. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* has, for example, offered a much clearer version: "environmentally sustainable development". This is exactly what Serbian dictionaries ought to do and improve the translation of the term. The Serbian equivalent ought to be "ekološki održiv razvoj" or "ekološki prihvatljiv razvoj". All the more so, as the adjective "održiv" in Serbian has only one meaning: "koji se može održati" ("that can be sustained").

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EKOLOŠKI I LINGVISTIČKI ASPEKTI U TERMINU »ODRŽIVI RAZVOJ«

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Kolokacija »održivi razvoj« prvi put se pojavila 1987. godine u zvaničnom izveštaju Svetske komisije Ujedinjenih nacija za životnu sredinu i razvoj naslovljenom »naša zajednička budućnost« (ili »Izveštaj Brundtland«). ovaj termin je smišljen da označi »razvoj koji zadovoljava potrebe sadašnjosti i ne ugrožava mogućnost budućih generacija da zadovolje svoje sopstvene potrebe«. Izgledalo je da je namera bila ekološki motivisana tj. da se radilo o očuvanju životne sredine. nažalost, ono što je trebalo očuvati bio je sve brži ekonomski razvoj bogatih zemalja, koje su se oslanjale na prirodne resurse siromašnih zemalja. Kako je ova dvosmislena namera dovela do formiranja termina »održivi razvoj, njen lingvistički odraz ili izraz bio je takođe dvosmislen. ovaj termin je kasnije na srpski jezik preveden kao »održivi razvoj«. I na srpskom jeziku ovaj termin je dvosmislen i daleko je od prvobitne namere. Zato ovaj rad pokušava da sugeriše neka bolja rešenja.

Ključne reči: *održivi razvoj, ekonomski razvoj, očuvanje životne sredine, lingvistički izraz*