

TRADITION, RELIGION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL AREA

Daniela SOREA¹

Abstract: *Sustainability is not unusual within Western culture. One of the causes accounting for the Romanian people's compatibility with the behaviours associated with sustainable development is represented by the persistence of the consumer behaviour before 1989 in the Romanians' memory. Other causes underlying this compatibility are represented by the axiological survival of the cultural tradition and by the Romanians' affiliation to the Orthodox Church. The concept of "sustainable development" connotes either change or recovery in the human relationship with the environment. The main advantage brought forth by this orientation comes from the promoted natural behaviours.*

Key words: *tradition, consumer, religion, sustainable development.*

1. Introduction

Occidental culture is oriented towards the future. From its perspective, humanity is in ongoing progress. The representation of the future has been optimistic so far. From Western perspective, humanity is in permanent evolution towards better and the best. The last two decades have been characterized by a serious diminution of the optimism. Its interest in the concept of *sustainable development* indicates this shift of perspective. Manifesting this interest, Occidental culture remains oriented towards the future. Such an orientation entails resuming and particularizing significant ideas.

Responding to the turmoil related to the continuous and almost irreversible deterioration of the environment, the concept of sustainable development possesses a significant remedial connotation.

Sustainable development supposes therefore the recovery of a less aggressive technical modality for placing the human being into the world. Without explicitly claiming to derive from traditional cultures, sustainable development is at the same time the modality for recovering, revaluing their *Weltanschauung*.

Sustainable development is not an exotic concept throughout the Occidental cultural space, despite the re-orientation that it compels on the level of daily habits and practices. Heidegger's authentic dwelling and Eliade's assuming the world as hierophany brilliantly prefigure it. Signalling the articulations of this prefiguring, the paper herein emphasizes the remedial dimension of sustainable development within the Romanian cultural space.

¹ Department of Sociology and Philosophy, *Transilvania* University of Braşov

2. Heideggerian concept of *authentic dwelling*

Forgetting the proper significations of the words in favour of a superficial signification stands for an usual phenomenon of the language as master of the human being, Martin Heidegger reminded us in 1935, in the study *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* [8].

Bauen means in German to dwell, to build and to cultivate, at the same time. *Bauen* comes, the philosopher shows, from the *buan* of old German, beside *ich bin, du bist* as expressions of the manner wherein man is on Earth. Under research, the language tells us, as regards the word *bauen*, that dwelling is the specifically human manner of being on Earth and that, in guise of dwelling, building makes itself conspicuous under its double hypostasis of taking care of the growth and of edifying the buildings.

Safeguarding, as non-aggression and protection of the thing in its essence, is the fundamental feature of the dwelling, Heidegger further showed. Through dwelling, people relate and refer themselves to Earth, sky, divine and human, and they safeguard in things this relation and reference. The place is an arranged space, which means delimited. The buildings, allowing and offering set-up, comprise in their essence the relation of the place to the space and the relation of the place towards the human being around.

People have to learn dwelling, Heidegger deemed. To authentically dwell means to build starting from the dwelling and to think for the dwelling. The concept of *authentic dwelling* prefigures sustainable development.

3. Sacredness and Consecration for Mircea Eliade

The manifestation of sacredness ontologically underlies the world, Mircea Eliade shows in *The Sacred and the Profane* [7]. Hierophany marks its Centre. The ritual of instituting a sacred space is efficient to the extent it reproduces the gods' work. Within traditional societies, Cosmos, as inhabited space, precludes Chaos, as it has previously been consecrated. *Homo religiosus* feels the need to permanently live in the Centre. For him, the country, town, sanctuary and dwelling are, individually and simultaneously, the image of the Universe and the Centre of the World. The dwelling is not the inhabiting machine designed by Le Corbusier, Eliade shows. The dwelling is the Universe that the human being creates for oneself, imitating gods. The Space allowing the existence of infinity of World Centres is not, Eliade further shows, the homogeneous geometric space. It is the existential space, susceptible of hosting in his breakages, the multitude of communications with the Transcendent.

Religious human being undertakes a specific manner of existing into the world, which supposes the existence of the sacredness transcending this world, nevertheless manifesting through it and rendering it real. Human existence updates thereby its potencies, to the extent wherein, by dint of being religious, participates in the reality. Within traditional cultures, the human manner of being is directly responsible for the proper functioning of the world. Not observing the sacred rules troubles cosmic harmony.

4. Romanian compatibility with sustainable development

From the perspective of practical philosophy, concept undertaking is achieved in different manners, depending on the socio-historical coordinates and on the characteristics of the traditional cultures, specific for every people. For the Romanians, the practical implications of sustainable development seem quite far from the area of their manifest interest. These implications sabotage the delights of the consumer society that the Romanians have just acquired the taste for. Romanians find it hard to give up of their own will to all these before having reached to the state of satiety and after the relatively long period of abstinence. This period comprises the years of communism and those wherein, after 1989; the feeble middle class took shape.

However, we cannot speak of an incompatibility of the Romanians with the behaviours associated to sustainable development.

4.1. Old consumer behaviours and sustainable development

One of the causes of compatibility is represented by the persistence in the Romanians' memory of the acquired skills towards consumer behaviour, before 1989. These acquired skills have different socio-economic justifications; however they are similar to the desired ones in the context of sustainable development. This way, the Romanians had been accustomed ever since school with the communist actions of collecting and enhancing paper and scrap iron. They had been likewise accustomed to using reusable glass packages and to keeping and reusing plastic bags. Therefore, the policy of giving up free shopping bags in hyper-market-s did not much stagger Romanian buyers. Many housewives still carry in their purse, always close at hand, such a bag. At a time, before 1989, the Western origin of

some bags was an indicator of prestige. The famous brand-marked and colour-imprinted bag signalled the carrier's connections to the free and happy world beyond the Iron Curtain. To the limit, the bag could serve as fashion accessory, matching the outfit.

Romanians had, even in feeding against their will, products with soy bean content, at that time probably still not genetically modified. They resented this as humiliation (After 1989, the Romanians from the Diaspora were greeted with the slogan „You did not eat soy bean salami!”) and nowadays they are searching similar products in sophisticated vegetarian diets. The Romanians have had up to recent times vegetable layers among the blocks of flats and even hen coops and hog pens, ignoring urban pollution indirectly affecting their quality; aliments produced this way, without other chemical substances, may be deemed ecological. Many Romanians still buy their vegetables and fruit, their eggs and dairy produce from the market, from the peasants. This practice has lasted since the communist period when it was deemed the happy alternative to the provisioning from the almost empty shops of the State commercial network. This practice is of course menaced, also in Romania, by the unfair competition of the supermarkets; however, most Romanians still know the taste of the food comes from the small producers.

Even the circulation restrictions with one's own car in the '80s might be retrospectively deemed as beneficial measures. At the time, the cars with even or uneven matriculation number alternatively circulated in the end of the week. The measure was justified by priority directing the scarcely available fuel towards industry and agriculture. However, the measure would fit nowa days, those who are worried by the

environment dangers afferent to the excessive use of the cars.

All aspects of this kind signal the paradoxical role of the communist regimes in shaping the population's economic behaviours. The isolation of the East, severely frustrating, functioned as a barrier against the dangers of the economy centred on consumer. The austerity, to say the least, during its time, modelled skills that prove to be beneficial and desirable in the long run, in line with the new requirements of sustainable development. Enforcing on administrative path these requirements would easily reactivate the docile Romanians' skills, although it would not make them happy from the very beginning.

Romanians are sensitive to the trends of fashion and they are eager to enrol themselves for them. Their desire, natural in the case of modest cultures of Europe, has found its critical expression ever since the 19th century, in the theory of the *forms with no substance*, by Titu Maiorescu, the life-giver of *Junimea*, grouping the main cultural personality of the epoch.

Perceiving behaviours in the sphere of sustainable development as *bon ton* Western influence would raise the Romanians' interest towards it. For many years, the Romanians think that good things proceed from the West and hopefully look in that direction.

4.2. Tradition and sustainable development

Another cause of the compatibility is represented by the axiological survival of the cultural tradition.

The Romanian rural environment and the peasants turned into proletarians during the forced industrialization years still keep fragments of the traditional reference to the world. The acts of disregard towards the natural order of things are deemed sins. There is a pity and a sin to put down the crops and hayfields, to hew down young trees (the Romanians nurture a cult of the

fir tree brother with the lad, in wedding and in death), to defile the sources, to disregard the elder or to cast guilt upon the innocent. There is likewise a pity and a sin to exhaust the lands, to pile more than you need or to scamp one's work.

There is a sin to throw food, especially bread. The wheat seed bears the Saviour's face, the elders thought, prolonging into Christianity the sacred dimension of agriculture [4]. Many later-turned city dwellers, during the communism, long into their block flats for a useful animal (which means bringing economic, not affective benefits), which they should feed with their kitchen remains. For these people, every alimentary rest thrown away causes pangs.

All these interdictions refer to acts perceived as encroachments on the sacredness of the world. They are sins, not crimes. Their referent is transcendental, not juridical. Their nature is religious, without being necessarily Christian.

These interdictions are the surviving of the pre-Christian manner of relating and referring oneself to the world. Within this manner, the human being dares not disturb the world from its senses and purposes, and prices its gifts up to rendering them sacred.

Lining in accordance with the places and with the time that characterize the Romanian rural environment [3] is obviously not a Romanian invention. It is a defining feature of the traditional cultures, it is common European legacy. There are particular, afferent to the psycho-sociological and historical conditions, the conditions of keeping this legacy. In the Romanians' case, their placement in the East, their appurtenance to Orthodoxy and their specific psychic features favoured keeping several pre-Christian religiosity dimensions.

The instauration of the consumer society, a later cause of moving off from tradition was less severe and less harmful from the

perspective of sustainable development in the countries from Eastern Europe. Much before this moment, the relative isolation of the Romanian State formations at the margins of the empires and the Orthodox religion functioned as conservation factors. Mircea Eliade deemed, about the middle of the past century, that the Romanian isolated villages kept religious practices that had disappeared from the rest of Europe even before Homer.

Orthodoxy has proved along history to be more tolerant than the other confessions towards the different forms of pre-Christian religiosity. The Orthodox East of Europe did not know the witch hunting. Spectacularly, in some cases, Orthodoxy and traditional religiosity reciprocally enhance themselves. The Romanians fill up on all occasions the convent churches and during Saint Andrew's night, they smear their thresholds with garlic, so that ghosts may not enter into their houses and stables. Romanian carols, announcing the Holy Birth and the re-birth, stand for one of the manifold examples of this possible enhancement.

On the borderline between the manifestations of traditional culture and cultured literature, the stories with known author are being placed. One of the most popular stories of Ion Creangă, the great storyteller of the Romanians, close to *Junmea* of Titu Maiorescu, is *The Old Man's Daughter and the Old Woman's Daughter*. In this story, well known by the great majority of the Romanian children, a poor girl, ill-treated by her step-mother, sets off to the world and meets a lame she-dog that she looks after, a pear tree of which she removes the dead branches and the caterpillars, a fountain that she cleans, a cracked oven that she glues with soil and, in the end, Saint Sunday's terrible fowls, which she gladly and willingly washes and feeds. For all these deeds, she is well repaid on her way back home. In the

second part of the story, the bad step-daughter resumes the trip, makes all things backwards and in the end she is paid back ill, according to justice. The story, in all its sequences, may be deemed a pleading for sustainable development. Its narration again and again to successive generations signals the appetite for this manner of relating oneself to the world.

In all these ways, traditional culture endorses sustainable development. Reaching deep levels of the Romanians going-on, this endorsement has real opportunities to last.

4.3. Orthodoxy and sustainable development

Another cause of the compatibility is Romanians belonging to the Orthodox religion. To Christianity, there are not explicitly proper neither worrying for tomorrow (the lilies in the valley grow by themselves and the birds of the sky pick up their food without sowing), nor valuing the wealth of this world (the apostles leave their wares behind, joining Jesus, Whose Kingdom is not in this world). The Christian is oriented towards Salvation undertaken as personal problem and he lives in the horizon of the Apocalypse. These facets of theological ethics seem in disagreement with the premises of sustainable development. They may be however counter-balanced by the human being undertaking the duty to work for restoring the world, fallen in the moment of the original sin, as it appears at Saint Maxim the Confessor. Relating and referring to this duty takes different forms in the various Christian Confessions.

L. Blaga identifies three types of the unconscious formative aspiration, as manners of appealing the transcendent: individualizing, standardizing and poetical. The individualizing type is characteristic to the Germans and to Protestantism, it is placed under the watchword „Be yourself!” The standardizing type of the

Greeks, of the Renaissance and of the Catholicism is placed under the motto „Be like the Master!” The poetical, schematizing type is proper to the Byzantines and to Orthodoxy, being placed under the slogan „Be as the One has been!” Blaga also highlighted the latent metaphysics afferent to the three principal architectonic styles of Christianity. This way, the Roman-Basilicas styles impose a surrogate of the transcendence, the Gothic is sublimation and in the Sophianic orientation proper to Orthodoxy, the transcendent descends towards the terrestrial receptacle. According to these latent metaphysics, the Catholic must be faithful and the Protestant must act in order to be saved. In Orthodoxy, salvation is an experience; the faith and deeds are its effects [4].

G. Vattimo considers secularization as constitutive feature of an authentic religious experience, as accomplishment of the embodiment promise, and proposes explicitly undertaking the Christian historicity, deeming charity as the only chance for the survival of the Occident. For R. Rorty, the Christians' shift towards illuminist ideals signals the passage from a God adored with force to a God adored with love. The contemporaries' duty is directed towards the co-citizens and civic responsibility may exist independently of reason or religious belief.

Both Rorty, the representative of American pragmatic post-empiricism and Vattimo, representative of the European Latin post-modernism, signal the evolution of the faith towards a sphere of the private, its individualization and the gradual loss of the feeling of appurtenance to a church. The clerics' indulgent support towards this evolution renders the individual more responsible towards oneself and towards the others. Christianity can no longer fulfil in postmodernism its doctrinaire, moral and disciplinary functions. The only truth

of Christianity remains its call to love. Rorty and Vattimo outline a faith with no precepts and with no metaphysic God as future of the religion, after the deconstruction of western deontology. Its believer is civically responsible and is oriented towards charitable acts. [9].

The prefigured comprehension of religion as love and of love as grounds for reciprocal help enhances the acting dimension of Occidental Christianity. Built under the sign of undertaken secularization, this concept of a religion with no transcendent steers towards a heresy much like communism, as outlined by Nikolai Berdiaev [5].

The evolution of Orthodox Oriental Christianity is not much fit to the model of Rorty and Vattimo. Secularization, as danger menacing not only the Western people, solely begins to constitute itself as theme for reflection in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Likewise, in the Orthodoxy centred on another type of attendance, the acting, social dimension is, at least apparently, less developed. From this perspective, Orthodoxy, less cosmically generous, seems more efficient in the direction of raising the believers' sensitivity towards the human being's harmony with nature, with the articulations of the world, than in organizing actions of sustainable development.

In the '80-ies, the preoccupation towards secularization manifested by Daniel Ciobotea, the current Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, was almost singular in Romanian theology. The future Patriarch deemed secularization to be challenging for the believers, as potential opportunity for sacredness and deep spiritualization. However, Daniel Ciobotea signalled, in an interview from 1991, that the fight for justice, dignity, peace and for the integrity of Creation is in its turn not only a civic obligation, deprived of significance and relation to salvation [6].

In a conference from 1999, Bartolomeu Anania, then Archbishop of Cluj, showing that, in Christianity, liberty is gained, placed theological liberty, defined as liberty of choosing the good, above the human being's ontological, individual and moral liberties [6].

Under the sign of the organic metaphor seeing the Church as body of Christ, these theoretical positions implicitly outline the Orthodoxy (in this case the Romanian one) relating and referring to the contemporary orientation towards sustainable development. In Orthodoxy, the believers' organic solidarity sustains their reciprocal responsibility and imposes their collaboration in well administering the Creation, which only pertains, in full right, to the Creator [6].

The world is creation of the Living God, it is good in itself, once with it the Word united in Embodiment and God wants to transfigure it, Oliver Clément [2] showed, in 1991, also from within Orthodoxy. Modern scientific research favoured the Christianity sliding towards pietism and morality, and likewise the abandonment of the cosmos in guise of object of Christian interest. However, according to Saint Maxim the Confessor, Clément adds, human being is called to offer God the spiritual essences of the things, in the great Eucharist of existence. This way, the magic of childhood and the archaic religions may be recovered as theophanies.

God stabilized the nature fallen through sin; however the laws of this fallen nature reflect at the same time His pity and the wrong human treatment applied to nature. In its original form, this one tends towards God, wants to be wonder. The apparently autonomous, stiffened nature of the scientific knowledge is reality disfigured by the shadow that man projects upon it, Clément further shows, in the analytical psychology key. In its relation to science, the contemporary Christian has two main

duties: to keep vigil that science should remain open, faithful to its vocation, and to exigently undertake the human being's cosmic responsibility. Science remains open if the researcher knows that the quality of the observation depends on the quality of his outlook. Nature is plastic; it is in permanent transformation between transfiguration and disfiguration. As regards cosmic responsibility, there is incumbent on the Christian, at the same time, the task of maintaining human life open towards the transcendent, of involving himself from scientific positions in surpassing both the severe dilemma of the sterilizing or loving exploitation of the environment, and the medicine openness towards the integral human being, simultaneously body and soul [2].

The Christian answers of the Occident and of the Orient to the challenges of sustainable development are centred on the mind and respectively on the heart. This differentiation corresponds, in fact, to the representation coming from Orthodoxy, of the two variants of Christianity. This way, for Andrei Scrima [1], Christian Occident is rational, while Christian Orient is rather mystical. Occident is juridical, Orient is synod-type. Occident is correct up to non-forgiveness; Orient is merciful and easily forgiving. Occident understands nature; Orient comprehends the grace that transfigures it. Occident is evolving and offensive, Orient is conservatory and defensive.

The differentiation and the complementariness of being centred in the mind and in the heart are beneficial in a unitary European context. As a matter of fact, in June 2002, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, collaborated on organizing the European conference *Religion, Science and Environment*, and he signed, together with Pope John Paul the Second, a common declaration upon environment.

The two types of answers may act in compensation. This way, the efficiency of approaching in a rationalist manner the sustainable development in the Occident of Europe may be reduced by the Western Christian's difficulty to feel the nature that he, as a matter of fact, comprehends. Inversely, the Oriental man's relatively low interest in what should be left to God's will may be compensated by the better settling of the inhabitants from the East of Europe in their natural environment. Nonetheless, within this complementariness, the answer of Orthodoxy happily fits one more time the Romanians' way of being.

5. Conclusions

The revaluing return to good and ancient habits stands for an approach, which is typical to future-oriented cultures. Theoretically prefigured in significant philosophical writings, the concept of sustainable development connotes at the same time change and restoration on the level of the human practices of relating to the environment.

Survival of the communist consumer behaviours, traditional culture and religion may equally act for the Romanians as favouring factors in acquiring behaviours afferent to sustainable development. The behaviours acquired this way stand at the same time for a novelty and for a revaluing return to good and old customs, in an approach typical to future oriented cultures.

Obviously, the mutations having occurred in the way that people feed themselves, produce their food and ensure their comfort have modified the ecological parameters of those habits. A sign of maturity or the perennial nostalgia for the

original Paradise, the interest in sustainable development may find their healthy equilibrium between new requirements and older teachings. The main advantage of this orientation proceeds from the very naturalness of the behaviours it promotes.

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