



# Specification of a model for the study of political rationality around sustainable development

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## Abstract

The objective of this paper has been to conceptually analyze Sustainable Development. In this sense, seven concepts were chosen, based on their similarities and differences, to interpret the nature-society relationship in terms of the equitable availability of resources between species and generations. The implementation of instrumental rationality assumes an optimization of resources and public

services. Limited rationality reveals the irreversibility of pollution. An increase in practical awareness would accelerate the emission of waste from process innovations. The communicative rationality and the decision would reveal risks in the face of austerity. This conceptual analysis of Sustainable Development will allow us to glimpse theories, diagnoses and interventions to promote rational lifestyles favorable to the conservation of the environment.

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Given that such a sequence has not been discussed, it is necessary to analyze it to warn of probable sustainability scenarios, even if these are provisional.

## Introduction

In political philosophy, sustainable development has been approached from the category of rationality to account for the scope and limits of the proposal to conserve resources based on the needs of future generations. In a general sense, rationality has been the focus of discussion regarding decision-making and action that is unfavorable or favorable to the conservation of resources.

Precisely, the objective of this work is to discuss the relationship between the category of rationality with respect to sustainable development. For this purpose, the philosophical approaches and analysis of authors who have proposed conceptual and operational definitions to inhibit or facilitate the conservation of natural resources are reviewed.

What are the scope and limits of the concepts of rationality with respect to the decisions of conservation of natural resources oriented towards a beneficial sustainable development for future generations?

The argumentative assumption that guides the discussion of this work is that the conceptual and operational definitions of rationality reveal sustainable development as a feasible human project only if a deliberate, planned and systematic process is built.

In this way, the present work contributes to the debate on rationality and sustainability. Both are presented as part of decision and action sequences but limited by situations or scenarios of resource availability. In this way, the ontological categories of the rational being are discussed: instrumental, limited, practical, communicative, prospective and consumerist with respect to the decision and action of conserving natural resources for future generations. At the end, a reflection on the coexistence of the categories is included, as well as their limits in situations.

## Dasein being itself (being there)

Heidegger (2006/1889) proposed the term *dasein* (ser = sein) to refer the ontology of man and analyze it from two categories: time and space, more concretely the *being being in time* and the *being being in space*. According to Heidegger, ontology refers to the moments taken away in the present that facilitate the constitution of being both in time and space and that can be recovered again and again, but on each occasion with a new face, mainly, with a new sense of being. Heidegger (2016) proposes a new conception of the constitution of man overcoming the duality that has him anchored to his voluntary action and his determined action. It is about thought rationality versus the unthinkable irrational. Around these

categories, sustainable development acquires a semantic face of rational thought and action, but also irrational if one considers that it is an opportunity (action determined by the situation) and a virtue (voluntary conservation action).

In this sense, *dasein* would be a foundation of the structuring if one considers that the being appropriates a moment to innovate, renew and perpetuate itself. The beings that structure the social reality are precisely those who capture a moment to eternalize through actions (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 55).

However, *dasein* is a term not yet linked to individual needs that, as inconsequential as ephemeral, only seek satisfaction and immediate pleasures bypassing the eternalization of being and reducing it to its simplest expression: the structuring of everyday life or worldly life.

It would be Max Weber (1997/1922) who would introduce the concept of *ideal type* to understand the *dasein* considering:

«The one-dimensional accentuation of one or more points of view (...) of specific fuzzy phenomena (...) which are placed (...) in a unified analytical construction” (p.11).

The Weberian *ideal type* refers to an *instrumental rationality* that was developed in industrial organizations, which had degraded Heidegger's *eternal being* to

a simple productive function. In the case of the notion of sustainability, the category of ideal type defines it as a project of humanity conservationist of resources (Husserl, 1986: 99). As a promoter of the care of animals and vegetables, this ideal type no longer only obeyed the identity or affinity with the natural but also defined an anthropocentrism that distinguishes itself by putting the welfare of humanity before any other species.

Anthropocentrism was idealized as the pinnacle of human dominance over nature, at the same time, ecocentrism was another opposite ideal type that symbolized species, including humanity, as part of a unique and unrepeatable cosmic community (Husserl, 2013). Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism were disseminated in the sustainable development discourse in order to differentiate radicals and moderates in the face of the deterioration of nature. Acting as ideal types, anthropocentrism revealed a propensity for the future exclusive of the human species as administrator of resources. In contrast, ecocentrism assumed a posture of original conservation of resources. By proposing a return to community life, ecocentrism emerged as an ideal type protector of the species.

However, in the transition from this ideal type to its implementation, anthropocentrism seems to have consolidated with respect to ecocentrism. This is so because the preservation of the environment for current generations rather than for future generations had a boom reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## The instrumental rationality

Individuals who act on their convictions forget their responsibilities (Weber, 1919/1986). This individual principle is extensive in the organizational field. That is, a large part of the population is employed by micro, small and medium enterprises, but only a few MSMEs survive in their first years to follow their objectives and use the consequent means without considering the contingency of the market and the relationships between organizations. An organization with standardized bureaucratization principles in its productive relations supposed instrumental actions that would guarantee its perpetuity. It was about the achievement of objectives and the use of means or consistent resources from previous information.

In the nomenclature of sustainable development, anthropocentrism is more of a conviction to preserve nature to maximize the gains of current generations to the detriment of future generations. On the contrary, ecocentrism is more linked to the responsibility to reduce the ecological footprint. It is because of the above that the optimization of resources proliferated on the innovation of processes.

The instrumental rationality consisting of excessive bureaucratization not only inhibited the optimization of resources. Furthermore, it prolonged its deterioration by nullifying risk prevention that implied a growing demand in relation to an increasingly diminishing availability of resources.

In this sense, Simon (1957) proposed a *bounded rationality* to designate a decision-making process based on information limits that can be of a temporal, but essentially rational, order. In this sense, the costs of obtaining the information should be commensurate with the benefits.

## The limited rationality

Because human beings cannot aspire to know the information about the beginning and end of a sustainable process due to its transition, due to the fact that it has been impossible to guess at the conjunctural moment from which humanity can develop sustainably, due to that—humanity does not seek its transcendence as an antecedent generation to guarantee the capacities of subsequent generations through the optimization of resources, environmental situations and lifestyles with their corresponding expectations, needs, decisions, intentions and actions are limited.

According to Simon (1957), humanity, mainly the supposedly rational individuals, cannot establish spatio-temporal intervals from which they calculate the probabilities of utility. For the most part, individuals employ *heuristics* in which they prefer low probabilities of success versus high probabilities of failure. It is a subsystem dedicated to competitive advantages among socially responsible organizations. Until the emergence of instrumental rationality, companies were considered as carriers of intangible assets, but oriented towards maximizing profits as a result of lower costs. The instrumental rationality

would come to reveal that this process is conditioned by the accumulation of information of inputs and outputs of data. Very soon the first limits to corporate social responsibility were recognized. The image of companies was adorned with prestigious strategies focused on optimizing resources.

These are decisions that structure individual actions and amplify groups to end up structuring societies. According to Giddens (1979); ~~it is practical actions that~~ invert the Weberian and Simonian process of limited instrumental rationality. Unlike Weber and Simon, Giddens speculates with the possibility that people are influenced by a social conscience that guides their heuristic processes.

### **Practical consciousness.**

Unlike the Heideggerian ontology that proposes the interpretation of man from the eternalization of its space-time, the Giddensian ontology raises practical awareness as rational action. It refers to a convenient practice regulated by the institutions (Giddens, 1991, p.204).

Anthony Giddens (1979) recognizes the influence of Heidegger in his Theory of Structuring. He points out that his approach is derived from Heidegger's ontology. He even agrees with the overcoming of duality: voluntarism vs. determinism. This transcendence of duality would not be to elevate the being in its spatio-temporal eternity but to anchor it in a daily life of intention rather than reflection, decision rather than sedition, action rather than transcendence.

Practical consciousness linked to institutional rationality is the basis of social structuring (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005, p. 16). These are mechanisms of thought and action favorable to the interests of individuals in relation to the security and uncertainty of the institutions and with them, the states. According to Giddens, both institutions and individuals are the most practical way to link public initiatives with personal needs.

However, the practical conscience is based on intentions and decisions that are not deliberate, planned and systematized (Bunge, 2000). These are actions that seek results convenient to the individual and convincing to the group to which he belongs or wants to belong. In this sense, the practical action is effective but ineffective. The instrumental conscience allows the attainment of objectives that only benefit the individual but that do not guarantee his perennial welfare. Practical awareness is an everyday mirage in which individuals look to strengthen their intentions, decisions and welfare actions. Such limits of practical consciousness impede the structuring of sustainability by being exclusive with the same group to which one belongs and therefore not contemplative of the needs of later generations.

Before the limits of situations, decisions and personal actions, Habermans (1992) will propose a new foundation of social structuring: communicative rationality. It is a symbolic field in which the action leaves its place to the symbols, meanings and meanings of the discourses. If

Heidegger's dasein transcends time and space, the discursive being transcends situations, especially personal ones, and anchors the individual in the shared symbols to which they assume different meanings, but which definitely belong to a cultural repertoire that already It was before the individual emerged. Before practical awareness, symbols had already structured societies.

### **The communicative rationality**

The structuring of sustainability has been analyzed from the Heidegger (1926), Weber (1986), Simon (1972) and Giddens (2006) proposals of time and space in which being is eternalized in a continuous present through innovative practices. However, the symbols, their meanings and their senses of discourse, have already been before any action, even to say of Habermans (1992), they determine, delimit and differentiate. Being sustainable is not based or reified in rational acts derived from laws. This is so because sustainable development, as construction, is reconfigured from the rational and irrational. It is just a continuous project of humanity to delay its extinction.

Giddens (2000) and Habermans (2005) argues that being does not transcend, with its actions, time and space, but rather, shared symbols are those that have already overcome all meaning and sense of being in time and space. The communicative act is the evidence that the symbols transcended the being. It is the verbal discourses that would lead society to structure the desired sustainability. It is about

a structural transformation of being directed towards the public sphere as a historical dialectic of sustainability. In this scenario, development is sustainable because, being a project of humanity, it has been verbalized and has transcended both senders and receivers.

By contrast, the structuring of sustainability implies the transcendence of the environment-humanity relationship in the past and the present. It is a prospective transcendence that, although symbolic, influences the balance between the availability of resources and human needs. It is about returning to the causal relationship between decisions as determinants of actions. It is about making decisions that maximize benefits and reduce costs, actions that reduce uncertainty and risks.

However, Kahneman (2003) showed that human decisions are not necessarily related to actions. Even decisions that maximize benefits do not result in actions that reduce risks.

### **The prospective decision**

The structuring of sustainability from the approaches of Heidegger (2004), Weber (2005), Simon (1972), Giddens (1990) and Habermans (1992) seems to obey a series of infinite decisions and actions in the same moment in which needs arise without considering the availability of resources. It is a bureaucratic rationality that can be seen from the depletion of resources, but that lasts until it reaches a status of maximum profit compared to probable costs. Or, a

communicative rationality that emerges as a counterpart to that bureaucratic rationality. A propensity to explain the imperatives of modernity reified in language. In both cases, sustainable development is a desire to conserve and a communication to preserve. In this sense, Kahneman (2003) established a fundamental law in the decision making that revealed the drawbacks of a structuring of sustainability.

These are heuristics that guide the intentions of being. Faced with a situation of uncertainty, individuals seem to prefer to risk winning large amounts than to preserve minimum reserves. In the case of the resource-needs balance, individuals seem to be oriented to market their waste than to preserve scarce resources. In a situation of uncertainty, risks define human actions. Natural reserves are sure to be exhausted, but public policies, private initiatives and technological innovations specialize in optimizing, regulating or moderating the exploitation of resources instead of preserving them and assuming new forms of consumption and lifestyles.

Precisely, current lifestyles, perhaps influenced by the symbols, meanings and meanings of the wasteful past, are the object of study by Bauman (1998; 2002; 2005; 2008) who affirms the liquidation of nature and next to it: humanity.

## The consumerist life

Sustainability has been structured from decisions and improvised actions, heuristics and creative, but not for that reason innovative or transforming inequitable relations between nature and humanity. Over exploitation of natural resources has been a function of human needs, desire and expectations rather than their equitable distribution among animal and plant species.

According to Bauman (1998), the imbalance between the availability of resources and human consumption, evidenced a context in which humanity structured its history based on modernist, materialist and consumerist assumptions. In this context, societies were structured under the assumptions of modernity.

However, societies did not finish their modern structure when they already presented postmodern symptoms (Bauman, 2002). If the modern structure of society consisted of the idea of progress, growth, utility, exploitation, production, expansion, identity, security, success, confidence, loyalty and happiness, the postmodern structuring of society now consists of uncertainty, risk, ubiquity, frustration, detachment, fear, terror, stress and unhappiness. It is a new structuring: a liquid post-structuring or a solid restructuring (Bauman, 2005).

In this sense, the structuring of sustainability is liquid due to its unstructured modern foundations of identity, security and progress. Also,

it is a solid post-structuring to appear to be anchored in hedonism and nihilism. However, sustainability seems to be more structured in terms of consumerism.

Precisely, it is in the notion of consumerism that Bauman (2008) explores the structural foundations of a postmodern society. In this regard, sustainability is anchored to the notion of the market and its corresponding fundamentals of maximizing profits and minimizing costs, reducing uncertainty and amplifying risks.

## Conclusion

In this way, the Heideggerian *dasein* clings to supply and demand. The Weberian instrumental rationality is now known as consumer competencies, the simonian limited rationality is now called consumer credit, the Giddensian practical conscience is presented as a seasonal offer, the Haymanian communicative rationality is only an acquisition in cheap and the Kahnemanian prospective decision. It is a merchandise auction.

From the context of sustainability, the structuring of societies is carried out through markets of extraction, transformation, distribution, hoarding and reuse. As resources become scarce, societies attempt to deconstruct their modern lifestyles in postmodern forms of coexistence. A decrease in energy reserves has its corresponding increase in merchandise without using only consumed once to be reused. The life cycle of natural resources seems to determine the structuring of societies. If

natural resources become disposable commodities, humanity seems to have that same end in accelerating the imbalance between saving and waste.

A limit observed in the approaches put forward is the question of structuring conceptions. Heidegger, Weber, Simon, Giddens, Habermans, Kahneman and Bauman seem to focus their approaches on a rationality external to individuals which seems to be determined by the norms, values and beliefs of their predecessors. In this sense, another limit of the exposed expositions is the relative one to the transcendence of the being in the past, reinforcing the idea that the limits of the sustainability would be in the decisions and current actions, but not in the future ones.

However, it is in rationality, whatever it may be, the possibility of returning to the balance between the needs of humanity and the availability of resources. The rational concepts exposed open a bridge between our decisions and actions of consumption, among our customs, values, beliefs and reasons for saving and waste. An increase in rationality in humanity would be inversely proportional to the depletion of resources.

If humanity recovers its *dasein* it will have an opportunity to structure new forms and austere lifestyles. The implementation of instrumental rationality in the care of resources would lead to optimized consumption. The information, processed by limited rationality, could be used to reveal the limits

of sustainability. An increase in the practical consciousness of the individuals would accelerate the waste, but at the same time, it would show the option of saving. Humanity needs an expansive universe of symbols to produce creative and innovative ideas as alternatives of sustainability and only communicative rationality would make possible such a prospective decision: increase the uncertainty to assume new risks of austerity.

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