

Human Values for Sustainable Future from the Czech and Slovak Perspective

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Abstract

Human values compatible with a sustainable way of living are a set of values, the implementation of which promote the shift towards sustainable future. These values are not completely new and are not related to the idea of "social engineering". Just opposite. They create the core of the common heritage of Mankind, since the oldest religious and cultures until today. Human values and environmental ethics were of particular importance during the first Pan-European Environmental Ministers Conference at Dobříš Castle near Prague (1991). This conference was initiated by Josef Vavroušek: former Czechoslovak Minister of the Environment. Due to this fact, Josef Vavroušek used to be called the *father of the "Environment for Europe"*. This article is dedicated to his memory.

Key words

Values; sustainable way of living; environmental ethics; The Dobříš Conference; Josef Vavroušek.

Abstrakt

Ľudské hodnoty zlučiteľné s udržateľným spôsobom života sú súborom hodnôt, ktorých uplatňovanie podporuje posun k udržateľnej budúcnosti. Tieto hodnoty nie sú úplne nové a nesúvisia s myšlienkou „sociálneho inžinierstva“. Práve naopak. Tvoria jadro spoločného dedičstva ľudstva od najstarších náboženstiev a kultúr až po súčasnosť. Ľudské hodnoty a environmentálna etika mali mimoriadny význam počas prvej celoeurópskej konferencie ministrov životného prostredia na zámku Dobříš pri Prahe (1991). Túto konferenciu inicioval Josef Vavroušek: bývalý československý minister životného prostredia. Vzhľadom na túto skutočnosť sa Josef Vavroušek zvykne nazývať otcom procesu „Životné prostredie pre Európu“. Tento článok je venovaný jeho pamiatke.

Klíčová slova

Josef Vavroušek; Dobříšská konference; hodnoty; udržateľný spôsob života; environmentální etika.

Motto

"In the period of increasing tensions between countries and people, we urge a return of human values in the sustainable development agenda...Ethics, like solidarity, equity and sufficiency are essential elements of our concept of sustainability."

Bratislava Declaration, 2002

Dedicated to the memory of our distinguish friend and colleague, Josef Vavroušek. Published also to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the First Pan-European UNCED Environmental Ministers Conference in Dobříš Castle near Prague as well as of Rio Earth Summit.

*Josef Vavrousek (1944–1995), system analyst, social scientist, environmentalist, politician, pedagogist, environmental non-governmental (NGO) movement leader, climber. Prof. Vavrousek was the first and last minister of the Environment in the Czechoslovak Republic (1990–1992), one of the leaders of the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution in 1989, the founder and the first President of the Society for Sustainable Living (1992–1995), a member of the Czech and Slovak Associations of the Club of Rome, as well as the youngest member of the students expedition *Lambarene* which brought medication to Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Africa across almost all Africa during 8 months. He was the head of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992).*

Josef Vavroušek started to be internationally recognised mainly as an organizer of the first Pan-European Environmental Ministers Conference at Dobříš Castle near Prague (1991). Due to this fact, Josef Vavrousek used to be called the *father of the "Environment for Europe" process*.

Human values and environmental ethics were of particular importance to him. The Dobříš Conference underlined the importance of these ideals in the search for ways of sustainable living.

Introduction

Question of human values compatible with sustainable way of living is closely related to global problems including the climate change. Different authors use to note different groups of global problems. Novacek, 2001 recognised these major groups:

1. Violence in the world [beside of wars: terrorism, organized crime, contempt for human rights, militant religious fanaticism, ethnic intolerance].
2. Population growth [mainly in developing regions].
3. The uneven and unfair distribution of wealth [escalating tensions in the developing countries and between the developing and development countries].
4. Destruction of the environment [threats to biodiversity including cultural diversity, deforestation, desertification, water shortages, soil degradation, pollution of atmosphere and climate change].
5. The ineffectiveness of supranational political and economic tools and institutions.

The growth of number, frequency and intensity of global problems is a big challenge: how to find generally acceptable, adequate global solution. According to The United Nations University Millennium Project *State of the Future* (2000–2020) the challenge number one is:

How can sustainable development be achieved for all? Why? As authors of mentioned project, which has been based on opinions of about 700 experts from all over the World, said, unsustainable growth may well be the greatest threat to the future of humanity since the danger of nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War. The world is increasingly aware of the adverse interactions between population and economic growth, on the one hand, and environmental quality and natural resources on the other. As a result, the majority of political and intellectual leaders around the world acknowledge sustainable way of living as the most important goal for uniting humanity and its institutions.

The development and implementation of the sustainable living concept is driven by the effort to reach – as much as possible – the ideals of humanism and the harmony between man and nature, based on the respect of life as well as the non-living parts of nature.

Values compatible with a sustainable way of living are a set of values, the implementation of which promote the shift towards sustainable future. These values are not completely new, and are not related to the idea of "social engineering". Just opposite. They create the core of the common heritage of Mankind, since the oldest religions and cultures until today. It assumes the highest possible degree of diversity of values, and tolerance to them. On the other hand, it does not resignate on certain basic common or integrative principles, acceptable for individual cultures as a "minimum common denominator" for all cultures and even all inhabitants of the Earth. Sustainable living should not only constitute surviving. It should be living based on harmony and environmentally friendly satisfaction of all needs, as well as on the development of human resources, which would not endanger the protection and restoration of natural resources (Hanusin et al., 2000).

A more pragmatic reflection of the sustainable living concept is the sustainable development concept.

According to Novacek (1997) the scenario of sustainable development starts from the presumption that the whole present philosophy of material growth and welfare is not acceptable from the long-term and global perspective. Both contemporary or recent dominant social systems, socialism and capitalism, have in fact the same aim – the generation of a consume society. Both lead to an ecological crisis in their consequences. New technology, the development of science etc. alone cannot solve the problems, a change of value orientation is necessary. A change from anthropocentrism (man as the centre of events, conqueror, ruler etc.) to ecological humanism or biocentrism is fundamental. The growth of the material standard of living in industrialised countries could and should be substituted by a growth in the quality of life and the development of human personality, above all in the neglected spiritual dimension.

Principles of (and values for) sustainable living

If we are speaking about sustainable living, it should to:

- respect and secure community of life,
- improve the quality of human life,
- protect vitality and diversity of the Earth,
- minimize the exhaustion of non-renewable resources,
- maintain the development of civilization within the Earth's carrying capacity limitations,
- change personal attitudes and behavior,
- provide community-based care for their own environment,
- create frameworks for integrated development and protection
- establish a global alliance. (by *Caring for the Earth*, UCN, UNEP, WWF 1991).

Process of the institutionalisation of the topic

Probably the most important step towards the institutionalisation of the agenda of human values, which are compatible with the sustainable way of living concept, happened in early 1990s. It was interrelated with two formally independent, but in reality closely interlinked processes:

1. The preparation of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, first of all with the preparation of the Earth Charter, document, which was in Rio finally substituted by a less ambitious Rio Declaration, consisted of 27 sustainable development principles.
2. The tradition of Pan-European environment ministerial conferences, fundamentals of which were created by the first conference of this type, organised in 1991, and which situated the topic of human values in the centre of interest, equivalent to political and legal issues. Thanks to it, not only to the main initiator of this unprecedented event Josef Vavroušek (former Czechoslovak minister for the environment), but also personalities like president Vaclav Havel and philosopher Prof. Erazim Kohák, became very popular and spread these ideals.

When, in 1992, Josef Vavroušek left his ministerial office, the topic of human values lost its most important protagonist. Ministerial officials, Eurobureaucrats, or officials from the United Nations structures forgot very quickly and easily that somebody wanted to incorporate a concept of human values compatible with sustainable way of living, which is so difficult to express in paragraphs and translate politically and financially, into their conservative, pragmatic and normative agendas. The consequence was, that this topic did not appear in the official ministerial agenda of the 2nd ministerial conference in Luzern, 1993.

At the same time, Josef Vavroušek returned among non-governmental environmentalists, as an activist and thinker with the great authority. He became responsible for values aspects

of the European EcoForum agenda. This resulted in the fact that problems of values, addressed to the Ministers through the Luzern NGO Memorandum, were considered having important, even key status. The above-mentioned part of the Memorandum was based on:

The Ten Alternative Sustainable Values:

(by J. Vavroušek, 1993, 1995)

1. Awareness of the innate connection to nature, a respect for life and nature.
2. Balanced emphasis on the individual and collective perspective and the complementarity of competition with cooperation.
3. Emphasis on the qualitative development of human society.
4. Emphasis on the quality of life, deliberate modesty and renunciation, self-denial of superficial things.
5. Balanced symmetry between human rights, freedoms, and responsibilities.
6. Adoption of the precautionary principle.
7. Awareness about human activities with negative impacts.
8. Awareness of the long-term goals and consequences of human activities.
9. Mutual tolerance.
10. Support to participatory democracy.

After Josef's tragical death, these problems remained forgotten, and NGO environmental leaders, following the pragmatic line of their ministerial partners, also seemed to neglect them. In this situation it was logical, and a bit symbolic, that the initiative to return the topic to real life was taken over by Slovak and Czech environmentalists from the

Society for Sustainable Living, and Josef's old friend Vladimir Lay from Croatia was elected the representative of the group in the EcoForum board. As co-chairs were elected Czech Jiri Dlouhy and Slovak Mikulas Huba, both from the Society for Sustainable Living.

The initiative demanded to return issues of human values to the agenda of both non-governmental and ministerial conferences on the environment in Aarhus (1998) and after.

Main reasons for the institutionalisation of the topic of human values for a sustainable future

1. To reflect the real importance of these issues for individual as well as social behaviour, that which is extremely relevant to solving environmental and/or sustainability issues.
2. To compensate, at least partially, the imbalance between pragmatically and ethically (or values) oriented approaches. The present situation is, that the second of the above-mentioned categories is almost absolutely overshadowed by the first one, and marginalized.
3. To continue in the process which was started during the Dobříš 1st Pan-European environmental ministerial conference in 1991, and in the frame of NGO activities was expressed in an excellent way in the Luzern NGOs' Memorandum in 1993.
4. To attract an important and influential group of NGO activists from all parts of Europe who deal with deep ecology, ethical and values issues to the "Environment for Europe" (EfE) process.
5. To commemorate the excellent personality of the EfE process' spiritual father: Josef Vavrousek, who was a big promoter of values issues and their incorporation into the EfE process, which he started in Dobříš.

At the end of June 1998 the 4th Pan-European Conference of Ministers of Environment took place in Aarhus, Denmark. A few days earlier, non-governmental environmentalists from all countries of the Old Continent had met there to discuss how to co-ordinate more efficiently multinational activities and how to influence the agenda and the results of the minister's conference. On Monday 22/6/1998, at a plenary session of the Pan-European co-ordination body on environmental non-governmental organizations: European Eco Forum, set up a new issue group (IG) called Values for a Sustainable Future (abbr. Values). The preliminary process, which had been originally started by an initiative from the last EcoForum Strategy meeting before the conference in Aarhus, was finished.

The foundation of the Values IG has been followed by the creation of web page: www.czp.cuni.cz/values, where is possible to find the most relevant information in English. It is managed by Jiri Dlouhy (Society for Sustainable Living in the Czech Republic and Charles University Environmental Center, Prague).

A regular forum of meetings of (unfortunately, mostly Czech and Slovak members, only) are Memorials of Josef Vavrousek in the Tatras, but sometimes also wider international events, like the conference: International Co-operation – The Approach to Sustainable Communities, Bratislava, 1999, organised by Academia Istropolitana Bratislava and Society for Sustainable Living, where values related issues represented one of the priorities.

Another relevant international event was 10th Alliance of Northern People (ANPED) General Assembly Meeting (AGM) in Bratislava, March 2000, in the frame of which a special session of Values IG has been organised with the participation of 50 participants from 15 countries and 3 continents, followed by publishing an article in the ANPED *Northern Lights* Newsletter.

A similar session was organised during the regular Olomouc international conferences: Towards Sustainable Development (2000, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012) organised by Societies for Sustainable Living in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Values related issues in relationship to environmental education were discussed during the 11th ANPED AGM in Minsk as well as 12th ANPED AGM in Thessaloniki, and are permanently "living" in the ANPED agenda, mostly in relationship with the topic of production and consumption patterns and were discussed several times on the WSSD, as well as during all the preparation processes before Johannesburg summit, first of all in Prague, at the Visegrad Region Conference called: Visegrad Agenda 21.

Another important event, participants of which expressed a big interest concerning Values issues, was the European EcoForum Strategy Meeting: *Environment for Europe: Decisions Depend on us!* in Bratislava, December, 2002, where majority of participants actively attended a workshop on values in relationship to education. A special part of the Bratislava Declaration – the final document coming from the strategy meeting – deals with these issues, and they are also highlighted in the NGOs letter to the Ministers prior to the Kiev conference.

The Values Issue Group has also been involved in several other activities. First of all, in issuing proceedings and other materials from all of the above mentioned events. Secondly, publishing a representative collection of essays called *The World Perceived by the Heart of Europe, Society for Sustainable Living, Olomouc, Bratislava 2000*. Co-organizing a conference with international participation: *Religious – Environment – Values for a Sustainable Future, Society for Sustainable Living, Liptovský Jan (Slovakia), 2001*.

The following challenges provoked initiators to organise this conference:

1. The beginning of the Millennium, in which many thinkers expect the renaissance of spirituality.
2. Reflection of the importance of environmental risks and hazards, as well as challenges related to the sustainable way of living concept from the side of all relevant religions.
3. Ten years since the Dobříš conference, which stressed the issue of values compatible with the idea of a sustainable way of living and the role of religion in the process of their promotion and implementation.
4. The Slovak Bishops letter on the topic of the environment and sustainable living.
5. Relevant contributions and polemics in media.

Key words of the conference were: human values, dialogue, tolerance, solidarity, antropocentrism/ekocentrism, sanctuarity, freedom and responsibility, risks/hazards of the next development, outcomes, and solutions (see more in: Huba, M. (ed.): *Religious – Environment – Values for a Sustainable Future, Conference Proceedings, 2002*).

Last, but surely not least, a huge Essay competition on the theme: *Sustainable Way of Living* for university students in both the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, organised by the Society for Sustainable Living, the Regional Environmental Center for CEE, Country Office in Bratislava, and the MOSTY (Bridges) Weekly (under patronage of the UNDP Regional Support Centre – Bratislava in connection with the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development).

Winning essays were published and summaries of them in English were distributed among WSSD participants and presented via Press Conference.

(The second year of the competition was organised in accordance with the 5th Environmental Ministerial Conference in Kiev preparation. Next eight years have been organised till 2011, too).

Independent "Values" Issue Group operated till 2008, when it was merged with the "Education" Issue Group.

Ethics – Science – Technology

As Skolimowski in his study *Living Philosophy. Eco-Philosophy as a Tree of Life* (1996) reports, ethics is not a technique. Instead of asking *How?* he asks *Why?* and goes on:

“There is not enough patience in terms of general principles. We want a manual on how to react in the very moment. But this attitude relates to technique. In comparison, ethics tries to comprehend the deeper nature of things and especially the reason why one should behave in one specific way and not in any other. Asking why leads sooner or later to the key issue, thus, to basic values.” (Skolimovski 1996, 140).

Where is the place of modern science in this context? What does it ask? Has it not drawn too closely to the superimposition of that technical *How?*, and neglected the ethical *Why?* Has it not resigned its search for the meaning of its existence and actions? Or does it take it automatically, naturally and axiomatically as an unuttered anticipation?

It is clear that most scientific behaviour, even in a democratic society, is not a voluntary, autonomous decision of science, scientific institutions or scientists themselves. Instead, it is a kind of tax on the immediate social atmosphere or on an artificially created and initiated “social order” that is subject to determinants existing outside the scientific sphere, incentives on the one hand and limits on the other. No one wants to do science for science's sake or deny the fact that basic research must serve society. The point is that factors and actors outside science (ranging from bureaucrats, politicians or businessmen and ending with the casual fashion of the “spirit” of the epoch) are increasingly manipulating science and scientists, pushing them to behave in ways that are contrary to their beliefs, priorities and mission.

One such determinant is the dictate of the market and money or the imperative to increase work efficiency including that of scientific work at any price. Work efficiency, even in science, is a good thing. But such a tendency becomes absurd and counterproductive when productivity and quantity are achieved at the cost of discussion, doubt, self-reflection, quality, originality and/or an ethics of science.

One of the phenomena of our era that impacts on science is ethical relativism, which, as Skolimowski asserts, undermines the essence of the 20th century human ego. Ethical relativism (Skolimovski 1996, 136-137) is a specific product of 20th century Western culture. Why is ethical relativism almost an inevitable result of the scientific-technological worldview? The author responds by saying that once humans adopt the dogma that an intelligent creature must exclusively respect scientific rationality and that religion and spiritual values are obsolete trash then ethical relativism is not an option anymore; it becomes a necessity.

Science, along with education, media and relevant actors increasingly impacts upon and responds to the improved dissemination of knowledge and information, public sensitivity and public awareness as well as the ethics and value orientations of people. On the other hand, values, attitudes, preferences and the expectations of people and societies influence the character and priorities of science, education and other generators of knowledge, information, inspiration and public awareness. The conclusion is that science, ethics and the hierarchy of our values are increasingly interlinked. In connection with the above, we are facing many open-ended questions and are searching for answers. New approaches will have to be applied not only in the political, social, economic, legislative, and/or environmental spheres, but also in the axiological and ethical ones. They will have to be based on multidimensional, integrated, synthetic, holistic, cross-disciplinary or post-disciplinary approaches. Having said this, there are also some other principles on which the concept of sustainability is based that show an astonishing correlation to the basic attributes of the synthetic, eventually integrative disciplines based on the recognition that nature and society (including science) represent in reality an extremely complicated, albeit a **single**

supersystem. The above-mentioned recognition also includes the conclusion that a modern contemporary scientist has to respond to the existing social, environmental, ethical and other problems and challenges.

Both the *science for science* approach as well as that of science's *splendid isolation*, characterised by indifference to the aggravating social problems is, in the period of growing global problems and emerging new and new challenges of the existential character, increasingly improper.

A very topical event was the last Memorial Josef and Petra Vavrousek, which was held in Varín, Slovakia in September 2021. It was organised by both the Slovak and Czech branches of the Society for Sustainable Living. At the end of the meeting, the participants adopted the Declaration, which includes, among other things, the following:

"Many negative trends in our countries are consequences of general disrespect to ethical values, which are fundamental precondition of direction towards a more sustainable future.

At the same time the social climate is determined by just human values."

Participants of the Josef Vavrousek Memorial are appealing to promotion and cultivation pro-sustainable human values and preferences, among others via the environmental education as well as through changing of production/consumption patterns and whole behaviour which is compatible with the idea of the sustainable way of living.

Recommendations for the near future

- To continue with all positive activities started yet and to highlight all positive examples/good practices.
- To promote and to facilitate a public debate on ethical values and principles.
- To put values related issues back to the ministerial agenda.
- To develop a set of relevant activities: research, conferences/seminars/workshops, presentations, mass-media activities, competitions etc., with the aim to highlight the importance of the topic.
- To deal with values related issues in relationship with such issues like the environmental awareness, human priorities/preferences/attitudes, and consumption patterns.
- To preserve and increase social, cultural and economic diversity and possibility of lifestyle choices.
- To educate people about the consequences and impacts of their choices.
- To attract disciplines like axiology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, human ecology and others to deal more with these issues.
- To influence teachers, priests, journalists, artists and others to deal more values issues.
- To incorporate sustainability issues into church life – green Sundays, ecological ten commandments, youth camps with the ecological orientation..., to interpret the Bible also in the context of environmental issues and sustainable living.
- To implement "ethical impact assessment".
- To improve transparency, accountability, codes of conduct...
- To establish an online conference dealing with values for a sustainable future.

Conclusions

Values compatible with the sustainable way of living form a set of values, the implementation of which promotes the shift towards a more sustainable future (including the carbon neutrality). These values are not completely new, and are not related to the idea of "social engineering". Just the opposite. They have been creating the core of the common heritage of Mankind, since the oldest religious and cultures until today. Such approach assumes the highest possible degree of diversity of values, and tolerance to them. On the other hand, it means not to resign on certain basic common or integrative principles, acceptable for individual cultures as a "minimum common denominator" for all cultures and even all inhabitants of the Earth.

The submitted study tries to map the paradigmatic background, driving forces, social context and recent development of sustainable values concept both from the Czech and Slovak authors' & foreign thinkers' perspectives in the wider framework of relevant international activities.

30 years after, Dobříš Conference represents a multiple challenge. First of all it means evaluation/confrontation of the pros and cons of the past three decades. Secondly, we should ponder the relevant personalities in the present Czech and Slovak Republics but also in wider Europe that would be able to demonstrate the zest, courage and capabilities to develop a similar initiative and vitalize it. Eventually, the Dobříš anniversary poses the question: Will the Environment for Europe process go on now with 30 years of experience, success or failures and poorer for the lost time and missed opportunities?

The 30th anniversary of the Dobříš Conference may also serve as an incentive to ground the *Central European Report* to the Club of Rome. A similar impulse emerged in form of the book of essays written by the Czech and Slovak authors under the title *World Perceived by the Heart of Europe* (Novacek and Huba, eds., 2000) with no response whatsoever although the world of today struck by crises would need it now even more as 30 years ago. The tasks and problems are multiple starting with the Pan-European strategy for protection of biodiversity, care for landscape, integrated protection of large river basins (including supply of faultless drinking water and prevention of disastrous floods), improved air quality with emphasis on limitation of greenhouse gas release and to reach carbon neutrality till 2050, big technological, economic and social challenges like the common agricultural, energy and transport policies with great impact on the environment and ending by the common European environmental policy and fulfilment of the EU Strategy of Sustainable Development as well as EU New Green Deal. Behind the above-mentioned challenges is the mission of Dobříš:

"Values that we respect and adhere to will decide about our future and the environment. Our sustainable future will depend on harmony of these values with the idea of ecologically sensitive and environmentally efficient way of existence. Without it our hope to the sustainable future will be only an illusion".

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