Folia Oeconomica Stetinensia
Volume 24 (2024) Issue 2
DOI: 10.2478/foli-2024-0031 | 389–418
ISSN (print): 1730-4237 | ISSN (online): 1898-0198
www.wnus.usz.edu.pl/fos

THE EPHEMERAL TERM "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT" IN CURRENT EU POLICIES

Veronika Zavřelová

School of Communication and Media, University of New York in Prague, Czech Republic
e-mail: vzavrelova@unyp.cz
ORCID: 0009-0001-2848-1593

Radka MacGregor Pelikánová

School of Communication and Media, University of New York in Prague, Czech Republic
e-mail: radkamacgregor@yahoo.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-9628-7146

Received 30.01.2024, Revised 19.09.2024, Accepted 19.09.2024

Abstract

Research background: The term "sustainable development" is an omnipresent expression reaching the dimension of a command in the EU under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen. However, this is an ephemeral term with ambiguous and contradictory meanings which is employed in a particular manner by current EU policies.
Purpose: The purpose of this study is to reconcile various approaches and consolidate the understanding of sustainable development as advanced by current EU policies.
Research methodology: A historical and conceptual review creates a foundation to prepare comparative review tables to be filled with information about current EU policies and their quotes regarding "sustainable development", as extracted from the EU Commission Websites and EurLex. This allows for a holistic, thematic and critical analysis about the teleological meaning as well as glossing and Socratic questioning.
Results: The juxtaposition of these findings suggests that the term "sustainable development" is a semantic puzzle which is perceived by current EU policies as a call for multispectral and inherently conflicting changes to be imposed by all stakeholders in the utilitarian context.
Novelty: Six pioneering propositions with controversial features emerge and are to be verified by further multidisciplinary longitudinal studies.

Keywords: EU law, responsibility, sustainable development, sustainable growth

JEL classification: F63, K29, K32, L21, M14, M48

Introduction

The modern concept of sustainable development emerged with the famous UN Annex to document A/42/427 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development Report: Our Common Future from 1987 ("UN Brundtland Report"). The definition was included in its Art. 3.27 "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The overlapping economic, environmental and social dimensions were set in 1992 by the Declaration on the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro ("UN Agenda 21") (Purvis et al., 2019) and cemented in 2015 by the UN Resolution A/RES/71/1 Agenda for Sustainable development 2030 ("UN Agenda 2030").

The EU has followed these trends and already in 1992 the Maastricht Treaty on the EU ("TEU") included in Title I Art. B as one of its objectives "to promote economic and social progress which is balanced and sustainable." This wording was replaced in 1997 by the Amsterdam Treaty to the "to promote economic and social progress and a high level of employment and to achieve balanced and sustainable development." The current version of the TEU indicates in Art. 3.3 that "The Union... shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth..., and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. It shall promote scientific and technological advance." This primary law has been projected in the secondary law and policies, such as the Communication from Commission COM(2010) 2020 EUROPE 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth ("Europe 2020") having as one of its 5 targets the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (by 20% and 20–20–20), Communication COM(2016) 739 Next steps for a sustainable European future in 2016, with the shared responsibility and multi-stakeholder approach, and the Reflection Paper Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2023 in 2019. These EU instruments have addressed extensively, vigorously and consistently 17 Sustainable development goals ("SDGs") with their 169 targets as set by the UN Agenda 2030 (Borchardt et al., 2022) and have attempted to reconcile the needs of the present and future generations. The concept of sustainable development is becoming a strategic instruction (see EU policies), a legal command (see EU law) and even the interpretation guide (see EU teleology). The progressive integration of such a powerful, and at the same time rather vaguely defined concept (von Rijswick, 2012; Menghwar, Daood, 2021), along with intra-related SDGs (Bieszk-Stolorz, Dmytrów, 2023b) has been challenged, especially during crises (Dmytrów et al., 2022).

Although the conceptual and terminological ambiguity has been repeatedly confirmed (White, 2013), the prevailing tenor connects the sustainability to the Corporate Social Responsibility ("CSR") (Friske et al., 2020) and the creation of shared values ("CSV") (Kramer, Pfitzer, 2016). This leads to the conflicting prevalence (typically juxtaposing environmental and social concerns) and the feasibility (typically juxtaposing economic concerns to environmental and social concerns) (MacGregor Pelikánová et al., 2021a). Plainly, EU policies and law should both include provisions advancing "sustainable development" and should be interpreted to advance "sustainable development," but what is to be done if there is a conflict between environment and social priorities and/or conflict between a pragmatic economic drive and a more ideological green social drive?

Arguably, the term "sustainable development" represents an inherent linguistic contradiction because of the physical aspects of the terrestrial ecosystem (Daly, 1991 et 2006). Further, this term should be doomed due to its lack of pragmatism, disinterest for compromising and balancing and, ultimately, its incapacity to inspire the very needed support across the entire society via a multi-stakeholder model. However, it is very much present in EU policies. In order to address this paradox, it is necessary to identify and analyze critically and semantically the prevailing perception of the term "sustainable development." Naturally, considering the particularities of the EU setting, a literal approach is merely the beginning instrument and the dominating instrument is a comparative, contextual teleological approach (Brittain, 2016).

Often, eminent evolutionary milestones can be marked by the personification and the term "sustainable development" and in current EU policies is clearly marked by the European Commission under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen and its six ambitions as stated by the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019–2024: A Union that strives for more. My agenda for Europe ("Political Guidelines 2019–2024") (von der Leyen, 2019). The first of these six ambitions is the famous COM(2019) 640 final – The European Green Deal ("European Green Deal" or "EGD"), which definitely moved "sustainable development" as perceived by Europe 2020 to a higher level. A myriad of policies advancing these six ambitions, and referring to "sustainable development", has been mushrooming, while being received with varying levels of enthusiasm and approval by Europeans. Although these policies are the foundation for a future EU law with its supremacy and direct effect nature, there is confusion regarding their meaning and consistency, in particular during crises (Dmytrów et al., 2022). This causes both theoretical and practical issues for a myriad of fields, such as how to reshape the key focus of national industries (macroeconomics), how the products of businesses should be reshaped to be pro-CSR, ideally pro-CSV (microeconomics), how this should be

communicated (macroeconomics), how these expenses should be reflected by financial and nonfinancial statements (finance, accounting), etc. Plainly, "sustainable development" is an ephemeral and omnipresent phenomenon which must be considered by each modern and competitive advantage seeking business, i.e. "sustainable development" does not need to be the core concern, but for sure it must be considered when core concerns are set up – the questions about whether to do or not to do steps for or against this and that type of sustainable development must be answered. And to have good answers, the questions should have clear meaning.

Since conceptual, linguistic and other ambiguities challenge the modern concept of "sustainable development" and causes it to lose its momentum, the purpose of this study is to reconcile various approaches and consolidate the understanding of "sustainable development" as advanced by current EU policies. In order to do so in an academically robust manner, after this Introduction, a thorough historic and conceptual review (1.) and the predominantly qualitative methodology based on data from the European Commission and EurLex (2.) are presented. They create the foundation to prepare comparative tables regarding current EU policies and their quotes (3.) and to critically discuss and gloss them (4.). The juxtaposition of findings and the resulting six pioneering propositions offer an unexpected solution of the semantic puzzle about the term "sustainable development" and call for verification by further studies.

1. Historic, conceptual and literature review

The term "sustainable development" is a complex, rather new and potentially self-contradicting, terminologically, compound of "sustainability", typically linked to maintaining aka keeping something over time, and "development", typically linked to the evolutionary process.

The term "sustainability" has millennial roots which reflect predominantly the continental law tradition and originally agricultural setting (MacGregor Pelikánová, Sani, 2023). It has been appearing in the English language and literature consistently only since 1610, in the sense of bearable agriculture. It has been gaining a wider application into the vocabulary since 1965, especially in the area of agriculture and economics. Currently, some argue that sustainability means "the ability to maintain some entity, outcome or process over time" (Jenkins, 2009) and to perform activities that do not deplete the resources on which that ability depends (Stawicka, 2023). It should be about building bridges between generations while demanding both individual

and collective responsibility, which should consider the entire biosphere (Fitzpatrick, 2023) and reflect moral values and a love for life (biophilia) (Barbiero, 2016 et 2021).

The term "development" emerged with the classical growth theory from the 18th century as a synonym for the term "economic growth" that each country must undergo at a given stage and move from traditional agricultural production to modern industrialized production (Stawicka, 2023; Williams, Murphy, 2023). The 19th century demonstrated the importance of intangible assets and their impact on the market and this led to the recognition from neoliberal and modern development theories that development is (or should be) a process that results in an improvement in the quality of life in the 20th century (Willis, 2005). In the 21st century, it is argued that development is about positive changes that society has experienced throughout history and continues to experience (Thomas, 2004) and this involves a plan (Sharpley, 2009). It is not only about quantity and efficiency but as well about quality and effectiveness, it is about the consideration of the move from linearity to circularity (William, Murphy, 2023).

The term "sustainable development" in the form of a stable compound expression with (allegedly) settled semantics started to be used systematically beginning in 1987 (UN Brundtland Report), but it remains a linguistic, in particular lexicological, challenge with an alleged inherent contradiction. This is caused by the fact that the term "sustainability" has always represented an ephemeral and evolving concept and the idea of "development" became linked to "growth" and opportunities and challenges of the 20th and 21st centuries. Indeed, the concept of sustainability as the foundation of current sustainable development has always mirrored value judgments about justice in distributing and using resources (MacGregor Pelikánová, MacGregor, 2020) and was reflected by both secular administrations, see the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian flooding and cultivation management and Bible verses about the seven years of abundance followed by seven years of shortage and famine (MacGregor Pelikánová, Hála, 2021). It is tied to Aristotle´s teachings about virtues (Rackham, 1997), the distribution of awards (MacGregor Pelikánová et al., 2021b) distinguishing general justice aka rightness and particular justice, which can be either distributive (diagonal conjunction) aka appreciative or vindicative public justice or corrective (average formation) aka commutative or restitutive private justice (Johnston, 2011). This teaching providing the general direction for the future is valid even in the current EU (Balcerzak, MacGregor Pelikánová, 2020). The multi-spectral commitment to sustainability and long term preferences over immediate consumption gratification was one of the key factors for the hundreds of years-long glory of the Ancient Roman Empire, and the erosion of it led to the fall of both its Western and Eastern parts (Harper, 2016). The originally agriculture-based concept of sustainable development made

the transition in Europe in the Middle Ages thanks to the canonic unification, development of monastic education centers and the foundation of universities, in particular those reflecting the Roman heritage incorporated in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. and his famous wife, Theodora.

In 1291, the French king, Philip IV, 'the Fair', issued a Decree regulating the management of natural sources while at least indirectly reflecting sustainable development, while in 1346, his nephew, French king, Philippe VI de Valois, issued a Decree called l´ordonnance de Brunoy to keep the (management of) forests in good shape. In 1571, a more radical and pro-active approach to sustainability regarding water and forest resources was presented by Jakub Krčín z Jelčan a Sedlčan, who radically changed the South Bohemian landscape by building a set of large ponds (Čechura, 2020), i.e., it was not only about breeding as much carp as possible but as well about including other considerations, such as the context of other economic (farming, mining), social (employment) and environmental (managing the river flow) factors while doing a rigorous multi-spectral accounting aka *Buchhalting/Buchhalterie.* Similarly, the broadening of the understanding of sustainability occurred in other European countries, such as in Poland with Nicolaus Copernicus and his management and monetary reforms (Dobrzycki, 1973).

The expansion from the agricultural to merchant and industrial sphere was launched by Italian Renaissance Republics and completed in the Hanseatic League which not only added business and industrial perspectives, but went from the local over to regional multi-national dimension and led to the *Nachhaltigkeit* and *Nachhaltige Entwicklung.* In 1713, the German Colberist, Hans Carl von Carlowitz, followed the Hansa tradition and discussed sustainable development in his book *Sylvicultura Oeconomica* in the context of the management of a forest, i.e. the point was to keep producing wood in the same territory and not to produce more wood in more territories aka *Naturmaessige Betrachtung - nachhaltende Nutzung* (von Carlowitz, 1713). Similarly, in 1832, Emil André addressed in his book *Einfachste den höchsten Ertrag und die Nachhaltigkeit ganz sicher stellende Forst-wirthschafts-Methode* the increasing demands ("what was good 10 years ago, is not anymore") by underlying the pragmatism (André, 1832). The focus was on the continuation and renewal aspect of *Nachhaltigkeit* and *Nachhaltige Entwicklung* within one local territory and one industry. The problematic general feasibility was observed within the Malthusian population theory pointing to the geometric progression of human population growth, while subsistence with the help of new technologies and other intellectual property assets can only have the growth in an arithmetic progression, i.e. ultimately natural resources would be exhausted (Dixon, Fallon, 1989). The 19th century understanding of "sustainable development" recognized a physical limit of tangible resources as well as the

emergence of intellectual property (MacGregor Pelikánová, 2019). At the same time, this was the era of the First Industrial Revolution, which was about the transition from agriculture and handicrafts into economies based on large-scale industries, mechanized manufacturing, and the factory system with the production of coal (1765–1840), and of the Second Industrial Revolution, aka the Technological Revolution, which brought further scientific discoveries, standardization, mass production and industrialization with the production of gas (1840/1860 – Second World War).

In the 20th century, the move from regional over to multi-national to international concerns regarding sustainable development and one or more industries focused on continuous long-term production to the global, eternal and more oriented production was orchestrated by the UN (Schüz, 2012). In 1948, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("UDHR") stated that "Everyone has the right to a standard living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family…" (Art. 25(1) UDHR). However, in 1972, it was recognized that the balancing and spreading cannot overcome physical limitations, that sustainable development understood as permanent growth is not feasible because there are "the limits to growth" (Meadows et al., 1972). In 1978 the UN Brundtland report went even further by using the motto "poverty is an evil in itself" regarding the entire world population (Sect. 3 Brundtland Report). Sustainable development became the capacity to evolve eternally towards reaching an increased efficiency of resource use for the benefit of humanity and other species (Harwood, 1990). The idea that sustainable development should provide all (!!!) people with a basic quality of life while protecting the ecosystem and that such human progress should be at the global (!!!) level for a long term (Sterling, 2010) was established along with the idea of the individual responsibility of businesses (Bowen, 2013) and other stakeholders vis-a-vis the entire society.

However, these ideas were neither shared nor trusted by all (Harow et al., 2013), see the call of Milton Friedman for a reduction of government intervention reflecting the Chicago school (MacGregor Pelikánová, Hála, 2021). The minimalist Friedman approach led to the "amoral" shareholder theory with the goal to do legally all possible to maximize the profits of shareholders, later on slightly moderated towards the motto "what is good for business is good for society," and promptly challenged by R. Edward Freeman with his "moral" stakeholder theory (Hühn, 2023). However, they both based their theories on the free and socially embedded individual (Hühn, 2023) and they both led to the realization that "sustainable development" might be a chimera. Friedman´s traditional, aka conventional, shareholder model to maximize returns to owners (Friedman, 2007) and Freeman's stakeholder model to take care of primary stakeholders while keeping the business in good health (Freeman, 2017) contrast and co-exist

with the CSR famous four-layers pyramid (Strand et al., 2015) and the CSV model to do good in society without necessarily aiming at profits (Carroll, 1999 et 2016). The statement "CSR is the strategic process through which corporations can solve a social problem which is aligned to their value chain while pursuing economic profits" (Menghwar, Daood, 2021) is a reality for some and illusory for others. Similarly, for some, CSV is a revolutionary concept (Wójcik, 2016) while for others it merely builds upon pre-existing thoughts (Porter, Kramer, 2014).

In the 21st century, "sustainable development" is a regular term incorporated into both state and individual documents and communications, entailing formal legal and policy instruments as well as informal marketing instruments. The term travels from technical, descriptive margins of the language to the center of it and becomes a rather focal point of the business itself (at least in its descriptive, self-portrayal aspect). It has turned from a rather neutral and pragmatic agricultural (management) term into a "buzzword, in-vogue, it-word, fashionable" center of the corporate lexical field. In current world policy communications, as well as corporate communications, it is unlikely the term would be absent, hence there is the (omni)presence, and it turns into a cliché (strictly linguistically, stylistically speaking, and quantitatively speaking) entailing biology, ecology, economy, sociology, etc. (Feil, Schreiber, 2017). Currently, the myriad of definitions keeps expanding rather than shrinking by consolidation (MacGregor Pelikánová, Sani, 2023) and this leads to the iconic statement "sustainability: I know it when I see it" (White, 2013). Arguably, sustainability tackles systems while sustainability development tackles human needs and well-being (Feil, Schreiber, 2017). However, it is questionable whether sustainable development represents a normal science development or a revolutionary science, aka paradigm change (Kuhn, 1970), whether it is rightly criticized (Panta, 2019) and labelled as elusive, contradictory (O´Riordan, 1996) and even a cliché (Lélé, 1991), and whether it collapses because SDGs are not (to be) achieved (Jermolajeva, Trusina, 2022). Sustainable development is based on "opportunity" and "need" and their inherent contradiction should be overcome by minimizing their differences and by avoiding the repetition of strategic mistakes (Jermolajeva, Trusina, 2022). However, sceptics shower this with criticism (Anderson, Kosnik, 2002) and point to the intrinsic unrealistic setting and extrinsic context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hála et al., 2022) and the War in Ukraine (Malý et al., 2023) and other events dramatically changing the setting on the macro- as well as micro-level (Cowling, Dvouletý, 2023).

The UN approaches sustainable development as a conjunction of sustainability perceived as durability and of development, perceived as extensiveness (Cristian et al., 2015), and turned into a global command resting on three pillars: environmental (planet), social (people) and

economic (profit). It is actionable via the UN Agenda 2030 in 2015 (van Tulder, Keen, 2018; van Tulder et al., 2021), connected to the move from CSR to CSV (Kramer, Pfiter, 2016) and fully endorsed by the EU, see the above mentioned Communication COM (2016) 739. Well, the current European Commission makes sure that the commitment of the EU to all SDGs is omnipresent in EU policies, but the progress of the implementation of almost all SDGs is delayed by several years in almost all EU member states (Bieszk-Stolorz, Dmytrów, 2023a et 2023b; Dmytrów et al., 2022). The lack of implementation of SDGs, such as the pro-innovation SDG 9, generates a set of negative impacts, undermines business viability and deteriorates the prevention of disastrous environmental crises (Bieszk-Stolorz, Dmytrów, 2023b). The innovation means openness to new ideas and readiness to take a new approach to technical, organizational, economic, scientific and social problems (Stawicka, 2023), crises should be an impulse to go ahead with them (D´Adamo, Lupi, 2021; D´Adamo et al., 2022) and, once applied, they should lead to the universal flourishing of SDGs. This was the philosophy of Europe 2020 with its smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including targets to reduce Greenhouse gas emissions 20% lower than 1990 and to reach 3% of EU GDP to be invested in R&D, and the Political Guidelines 2019–2024 with six ambitions aka priorities, including the European Green Deal. Pursuant to the new Political Guidelines for 2024–2029 Europe´s Choice – A new plan for Europe´s sustainable prosperity and competitiveness from July 18, 2024 ("Political Guidelines 2024–2029") the second European Commission of Ursula von der Leyen is open to re-adjusting these prior six priorities, especially to modernize the European Green Deal, see the new Clean Industrial Deal (von der Leyen, 2024). However, the basic philosophy has not dramatically changed and is just made more pragmatic and more concerned with prosperity and competitiveness. And how does this work in real life? Do we have a highly competitive EU which is pro-sustainable development and pro-innovations? In particular, what is the reality about sustainable development in EU policies?

2. Research methodology

Since 2019, the already known term "sustainable development" has played a crucial role in EU policies and is perceived as an abstract, heterogeneous and conceptually unsettled argumentative command. Plainly, its roots are obscure and its interpretation extremely diversified, often reduced to empirical observations (White, 2013) to avoid semantic pitfalls. Political science and organizational analysis bring relevant suggestions about adjustments for individuals, institutions, bureaucratic roles and standard operating procedures

(O´Riordan, Jordan, 1971) and it is illustrative to point out the aphorism "where you stand depends upon where you sit" (Allison, 1971). The European Commission sits on several chairs and needs to reconcile all sustainable development dimensions across the EU. Economic sustainable development needs to reconcile not only the interests of environmental and social sustainable development but as well needs to balance equity and fiscal soundness (Zhai, Chang, 2019), i.e. fair pragmatism and pragmatic fairness. Social sustainability development is not about the meeting of the needs of everybody, but about removing barriers blocking individuals from meeting their needs (Kolk, 2016), etc. Since the European Commission is vigorously advancing sustainable development via its policies, as pre-cursors of its legislative endeavors, the meaning of this term is critically important. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to reconcile these various approaches and consolidate the understanding of "sustainable development" as advanced by current EU policies.

The materials and methods to be employed in this explorative undertaking are inherently determined by the spheres most related to it. Sustainable development is at the intersection of three spheres – environmental, social and economic. All of them are covered by the social sciences, such as philosophy, linguistics, economics or law, which deal with human behaviour in its social and cultural aspects. Sustainable development in current EU policies is shaped by the European Commission operating in the particular EU context. These policies stem from inherent EU sources placed in the digital setting, i.e. on the domain of the European Commission and in EurLex. These sources need to be explored while going for the key words "sustainable", "sustainability" and sustainable development" and their concepts in the literature and sematic manners in valid and effective policy documents. Such extracted data are to be categorized based on their principal affiliation to one of six ambitions (A1–A6) and EGD policy (EGD1–EGD9) and visualized by the posting of their category, title, description in comparative tables which allow for further content analysis with comparative and critical comments and glossing.

Regarding the philosophy, in particular its discipline focusing on the nature and organization of reality, i.e. ontology, the ontological question "what is reality" is to be posed regarding "sustainable development" and its heterogenous sources (Vourvachis, Woodward, 2015) and processed in a methodologically organized designed manner (Yin, 2008). Regarding linguistics and law, it needs to be underlined that the use of logic as a mechanical model of language (Stamper, 1991) should give the priority to a more open, holistic, flexible, pragmatic and causality-oriented search (Heckman, 2005) for a meaningful understanding, interpretation and application of the wording of EU policies. The binary true-false propositional logic is not

appropriate for their exploration, but even the variables-based predicate logic could hardly be employed automatically and, *per se*, due to the presence, if not predominance, of argumentative features. Further, for the categorization and considering the legal potential, these EU policies need to be exposed to common deductive reasoning with an interpretation by an agent based on the legal positivism of "Hart´s will" (Stamper, 1991), have reached the compromises of "Hobbes´ social contract," the utilitarian concession of "Bentham´pragmatism", the deontological principles of "Kant´s judgment" (Balcerzak, MacGregor Pelikánová, 2020) and the universalism of "Aristotle's law of nature" (MacGregor Pelikánová et al., 2021b). Their semantic analysis upon word structure analysis (morphology), sentence structure analysis (syntax), and context appreciation should consider special branches approaches and rules (golden, mischief and purposive). Their interpretation is to be dominated by the teleological approach due to the CJ EU determination to go for the spirit of EU policies and law via an autonomous pro-integration interpretation (MacGregor Pelikánová, MacGregor, 2021).

In summary, the inherently implied need for an advanced semantics exploration with contextual and evolutionary features, the historic and multidisciplinary comparative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2003) with a strong qualitative text focus (Kuckartz, 2014) should take advantage of data visualization via comparative tables and their juxtaposition. This should be followed by the holistic, thematic and critical analysis about their categorization and teleological meaning refreshed by glossing and Socratic questioning (Areeda, 2016) and glossing based on multi-spectral field observations (Gold, 1958). On the theoretical level, this allows for connecting the rather empirical, casuistic, inductive and qualitative aspects to a more theoretical and deductive background implied by the historic and conceptual review. On a practical level this should lead to propositions about the understanding and interpretation of "sustainable development" in current EU policies while recognizing and overcoming a set of semantic pitfalls regarding its ephemeral nature and ambiguous meaning.

3. Results

"Sustainable development" is not a neutral, composed term with a constant meaning and hence the complexity of "sustainable" and "development" grows exponentially once it is combined in the term "sustainable development." It is to be considered in the nature-society-human system and to be applied in conformity with the laws of the global evolution of living nature and with laws of the historical development of humankind (Jermolajeva, Trusina, 2022).

Sustainable development has been for centuries, if not a millennia, an important aspect addressed by European society. The French command for the perpetual renewal of the crop generating resource was further advanced by the German concept and methodology, see *développement soutenable* and *Nachhaltige Entwicklung*. The UN brought global solidarity and justice. The current perception of sustainable development in the EU entails ecological, poverty, justice and various ethical issues (Rendtorff, 2019) and leads to a myriad of juxtapositions and conflicts making it challenging, if not impossible '(Huttmanova, Valentiny, 2019), to reach a universal model (Grabara, 2019). The sustainable development is based on three concepts which are not always in harmony : (i) development (socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints), (ii) needs (redistribution of resources to ensure quality of life for all) and (iii) future generations (the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations) (Klarin, 2018). There are hundreds of definitions of sustainable development (Dobson, 1996) and ongoing discussions whether the ecological (environmental) dimension is the most important view (Holden et al., 2014), both on the state as well as on the private (business) level (Balcerzak, MacGregor Pelikánová, 2020)

The European Commission for 2019–2024 set its ambitions and tied them to SDGs and sustainable development. Resulting policies should induce Europeans, including businesses, to embrace sustainability, to build their strategic models and to go for strategic cooperation with various stakeholder groups (Stawicka, 2023) across various industries (van Tulder, van Mil, 2023). These policies recognize that sustainability is futile without multi-stakeholder models across industries (van Tulder, Keen, 2018) and, considering the physical limits of the tangible universe and cross-generational solidarity, a sustainable future must be innovative (MacGregor Pelikánová, 2019; Stawicka, 2023). Innovation is the foundation for all three core elements of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection (Stawicka, 2023). The European Commission accepted the challenge to put sustainable development, centered around inter- and intragenerational equity, at the top of its list of endeavors (Schunz, 2022), see the motto of Political Guidelines 2019–2024 "For the generation of my children, Europe is a unique aspiration." In particular, the European Green Deal impacts the understanding and application of sustainable development by all European stakeholders in all industries (Kowalska, Bieniek, 2022) or size (Bočková, 2022). Sustainable development is anchored at the heart of modern European integration as a process to be completed via a multi-stakeholder model (Panta, 2019), based on appropriate policies, Table 1 provides an overview with categorization and citations.

Table 1. Six ambitions of the Political Guidelines 2019–2024

Ambition aka Priority	Description	Sustainability, Sustainable, Sustainable development
A1 – A European Green Deal	Striving to be the first climate-neutral continent by reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, and to achieve climate neutrality by 2050	*A sustainable Europe is one that opens up opportunities, innovates, creates jobs and offers a competitive edge to its industries. The circular economy is key for developing Europe's future economic model*
A2 – An economy that works for people	Ensuring social fairness and prosperity by advancing the EU's unique social market economy which allows economies to grow and to reduce poverty and inequality	*I will refocus the European Semester into an instrument that integrates the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*
A3 – A Europe fit for the digital age	Empowering people with a new generation by boosting digitalization from NextGenerationEU and reach 80% population with digital skills	
A4 – A stronger Europe in the world	Reinforcing our responsible global leadership by championing multilateralism and a rules-based global order through a more active role and stronger voice for the EU as a global leader while ensuring the highest standards of climate, environmental and labour protections	*We need to put the clear focus of our development cooperation on improving the perspectives of young women and men in their countries of origin. We need to invest in their health, in their education and skills, in infrastructure, sustainable growth and security*
A5 – Protecting our European way of life	Protecting our citizens and our values by advancing equality, tolerance and social fairness built upon the rule of law	*Trade is not an end in itself. It is a means to deliver prosperity at home and to export our values across the world. I will ensure that every new agreement concluded will have a dedicated sustainable-development chapter and the highest standards of climate, environmental and labour protection, with a zero-tolerance policy on child labour*
A6 – A new push for European democracy	Nurturing, protecting and strengthening our democracy by recognizing that Europe's strength lies in its unity based on shared democratic values, human rights, independence of press, rule of law, equality	

Source: own elaboration based on European Commission data (von Der Leyen, 2019).

The Political Guidelines 2019–2024 underlines that "A Union that strives for more" and should go for "a healthy planet, a new digital world, by bringing people together and upgrading social market economy" and is pro SDGs. Nevertheless, as with each and every long-term strategy, the Political Guidelines 2019–2024 are a product of its original contextual setting (Europe before 2019) which is to be applied in a dynamically evolving setting, often dramatically changed by crises (COVID-19, the War in Ukraine). It is illustrative to review the latest policies (as of January 2024) and their attitude to sustainable development, see Table 2.

Tables 1 and 2 imply aspects critical for the perception of sustainable development and its importance by the European Commission for 2019–2024 and its policies. The discussion of these aspects shines a new light and moves the understanding of sustainable development into a new stage. Comparatively, it is instructive to mention as well the upcoming European Commission for 2024–2029 and its focus, in particular as so far suggested by the Political Guidelines 2024–2029, see Table 3.

Table 2. Overview of key EU policies as of January, 2024

Ambition to Priority	Policy	Description with the link
1	2	3
A1–P1	The European Green Deal – Key Figures	– the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, – at least 55% less net greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, – 3 billion additional trees to be planted in the EU by 2030. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en
A1–P1	European Climate law and Fit for 55	Under the European Climate law, the EU is committed to reducing its net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030... Euś economy fit to meet its target... on a path to reach its climate targets in a fair, cost-effective and competitive way... https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_23_4813
	EGD1 Biodiversity strategy for 2030	Objectives/commitments: Establishing a larger EU-wide network of protected areas on land and at sea, Launching an EU nature restoration plan, Introducing measures to enable the necessary transformative change, Introducing measures to tackle the global biodiversity challenge. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en and https://dopa.jrc.ec.europa.eu/kcbd/dashboard
	EGD2 Chemicals strategy	The EU's chemicals strategy for sustainability towards a toxic-free environment with objectives: Banning the most harmful chemicals in consumer products..., phasing out the use of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the EU... https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/chemicals-strategy_en
	EGD3 New circular economy action plan ("CEAP")	The EU's new circular action plan paves the way for a cleaner and more competitive Europe with objectives: make sustainable products the norm in the EU, empower consumers and public buyers, focus on the sectors that use most resources and where the potential for circularity is high such as: electronics and ICT, batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food, water and nutrients ensure less waste. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/circular-economy-action-plan_en
	EGD4 Environment action program to 2030	Environment action program to 2030 – six priority objectives to 2030: – achieving the 2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target and climate neutrality by 2050, – enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, – advancing towards a regenerative growth model, decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation, and accelerating the transition to a circular economy, – pursuing a zero-pollution ambition, including for air, water and soil and protecting the health and well-being of Europeans, – protecting, preserving and restoring biodiversity, and enhancing natural capital, – reducing environmental and climate pressures related to production and consumption (particularly in the areas of energy, industry, buildings and infrastructure, mobility, tourism, international trade and the food system)... https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/environment-action-programme-2030_en

1	2	3
	EGD5 Forest strategy	Forest strategy headlines: – promoting the sustainable forest bioeconomy for long-lived wood products, – ensuring the sustainable use of wood-based resources for bioenergy, – promoting a non-wood forest-based bioeconomy, including ecotourism, – developing skills and empowering people for a sustainable forest-based bioeconomy, – protecting the EU's last remaining primary and old-growth forests, – ensuring forest restoration and reinforced sustainable forest management for climate adaptation and forest resilience, – re- and afforestation of biodiverse forests, including planting 3 billion additional trees by 2030,¨ – providing financial incentives for forest owners and managers for improving the quantity and quality of EU forests. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/forest-strategy_en
	EGD6 Plastics strategy	Plastic Strategy Actions: – making recycling profitable for business, – curbing plastic waste, – driving innovation and investment, – spurring global change. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/plastics-strategy_en
	EGD7 Soil strategy	Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/soil-and-land/soil-strategy_en
	EGD8 Textiles strategy aka Strategy for sustainable and circular textiles	Key figures: – 5 million tons of clothing discarded each year in the EU - around 12kg per person, – 20 to 35 jobs created for each 1000 tons of textiles collected for re-use, – 1% of material in clothing is recycled into new clothing. – Objectives: – all textile products placed on the EU market are durable, repairable and recyclable, to a great extent made of recycled fibers, free of hazardous substances, produced in respect of social rights and the environment, – "fast fashion is out of fashion" and consumers benefit longer from high quality affordable textiles, – profitable re-use and repair services are widely available, – the textiles sector is competitive, resilient and innovative with producers taking responsibility for their products along the value chain with sufficient capacities for recycling and minimal incineration and landfilling. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/textiles-strategy_en
	EGD9 Zero pollution action plan	– Zero pollution vision for 2050: – improving air quality to reduce the number of premature deaths caused by air pollution by 55%, – improving water quality by reducing waste, plastic litter at sea (by 50%) and microplastics released into the environment (by 30%), – improving soil quality by reducing nutrient losses and chemical pesticides' use by 50%, – reducing by 25% the EU ecosystems where air pollution threatens biodiversity, – reducing the share of people chronically disturbed by transport noise by 30%, and – significantly reducing waste generation and by 50% residual municipal waste. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en
A3–P2	A Europe fit for the digital age – Key Figures	– €250 billion to boost to digitalisation from NextGenerationEU, – 80% of the EU population should have basic digital skills by 2030, – €43 billion of policy-driven investment will support the Chips Act until 2030. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en
	European industrial strategy	Strengthening the EU's open strategic autonomy. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-industrial-strategy_en

1	2	3
A3–P2	In progress	Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act, European Chips Act, European Digital Identity, Artificial Intelligence, European data strategy. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en
A2–P3	An economy that works for people – Key Figures	– €800 billion invested in the NextGenerationEU recovery plan, – 6 million jobs created in the EU in 2021, – 60% of all adults to participate in training every year by 2030. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people_en
	In progress	NextGenerationEU, European Skills Agenda, European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, New Consumer Agenda, Adequate minimum wages in the EU, Working conditions of platform workers, New Business Taxation Agenda, Small and medium-size enterprises strategy, Capital Markets Union. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people_en
A4–P4	A stronger Europe in the world – Key Figures	– €300 billion for the Global Gateway until 2027, – 1.8 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses sent to 165 countries, – €40.5 billion mobilised for Ukraine by Team Europe. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world_en
A4–P4	In progress	EU solidarity with Ukraine, the Middle East crisis, Food security, the Global Gateway, Support for the people in Türkiye and Syria, Enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, EU-US trade and technology council, Global response to coronavirus, a new agenda for the Mediterranean, Anti-coercion instrument, a new tool to counter the use of economic coercion by third countries. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world_en
A5–P5	Promoting our European way of life – Key Figures	– €4 billion for implementing Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, – €5.5 billion in savings for the EU over 10 years from better access and exchange of health data, – 3.5 million people crossing between Schengen States every day. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life_en
A5–P5	In progress	European Health Union, Migration and asylum, Strategy on the future of Schengen, Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, European Health Data Space, EU agenda to tackle organised crime and on counter-terrorism, European Security Union, EU strategy on combatting antisemitism, European Care Strategy. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life_en
A6–P6	A new push for European Democracy – Key Figures	– 49 proposals, – More than 750,000 participants, – More than 6,500 events organized all around Europe. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy_en
A6–P6	In progress	European citizens' panels, Conference on the Future of Europe, LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, Ending gender-based violence, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, Protecting democracy, Rule of Law Mechanism, European Media Freedom Act, Long-term vision for rural areas. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy_en

Source: own elaboration based on European Commission Data from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024_en and https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy_en.

Table 3. Plans of the Political Guidelines 2024–2029

Plan	Points	Sustainability, Sustainable, Sustainable development
A new plan for Europe´s sustainable prosperity and competitiveness	– Make business easier and deepen our Single Market. – Build a Clean Industrial Deal to decarbonize and bring down energy prices. – Put research and innovation at the heart of our economy. – Boost productivity with digital tech diffusion. – Invest massively in our sustainable competitiveness. – Tackle the skis and labor gap	*... We will introduce a new category of small midcaps and assess where existing regulation applying to large companies is too burdensome, disproportionate or a hindrance to their competitive development... a new Circular Economy Act...*
A new era for European Defense and Security	– Bringing the European Defense Union to life. – A preparedness Union. – A safer and more secure Europe. – Stronger common border. – Standing fair and firm on migration	---
Supporting people, strengthening our societies and social model	– Social fairness in the modern economy. – Reuniting our societies, supporting our young people. – A Union of equality	*... Europe will be confronted with various challenges... from labour shortages to fiscal sustainability... We need a strengthened cohesion and growth policy...*
Sustaining our quality of life: food security, water and nature	– Climate adaptation, preparedness and solidarity	*One of the greatest risks to our security is the impact on climate change... strengthening Europe´s water security*
Protecting our democracy, upholding our values	– Protection of our democracy. – Strengthening the rule of law. – Putting citizens at the heart of our democracy	*... address... deepfakes... Europe´s democracy and economy relies on the rule of law ..*
A global Europe: Leveraging our power and partnership	– Enlargement as a geopolitical imperative. – Reshaping multilateralism for today´s world	*... it is moral, political and geostrategic imperative to further complete our Union...*
Delivering together and preparing our Union for the future	– A new budget fit for our ambitions. – Respect the rule of law is – and will be – a must for EU funds. – An ambitious reform agenda for Europe. – Delivering together with the European Parliament	*... partnership between the European Commission and the European Parliament... Art. 122 and Art. 225 TFEU...*

Source: own elaboration based on European Commission data (von Der Leyen, 2024).

4. Discussion

Modern sustainable development is built upon non-hierarchical communication across society (Ferraro, Beunza, 2018) regarding tying SDGs and social responsibility endeavors of businesses and individuals in an actionable manner and cross-sectorial partnership (van Tulder, van Mil, 2023). A crisis is both a challenge to the pre-existing setting and an opportunity for its change (Kovoor-Misra, 2009; Schumpter, 1934). Even Albert Einstein perceived a crisis

as a necessary stimulus for human progress, inventiveness and innovations (D´Adamo, Lupi, 2021). Such innovations based on the right values (Al-Jundi et al., 2021) should be presented and received accordingly (Drucker, 2015) – otherwise it would be a higher cost, or even a waste (Drucker, 1973).

Sometimes such stimuli and innovations are more welcome, sometimes less welcome … Due to them or despite them, the European Commission has neither recalled nor dramatically changed its Political Guidelines 2019–2024 nor moved away from "Sustainable development means meeting the needs of the present whilst ensuring future generations can meet their own needs. It has three pillars: economic, environmental and social. To achieve sustainable development, policies in these three areas have to work together and support each other… The EU and its member countries are fully committed to implementing Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals into EU policies" (EC, 2023). For current EU policies, sustainable development means sustainability resting on three pillars and going for all 17 SDGs in a mutually synergetic manner. Further, COM(2022) 409 The power of trade partnership: together for green and just economic growth "exports" for such a perception of sustainable development, see the wording "Sustainable development priorities and objectives have been mainstreamed into all EU policies in accordance with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and other multilateral agreements for the protection of the environment and labour standards." Arguably, sustainable development in current EU policies means the acceptance of SDGs as stated by the UN (Borchardt et al., 2022) and its global dissemination. However, the overview of current EU policies, both as stated by the Political Guidelines 2019–2024 (Table 1) and as further advanced (Table 2) provides a more nuanced and colorful picture and does not confirm the idea of the EU as a mere messenger of the UN. Recent crises have made these colors even sharper and have led to the following SIX particular proposition about the term sustainable development in EU policies.

First, sustainable development in current EU policies is neither about keeping and maintaining, as conceived by Hans Carl von Carlowitz and Emil André, nor about innovative changes, as conceived by Joseph Schumpeter and Peter Drucker. It is about CHANGES and reversing pre-existing and ongoing trends. The European Green Deal, Fit for 55, A6–P6 In progress, etc., are about wanting different things and reaching them differently, i.e. they are about the change in effectiveness (what is right) and efficiency (how rightly is to be achieved).

Second, these changes are MULTISPECTRAL. They overlap with SDGs, but they are not identical. SDGs address sustainable development as a tool to fight against the climate

crisis and poverty via a global partnership and, at the present time, there is a universal lack of progress. Current EU policies are also going through rainy days, but it appears that this does not slow the endeavors and ambitions of the European Commission and its eagerness to tackle spheres which are above and beyond SDGs, such as EGD3 with CEAP, A6–P6.

Third, these multispectral (and sometimes from SDGs departing) changes bring a conflict of values and so are inherently CONFLICTING, e.g. P1–A1 EGD and P5–A5 are prima facia in direct contrast. Sustainable development is not only about environmental concerns related to the reduction of emissions, deforestation, global warming and general waste, but are as well about social justice along with shared democratic values, human rights, independence of the press, the rule of law, equality in the EU and even outside of the EU (see various partnership initiatives). The European Commission argues that these conflicts are not real, that the synergy prevails and, for example, "to make Europe greener and more digital" pursuant to the EU DIGITAL Europe Programme should put intangible assets at work to fight against environmental crises. However, a part of academia is concerned with various EU policy endeavors which arguably cannot be reconciled with other pro-sustainable development policies (Adamo, Lupi, 2021), and this even in the arena of "to make Europe greener and more digital", see the intellectual property issues, legal liability and the competition impact of electric cars produced in China (Gomes et al., 2023) or the energy supply issue (Dmytrów et al., 2022), where EU member states do not see any synergy, but instead a balancing test with different results in different EU member states' jurisdictions.

Fourth, sustainable development in current EU policies is about IMPOSING these multispectral and potentially conflicting changes, i.e. about going from a messenger over to a defender with a shield to an attacker with a sword. EU policies do not propose changes or trend reversals, they order it. For example, EGD3 with CEAP and EGD8 with its objectives impose the change in the way Europeans dress themselves.

Fifth, the EU wants to engage all stakeholders in the imposition of multispectral conflicting changes. This can be demonstrated via the empowered role of consumers in accelerating the green transition by the EGD, see e.g. the change of the homo economicus into HOMO RESPONSIBILUS in the context of the fight against greenwashing and waste via proposals for a Regulation for eco-design for sustainable products, for the Green Empowerment Directive, for the Repair Goods Directive and for the Green Claims Directive. Academia applauds this drive for transparency allowing stakeholders, including shareholders, investors and customers, to make educated choices (Ferraro, Beunza, 2018).

Sixth, since 2019, almost all EU policies and laws directly or indirectly refer to sustainable development in order to boost their justification and legitimacy and, at the same time, since sustainable development is about imposing multispectral conflicting changes to be heralded by all, its LEGITIMACY and JUSTIFICATION are demanded and scrutinized. The European Commission of Ursula von der Leyen turned sustainable development into a sword to be actively used by all Europeans in order to advance multispectral changes, often of a revolutionary nature. Interestingly, the legitimacy and justification for that is done by a mere referral to general provisions of the TEU and TFEU and wording of the UN along with some statistics. Certainly, moving from the linear economic model towards a more transparent, clean and resources-respecting competition, such as advanced by CEAP, engaging in the green transition empowered stakeholders and avoiding waste by the "right to repair" are very positive and pro-sustainable development endeavors (Skvarciany et al., 2021) and the European Commission should be complimented for considering it (EGD3). Similarly, the Plastics strategy (EDG6) fighting against single-use plastics and plastic waste in general, along with the Textiles strategy (EDG8) to build a greener and more competitive and pro-recycling textile sector as set by CEAP (EDG3) appears as the right way to deal with the textile and fashion industry, which is the 2nd largest polluter and perhaps the leader in entirely unnecessary waste (Niinimäki et al., 2020). However, the EU's sustainable development cannot be based on mere consequentialism and many choices labelled pro-sustainable have turned out to be ultimately against sustainable development. Considering the underlying top problem of sustainable development, i.e. the limitation of tangible resources, the legitimacy and justification of EU policies regarding sustainable development should be linked to intangible assets and the protection of intellectual property. Indeed, the EU's digital strategy is to help to achieve its target of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. A Europe fit for the digital age is currently in a stage of reshaping and rests on the Strategy for Virtual Worlds including the Metaverse, the Strategy regarding Web 4.0 and the Digital Europe Program ("DIGITAL") which is a new EU funding program focused on bringing digital technology to businesses, citizens and public administrations and is in line with the Society 4.0 (Turečková et al., 2023). The decade dimension is presented in Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030 (see more at https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en). In general, the Political Guidelines 2024–2029 appear prima facie in compliance with the above mentioned.

The attitude of the European Commission regarding sustainable development and the determination for multispectral and inherently conflicting changes to be heralded and imposed by all while advancing actionability, means that sustainable development is not a shield to

be used in a passive manner but a sword to be used in an active manner by all Europeans, which should be turned from homo economicus to homo responsibilus. Considering European civilization and tradition, this is feasible, provided that values are observed and general support obtained, i.e. ordering from above is not sustainable for sustainable development.

Conclusions

Sustainable development does not have a clear, unanimously accepted and multi-disciplinarily, definition and interpretation. Its underlying concept is understood contextually and personally (Kosner, 2023), i.e. it depends upon the situation and the speaker. It is the product of the mirror image doctrine. Arguably, an object, item or concept is not as important as one´s relationship to it (Wilson, Hugher, 2019). However, a mirror image is not only a static passport photo taken at the beginning of the research process, in addition it is a picture undergoing an ongoing dynamic change. The work is a reflection of its author and ephemeral "sustainable development" is a typical transparent vessel bringing out a testimony of its era and people.

The term "sustainable development" is a complex, rather new and potentially self-contradicting, terminological, compound. A historical and conceptual review reveals that the millennia roots of the term "sustainability" go back to what was "still possible" (not passing lines) aka bearable in the local agriculture of the ancient and feudal agricultural societies, over to the ongoing inter-local and inter-regional business in the trade-oriented Hansa and to the regional maintenance of natural resources for industries. Such an evolution reached the global society with the hope of mutual co-operation, the recognition of certain principal human rights and the management of limited resources. In contrast, the term "development" has much more recent roots pointing to economic growth. The systematic modern usage of the composed term "sustainable development" emerged with the UN Brundtland report and means the global battle against poverty and hunger by perhaps producing more, along with the advancement of SDGs. The EU follows in a particular manner and this leads to the burning research question what does the ephemeral term "sustainable development" in current EU policies really mean?

The performed and presented, thorough historical and conceptual, review established a foundation to prepare comparative tables filled in with information about current EU policies and their quotes regarding "sustainable development", as extracted from the EU Commission Websites and EurLex. The holistic, thematic and critical analysis about the teleological meaning along with the glossing and Socratic questioning was facilitated by the visual juxtaposition of these findings. This resulted in the confirmation that current EU

policies are committed to SDGs and, in the emergence of, six pioneering and rather surprising propositions regarding this semantic puzzle. Current EU policies are more heterogeneous and "sustainable development" means for them much more about the change than the continuation, these changes are multispectral and entailing inherently conflicting concerns and interests and are to be imposed via an active multi-stakeholder model, including consumers evolving from homo economicus to homo responsibilus. Legitimacy is at the crux of the question, while justification is more utilitarian than deontological. Yes, the first of the six ambitions as stated by the Political Guidelines 2019–2014 is the European Green Deal, but its nine policies keep developing (EGD1–EGD9) and, in addition, five other ambitions are entering into the picture and generate overlapping policies. Indeed, the ephemeral term "sustainable development" has acquired a special meaning mixing its background, the inherent contradiction of wanting more and having limited (physical) resources and the reflection of its author, see the mirror image doctrine effect. The term "sustainable development" is a semantic puzzle with a solution to be found as a common denominator in each of these mirrors. This is unlikely to be changed by the Political Guidelines 2024–2029 and their implementation.

The visualization via a comparative table reveals that such a denominator is neither the pro-environmental alleged rigidity of the European Green Deal nor the pro-social savior mission in the global setting. Instead, the European Commission keeps generating policies allowing European subjects to read their reference to "sustainable development" as their own vision of life standard maintenance with waste avoidance. This is the legacy of our Western civilization based on Christianity and individual responsibility. This common denominator ultimately boosts the potential for the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of "sustainable development" in EU policies. The ambitious attitude of the European Commission regarding sustainable development, the meeting of SDGs and the multispectral and inherently conflicting to be actionably imposed by all, means that sustainable development is not a shield to be used in a passive manner. Instead, sustainable development is a sword to be used in an active manner by all Europeans, which should be turned from homo economicus to homo responsibilus. Considering European civilization and traditions, this is feasible, provided that values are observed and general support obtained, i.e. ordering from above is not sustainable for sustainable development…

These pioneering propositions are serious and strongly point to recommendations about updating current EU policies while focusing more on shared values and waste avoidance than on the environment per se as advanced by the European Green Deal. Such pioneering propositions have controversial features and the potential for a dramatic impact

and policy modifications. However, these propositions have inherent limitations reducing their robustness. This needs to be corrected and overcome by further multidisciplinary longitudinal studies involving Delphi with panel experts and other tools for the exploration of an even a larger pool of policies, both from the EU as well as more national jurisdictions from the EU. The qualitative and quantitative analysis should include a comparison of the Political Guidelines 2019–2024 and Political Guidelines 2024–2029, and be complemented by field observations, empirical glosses and case law of the CJ EU, and perhaps even surveys entailing policy insiders as well as outsiders. The traditional motto of the EU "united in diversity" and the share rejection of waste should be considered. As a matter of fact, the Political Guidelines 2024–2029 are rather using "European strength and unity."

Acknowledgments

This paper is the result of a UNYP internal research project

References

Al-Jundi, S.A., Shuhaiber, A., Augustine, R. (2019). Effect of consumer innovativeness on new product purchase intentions through learning process and perceived value. *Cogent Business & Management*, *6*(1), 1–2. DOI: 10.1080/23311975.2019.1698849.

Allison, G.T. (1971). *Essence of Decision*. Boston: Little Brown and Co.

Anderson, T.L., Kosnik, L.R. (2002). Sustainable Skepticism and Sustainable Development. *Case Western Reserve Law Review*, *53*(2), 439–475.

André, E. (1832). *Einfachste den höchsten Ertrag und die Nachhaltigkeit ganz sicher stellende Forst-wirthschafts-Methode.* Prague: Borrosh und André.

Areeda, P. (1996). The Socratic method. *Harvard Law Review*, *109*(5), 911–922.

Balcerzak, A., MacGregor Pelikánová, R. (2020). Projection of SDGs in codes of ethics – case study about lost in translation? *Administrative Sciences*, *10*(4), 95. DOI: 10.3390/admsci10040095.

Barbiero, G. (2016). Francis of Assisi and the Wolf: Nonviolence as a moral value of biophilia. *Visions for Sustainability*, *5*, 28–31. DOI: 10.13135/2384-8677/1504.

Barbiero, G. (2021). Affective ecology as development of biophilia hypothesis. In: A. L'Astorina, C. Bergami, A. De Lazzari, E. Falchetti (eds.). Special Issue "Scientists moving between

narratives towards an ecological vision". *Visions for Sustainability*, *16*(5575), 43–78. DOI: 10.13135/2384.

Bieszk-Stolorz, B., Dmytrów, K. (2023a). Application of multivariate statistical analysis to assess the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 8 in European Union countries *Wiadomości Statystyczne. The Polish Statistician*, *68*(3), 22–43. DOI: 10.59139/ws.2023.03.2.

Bieszk-Stolorz, B., Dmytrów K. (2023b). Decent Work and Economic Growth in EU Countries – Static and Dynamic Analyses of Sustainable Development Goal 8. *Sustainability*, *15*(18), 13327. DOI: 10.3390/su151813327.

Bočková, N. (2022). The Role of the Green Deal in Start-ups' Approach to Innovation. In: M. Staníčková, L. Melecký (eds.), *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on European Integration 2022. Ostrava: VSB – Technical University of Ostrava* (pp. 89–101). DOI: 10.31490/9788024846057.

Borchardt, S., Barbero Vignola, G., Buscaglia, D., Maroni, M., Marelli, L. (2022). *Mapping EU Policies with the 2030 Agenda and SDGs*. EUR 31347 EN, JRC130904. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. DOI: 10.2760/87754.

Bowen, H.R. (2013). *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. University of Iowa Press. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctt20q1w8f.

Brittain, S. (2016). Justifying the Teleological Methodology of the European Court of Justice: A Rebuttal. *Irish Jurist*, *55*, 134–165.

Carroll, A.B. (1999). Corporate Social Responsibility: Evolution of a Definitional Construct. *Business & Society*, *38*(3), 268–295. DOI: 10.1177/000765039903800303.

Carroll, A.B. (2016). Carroll's pyramid of CSR: taking another look. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, *1*(3). DOI: 10.1186/s40991-016-0004-6.

Cowling, M., Dvouletý, O. (2023). Who is brave enough to start a new business during the COVID-19 pandemic? *Baltic Journal of Management*, *18*(3), 402–419. DOI: 10.1108/bjm-11-2022-0414.

Cristian, D., Goga, L.M., Artene, A.E., Duran V. (2015). The Components of Sustainable Development – A Possible Approach. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, *26*, 806–811. DOI: 10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00849-7.

Čechura, J. (2020). *Jakub Krčín z Jelčan*. Praha: Vyšehrad.

D´Adamo, I., Lupi, G. (2021). Sustainability and Resilience after COVID-19: A Circular Premium in the Fashion Industry. *Sustainability*, *13*, 1861. DOI: 10.3390/su13041861.

D´Adamo, I., Lupi, G., Morone, P., Blundo, D. (2022). Towards the circular economy in the fashion industry: the second-hand market as a best practice of sustainable responsibility for businesses and consumers. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, *29*, 46620–46633. DOI: 10.1007/s11356-022-19255-2.

Daly, H.E. (1991). Sustainable development: a contradiction. *Desarro Base*, *15*(3), 39.

Daly, H.E. (2006). Sustainable Development – Definitions, Principles, Policies. In: M. Keiner, (ed.). *The Future of Sustainability* (pp. 39–53). Springer, Dordrecht. DOI: 10.1007/1-4020-4908-0_2.

Dixon, J.A., Fallon, L.A. (1989). The concept of sustainability: Origins, extensions, and usefulness for policy. *Society & Natural Resources*, *2*(1), 73–84, DOI: 10.1080/08941928909380675.

Dmytrów, K, Bieszk-Stolorz, B, Landmesser-Rusek, J. (2022). Sustainable Energy in European Countries: Analysis of Sustainable Development Goal 7 Using the Dynamic Time Warping Method. *Energies*, *15*(20), 7756. DOI: 10.3390/en15207756.

Dobrzycki, J. (1973). Nicolaus Copernicus – His Life and Work. In: B. Bieńkowska (ed.), *The Scientific World of Copernicus*. Dordrecht: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-94-010-2616-1_2.

Dobson, A. (1996). Environmental Sustainabilities: an analysis and a typology. Environmental Politics, *5*, 401–428. DOI: 10.1080/09644019608414280.

Drucker, P.F. (2015). *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*. London and New York: Routledge Classics.

Drucker, P.F. (1973). *Management: tasks*, *responsibilities*, *practices*. New York: Harper & Row.

European Commission (2023). Sustainable development. Retrieved from https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/sustainable-development_en (3.10.2023).

Feil, A., Schreiber, D. (2017). Sustainability and sustainable development: unraveling overlays and scope of their meanings. *Cadernos*, *14*(3), 667–681. DOI: 10.1590/1679-39515747.

Ferraro, F., Beunza, D. (2018). Creating Common Ground: A Communicative Action Model of Dialogue in Shareholder Engagement. *Organization Science*, *29*(6), 1187–1207. DOI: 10.1287/orsc.2018.1226.

Fitzpatrick, H. (2023). A review of worldviews beyond sustainability. Potential avenues for human-nature connectedness. *Visions for Sustainability*, *19*, 7309, 9–57. DOI: 10.13135/2384-8677/7309.

Freeman, R.E. (2017). The New Story of Business: Towards a More Responsible Capitalism. *Business and Society Review*, *122*(3), 449–465. DOI: 10.1111/basr.12123.

Friedman, M. (2007). The Social Responsibility of business is to Increase its Profits . In: W.C. Zimmerli, M. Holzinger, K. Richter (eds.), *Corporate Ethics and Corporate Governance* (pp. 173–178). Berlin, Heidelber: Springer.

Friske, W., Nikolov, A.N., Hoang, P. (2020). CSR reporting practices: an integrative model and analysis. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *28*(2), 138–155. DOI: 10.1080/10696679.2019.1690397.

Gold, R.L. (1952). Roles in Sociological Field Observations. *Social Forces*, *36*(3), 217–223.

Gomes, A.P., Pauls, R., Brink, T. (2023). Industrial policy and the creation of the electric vehicles market in China: demand structure, sectoral complementarities and policy coordination. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *47*(1), 45–66. DOI: 10.1093/cje/beac056.

Grabara, J. (2019). Sustainable Development – Never Fulfilled Dream. *Quality – Access to Success*, *20*(1), 565–570.

Hála, M., Cvik, E.D., MacGregor Pelikánová, R. (2022). Logistic Regression of Czech Luxury Fashion Purchasing Habits During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Old for Loyalty and Young for Sustainability? *Folia Oeconomica Stetinensia*, *22*(1), 85–110. DOI: 10.2478/foli-2022-0005.

Harper, K. (2016). The Environmental Fall of the Roman Empire. *Daedalus*, *145*(2), 101–111. DOI: 10.1162/DAED_a_00380.

Harlow, J., Golub, A., Allenby, B. (2013). A review of utopian themes in sustainable development discourse. *Sustainable Development*, *21*(4), 270–280. DOI: 10.1002/sd.522.

Harwood, R.R. (1990). The history of sustainable agriculture. In: C.A. Edwards et al. (eds.), *Sustainable Agricultural Systems* (pp. 3–19). Boca Raton: CRC Press.

Heckman, J.J. (2005). The Scientific Model of Causality. *Sociological Methodology*, *35*, 1–98. DOI: 10.1111/j.0081-1750.2006.00164.x.

Holden, E., Linnerud, K., Banister, D. (2014). Sustainable development: Our Common Future revisited. *Global Environmental Change*, *26*, 130–139. DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.04.006.

Huttmanova, E., Valentiny, T. (2019). Assessment of the Economic Pillar and Environmental Pillar of Sustainable Development in the European Union. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, *8*(2), 289–298. DOI: 10.14207/ejsd. 2019.v8n2p289.

Hühn, M. (2023). Business ethics: Between Friedman and Freeman? A response to A Puzzle about Business Ethics. *Business Ethics*, *the Environment & Responsibility*, *32*(2), 868–876. DOI: 10.1111/beer.12523.

Jenkins, W. (2009). *Berkshire encyclopaedia of sustainability: the spirit of sustainability.* Vol. 1. Berkshire: Berkshire Publishing Group.

Jermolajeva, E., Trusina, I. (2022). Is Sustainable Development Really Sustainable – Theoretical Reflections, Statistics and the Need for Changes. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, *24*(2), 166–179. DOI: 10.2478/jtes-2022-0023.

Johnston, D. (2011). *A brief history of justice. Chapter 3: Aristotle's Theory of Justice* (pp. 63–88). John Wiley & Sons. DOI: 10.1002/9781444397550.ch3.

Kelly, D. (2020). *Slapper and Kelly's The English Legal System*. 19th Edition. Oxford: Routledge, 2020.

Klarin, T. (2018). The Concept of Sustainable Development: From its Beginning to the Contemporary Issues, Zagreb International Review of Economics & Business, *21*(1), 67–94. DOI: 10.2478/zireb-2018-0005.

Kolk, A. (2016). The social responsibility of international business: From ethics and the environment to CSR and sustainable development. *Journal of World Business*, *51*(1), 23–34. DOI: 10.1016/j.jwb.2015.08.010.

Kosner, L. (2023). The role of Skolt Saami religious texts in language development and revitalization. *Linguistic Portal*. DOI: 10.1515/lme.20442485. Retrieved from https://www.degruyter.com/database/LME/entry/lme.20442485/html, https://blogs.helsinki.fi/linguisticsandsustainability/2023/10/03/sustainability-in-linguistics-a-mirror-image (20.12.2023)

Kowalska, A., Bieniek, M. (2022). Meeting the European green deal objective of expanding organic farming. *Equilibrium*, *17*(3), 607–633. DOI: 10.24136/eq.2022.021.

Kovoor-Misra, S. (2009). Understanding perceived organizational identity during crisis and change: A threat/opportunity framework. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *22*(5), 494–510, DOI: 10.1108/09534810910983460.

Kramer, M.R., Pfitzer, M.R. (2016). The ecosystem of shared value. *Harvard Business Review*, *94*, 80–89.

Krippendorff, K. (2003). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Kuckartz, U. (2014). *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods*, *Practice and Using Software.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Kuhn, T.S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 92.

Lélé, S.M. (1991). Sustainable development: A critical review. *World Development*, *19*(6), 607–621, DOI: 10.1016/0305-750X(91)90197-P.

MacGregor Pelikánová, R. (2019). R&D expenditure and innovation in the EU and selected member states. *JEMI – Journal of Entrepreneurship*, *Management and Innovation*, *15*(1), 13–33. DOI: 10.7341/20191511. WoS.

MacGregor Pelikánová, R., Hála, M. (2021). CSR unconscious consumption by Generation Z in the COVID-19 era – Responsible heretics not paying CSR bonus? *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, *14*(8), 390. DOI: 10.3390/jrfm14080390.

MacGregor Pelikánová, R., MacGregor, R.K. (2020). The EU puzzling CSR regime and the confused perception by ambassadors of luxury fashion businesses: A case study from Pařížská. *Central European Business Review*, *9*(3), 74–108. DOI: 10.18267/j.cebr.240.

MacGregor Pelikánová, R., MacGregor, R.K. (2021). The COVID-19 As Interpretation Instrument for the Content of Corporate Social Responsibility and its Reporting in the EU. *The Lawyer Quarterly*, *2*, 305–322.

MacGregor Pelikánová, R., Němečková, T., MacGregor, R.K. (2021a). CSR Statements in International and Czech Luxury Fashion Industry at the Onset and during the COVID-19 Pandemic – Slowing Down the Fast Fashion Business? *Sustainability*, *13*(7), 3715. DOI: 10.3390/su13073715.

MacGregor Pelikánová, R., MacGregor, R.K., Černek, M. (2021b). New trends in codes of ethics: Czech business ethics preferences by the dawn of COVID-19. *Oeconomia Copernicana*, *12*(4), 973–1009. DOI: 10.24136/oc.2021.032.

MacGregor Pelikánová, R., Sani, M. (2023). Luxury, Slow and Fast Fashion – A Case study on the (Un)sustainable Creating of Shared Values. Equilibrium. *Quarterly Journal of Economics and Economic Policy*, *18*(3), 813–851. DOI: 10.24136/eq.2023.026.

Malý, M., Cvik, E.D., MacGregor Pelikánová, R. (2023). EU Sanctions Against the Russian Federation and Their Implications for the Foreign Trade of the Czech Republic. *AGRIS online Papers in Economics and Informatics*, *15*(3), 119–130. DOI: 10.7160/aol.2023.150310.

Meadows, D.H., Meadows, D.L., Randers, J., Behrens, W.W. (1972). *The limits to growth*. New York: Universe Books.

Menghwar, P.S., Daood, A. (2021). Creating shared value: A systematic review, synthesis and integrative perspective. *International Journal of Management Review*, *23*(4), 466–485. DOI: 10.1111/ijmr.12252.

O´Riordan, T. (1996). Environmentalism on the move. In: I. Douglas, R.J. Huggett, M. Robinson (eds.), *Companion encyclopaedia of geography*. London: Routledge.

O´Riordan, T., Jordan, A. (1999). Institutions, climate change and cultural theory: towards a common analytical Framework. *Global Environmental Change*, *9*, 81–93.

Panta, N.D. (2019). Clashing Perspectives on Sustainable Development. *Studies in Business and Economics*, *14*(1), 181–190. DOI: 10.2478/sbe-2019-0014.

Porter, M.E., Kramer, M.R. (2014). A response to Andrew Crane et al.'s article. *California Management Review*, *56*, 149–151.

Purvis, B., Mao, Y., Robinson, D. (2019). Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins. *Sustainability Science*, *14*(3), 681–95. DOI: 10.1007/s11625-018-0627-5.

Rackham, H. (1997). *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature.

Rendtorff, J.D. (2019). Sustainable Development Goals and progressive business models for economic transformation. *Local Economy*, *34*(6), 510–524. DOI: 10.1177/0269094219882270.

Schumpeter, J.A. (1934). *The Theory of Economic Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Schunz, S. (2022). The 'European Green Deal' – a paradigm shift? Transformations in the European Union's sustainability meta-discourse. *Political Research Exchange*, *4*(1). DOI: 10.1080/2474736X.2022.2085121.

Schüz, M. (2012). Sustainable Corporate Responsibility – The Foundation of successful Business in the New Millennium. *Central European Business Review*, *1*(2), 7–15. DOI: 10.18267/j.cebr.12.

Sharpley, R. (2009). *Tourism Development and the Environment: Beyond Sustainability*? London–New York: Earthscan.

Stamper, R.K. (1991). The Role of Semantics in Legal Expert Systems and Legal Reasoning. *Ratio Juris*, *4*(2), 219–244.

Stawicka, E. (2023). The Impact of Innovation on the Sustainable Development of Enterprises. *Folia Oeconomica Stetinensia*, *23*(2), 370–386. DOI: 10.2478/foli-2023-0036.

Sterling, S. (2010). Learning for resilience, or the resilient learner? Towards a necessary reconciliation in a paradigm of sustainable education. *Environmental Education Research*, *16*, 511–528. DOI: 10.1080/13504622.2010.505427.

Strand, R., Freeman, E., Hockerts, K. (2015). Corporate social responsibility and sustainability in Scandinavia: An overview. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *127*, 1–15. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-014-2224-6.

Thomas, A. (2004). *The Study of Development*. London: Church House.

van Tulder, R., Keen, N. (2018). Capturing Collaborative Challenges: Designing Complexity-Sensitive Theories of Change for Cross-Sector Partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *150*, 315–332. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-018-3857-7.

van Tulder, R., van Mil, E. (2023). *Principles of Sustainable Business – Frameworks for Corporate Action on the SDGs*. Oxon: Routledge.

van Tulder, R., Rodrigues, H., Mirza, H., Sexsmith K. (2021). The UN's Sustainable Development Goals: Can multinational enterprises lead the Decade of Action? *Journal of Internal Business Policy*, *4*, 1–21. DOI: 0.1057/s42214-020-00095-1.

von Carlowitz, H. (1713). *Hans Carl von Carlowitz. Sylvicultura oeconomica*. Leipzig: Braun.

von der Leyen, U. (2019). *Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019–2024: A Union that strives for more. My agenda for Europe*. Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20190716RES57231/20190716RES57231.pdf (15.01.2024).

von der Leyen, U. (2024). Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029: Europe´s Choice, 18 July 2024. Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/document/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en (18.09.2024).

von Rijswick, H.F.M.W. (2012). The Road to Sustainability: How Environmental Law Can Deal with Complexity and Flexibility. *Utrecht Law Review*, *8*(3), 1–6. DOI: 10.18352/ulr.202.

Vourvachis, P., Woodward, T. (2015). Content analysis in social and environmental reporting research: Trends and challenges. *Journal of Applied Accounting Research*, *16*(2), 166–195. DOI: 10.1108/JAAR-04-2013-0027.

Williams, S., Murphy, D.F. (2023). Learning from Each Other: UK Global Businesses, SMEs, CSR and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *Sustainability*, *15*(5), 4151. DOI: 10.3390/su15054151.

Willis, G.B. (2005). *Cognitive Interviewing.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Wilson, S., Hughes, M. (2019). Why research is Reconciliation. In: *Research & Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing Through Indigenous Relationships* (pp. 5–19). Canadian Scholars.

White, M.A. (2013). Sustainability: I know it when I see it. *Ecologocial Economics*, *86*, 213–217. DOI: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2012.12.020.

Wójcik, P. (2016). How creating shared value differs from corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Management and Business Administration Central Europe*, *24*(2), 32–55. DOI: 10.7206/jmba.ce.2450-7814.168.

Yin, R. (2008). *Study Research. Design Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Zhai, T., Chang, Y.C. (2019). Standing of Environmental Public-Interest Litigants in China: Evolution, Obstacles and Solutions. *Journal of Environmental Law*, *30*, 369–397, DOI: 10.1093/jel/eqy011.

Citation

Zavřelová, V., MacGregor Pelikánová, R. (2024). The Ephemeral Term “Sustainable Development” in Current EU Policies. *Folia Oeconomica Stetinensia*, *24*(2), 389–418. DOI: 10.2478/foli-2024-0031.