

Reflection 23/3Sustainable Development and Climate Change: Introduction to the debate with views from EU. Lecturer: Marikka Stocchetti

It was back 50 years ago when the negative environmental impacts of “development” were started to discuss. Marikka Stocchetti starts the lecture explaining the background that lead to the need of the sustainable development movement.

Compromising cases of environment degradation due to human action, as the ones exposed in the book of Rachel Carson “The silent Spring” that became a breakthrough for the rising ecological consciousness. The holism that helped to understand the Earth as one auto regulated system where humans are part as other living creatures are; and this made clear that the state of natural ecosystems of Earth has a direct effect on human beings. And finally, the idea that in the future the Earth was not going to be able to provide with resources to the world’s growing population, as exposed in the book that Paul R. Ehrlich wrote in 1968 “The Population bomb”.

In this respect, I would like to comment the formulae also proposed by Paul R. Ehrlich to describe this phenomenon. The so called IPAT (impact= population x assessment x 1/technology) expresses conceptually the relation between the impact on environment and the use of resources per capita. In my opinion, is such a simple and intuitive statement, and at the same time, so clear and explicative, that itself already tells most part of the problem.

These three trends above exposed and some others raised the interest to environment on some groups mainly worried about human’s progress. One thing couldn’t be achieved without caring about the other. In 1972, UN placed environment in the international agenda; on 1986 the WCED proposes the concept “sustainable development” as a desirable solution. On 1992 the UN conference in Rio de Janeiro discusses how to walk towards the sustainable development and sets the programme for further practical actions. In 1997 Kyoto starts with the first “real” measures to

reduce emissions causing climate change. The goal then was to stabilise carbon emissions so the temperature of the planet wouldn't rise above the critical threshold of 2°C. But it seems that we should do more if we really don't want to get to that point, situation is far from better: "the poorest in the world is poorer".

And this year, 20 years later, in the same city there is going to take place the next UN Conference on sustainable development. Marikka Stocchetti has talked us about the issues that will be discussed in this event and what is the position of the EU in it.

I have noticed that we are using the terms "progress", "development" and "growth" sometimes with the same meaning. In my opinion, these concepts express different things and should be carefully utilised. Development to a better life-quality, progress to a more fair and prosper society. "Growth" either of population or economic, it implies, at first, the need of more natural resources. To me, while we are still putting "growth" in the same side as "progress or development", we are stuck on the same problem: the over-exploitation of the Earth ecosystem. Of course, any growth should be greener, but not-growing is also possible and this idea is so compromising that is still very little discussed. The economic system itself, capitalism, is being questioned if we talk about the "Degrowth". And these kind of strong ideas are far from being discussed in a UN conference.

From my point of view, inevitably environmentalist, the international policies that are being developed to fight the climate change, the meetings, discussions, decisions... are important to act in a global level, but are too slow. Nature needs a rapid change. However, Rio1992, Kyoto... already did a big action and many hopes are in Rio+20 to put sustainable development even more on the forefront of international scene. Sustainable development would ideally be a new paradigm, from education to governance, and affecting all aspects of society. I agree with Marikka that two simple questions would have to be done before any action (from personal, to business, to institutional level):

- "How this would affect my brothers and sisters in Africa?"

- "How this would affect my children's life in the future?"