What is integrative with the Integrative Concept of Sustainable Development?

A viewpoint from an unwitting Witness

The mission of this work is to explain the nature of the Integrative Concept and what it seems to accomplish in regards to Sustainable Development. To achieve this goal, we first need to look at the somewhat famous classical approach on sustainability.

If you ever heard of sustainability, you probably also heard of the so called pillar models of sustainability. It is the viewpoint that there is no easy viewpoint on sustainability, since there are many dimensions associated with sustainability. This to say, that there are the ecological (most peoples first association with sustainability), the economical (most people would interject with remarks on how this is important as well) and the social (which is for some people the single most relevant) dimensions. Some models also add institutional (which is to say political) and cultural (which seems the most useless dimension, since it can be subsumed under the social dimension) dimensions in these models. Where does this viewpoint come from? As of until now, the author does not know; the terminology of dimensions seems to originate from the Agenda 21, a document addressing urgent needs in the social and economic sectors.

To the concrete material of these question: A sphere of sustainable development was picked, it was the Integrative Concept of Sustainable Development. Let us suppose that it is inherently clear what a concept is and what development is. A concept is something that is present not in the concrete world, but the mind. It is a model of how things are or how they should be. Development seems to be a process where one state results in another state *or* a process, where one state results in another state *and there is a progress*. Surely we can debate on these two words for a long time and not conclude that we have a certain understanding if we grasp these words in a definite answer. But here is not the time and place to answer our needs for these questions, we are here for the other two.

Sustainability, in short, is the ability (of the planet) to sustain (human and – hopefully – biological life). This is an etymological truth, it says this right there in the word. But what is the concrete content of sustainability? As we remember from just some lines ago, there seems to be a connection between ecological, economical, social, political-institutional and cultural aspects of sustainability. That makes sustainability a notion with at least three, if not five dimensions. If we say dimensions, we say that we make a theory into something practical. We can grasp it with the help of these five dimensions, and thus make it so that we achieve what a sustainable development should be: A progress towards a planet that is something like a family – in Greek terms: οἶκος (oikos – an household; the terms ecology and economy stem from it) - for not only for us now, not only for us in our region, but for *everyone* now and after. To put sustainability in the words of the World Commission on Environment and Development, it is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (OECD

1987: p. 43) You see that there is a definite need for a working notion of what development is, and why it is important to discuss this. We could go deeper into detail and ask, what needs are, or what these dimensions really consist of. But that would digress from the primary question; what is the integrative moment with the Integrative Concept of Sustainable Development?

If we say integrative, then we have a certain picture in mind by saying so. Maybe it is mathematics or computer sciences or social integration we have our notion of an integration from. An this is the difficulty. We need not to address each of these notions in any order, we need to address these notions all at once! What is integration on a totally general basis? It is the movement of something into another thing, where it can be summarized under a symbol – may it be a number, a word or a picture - for the latter. For instance, if we integrate ourselves into a group of friends, we become a clique. For another instance, if we integrate the graph of f(x)=x fully, there is a number that can be associated with the net sum of the area between the line of the graph and the x-axis. For my third instance, if we move together two or more sets of data on a computer, you can summarize and work with this method to look at these two sets at once.[1]

If this definition of integration is correct, it should be possible to assess what the integrative moment of the Integrative Concept is. But to understand why this is plausible, we need to address the problem of the pillar models. There are many things that can be viewed problematic, for each individual individually. But the authors of the Integrative Concept say that the notion of dimensions had two main problems: First, it precedes the work of people on something that does not care about the limitations of people and secondly, it does not work very well to be translated into action.

The first problem seems to come from an arrogant perspective, but this is not the case. I do not know anything about economy, ecology and social sciences, and very little about politics and culture. These fields of human endeavours are each so big, that no one can even understand one of these dimensions fully. But humans learn to specialise in certain areas of expertise, and know that if they do that well enough, they can count on other people to come up with expertise in other areas, where they need it. And this is generally a very good idea, since it makes a big society possible where we make stuff like rockets or houses, which are very nice to have. But if we do that, then the people working with people that build rockets or houses tend to speak only to the people building rockets or houses about how the rockets or houses should be built. Now you can imagine that these people know certainly best about their individual projects and how to work on these. But if we want to build houses on the Moon or Mars, then we need both of these kinds of people. The rocket-

1 This is an enumerative argument at best, it is not designed to be deductive. But in practical approaches, inductive reasoning is at its best when it provides with falsifiable results for a latter argument.

builders tell the house-builders how much equipment they can fly there, and the house-builders tell the rocket-builders how much energy a house needs to sustain live. And they talk to each other and they will build houses on another object in space. This is true for a lot of interdisciplinary activities. But a similar situation is happening if we differentiate sustainability into multiple dimensions. The ecologists speak only with the ecologists, the economists only with the economists, and so on. And this is the first problem of a purely dimensional approach.

The second problem is more difficult to address. Lets say, there is a asteroid of big size coming towards the earth. Humans would have an answer to that problem. The rocket-builders would speak with the star-gazers and bomb-makers to build a rocket that would fly there and blow the asteroid up so it would only be a nice shooting star night for the people on earth. Ideally. Now, with sustainability, this seems to be a problem. Not only because not everybody is concerned about some invisible stuff that is above us, or concerned with the well-being of people they do not know, but because even if they are concerned about the outlook, they do not know what to do exactly to prevent the not-sustainability from happening. To put it plainly, we do not have an easy answer of how to act.

This is where the Integrative Concept come into play. It takes the problem, the model of dimensions and the notion of sustainability and integrate the dimensions into goals and rules that can easily be guidelines for actions. The dimensional model of sustainability is still there, it is just workable for politicians. To make things a bit more difficult, the Integrative Concept differs between Know-How and Know-What. What to do is to preserve human existence in a state where everybody is content. How we achieve this is the task of said politicians and the executive officers of corporations. There three goals with five rules each for the what-part and ten for the how-part. (Kopfmüller et al 2001 pp. 172-174)

What seems important to the authors of the Integrative Concept are the notion of justice for everybody, the view that all earth is connected and that we do everything we can do for the good of all humans – even when we are preserving nature, it is for humans to satisfy their needs and wishes. Now, one could say that there is hardly a place for economists and politicians in that concept. But its authors are very diligent and thoroughly with their work, and know that the relevant economists know the importance that everybody gets the goods they need. The current state of affairs is that this is done with market economy. And we need to address the problems with this state of affairs as well as we need to address the problems with authoritarian regimes.

With both problems, there seems to be no easy solution. We can't force anybody to accept anything coming from a theorist. It has to be viable, easy to understand, easy to translate, easy to put into action and should not be worse than our current state of affairs. In every regard that we see a problem. And this is where it becomes even more difficult than before. If our actions do only good things, then we call it a win-win-situation. But if a concrete action does some good, some bad, we speak of it as a conflict of goals. But as you remember, these conflicts are not exclusive to the Integrative Concept. They are in the dimensional model, too – one is only not so aware of that because it boils down to a competition between the ecologists, the economists and the ambassadors of social advancement. This competition makes it so that if there is one urgent need of the world, it may be overlooked – or inadequately answered. Because for the competitors, their respective field is the most important. If you build houses, a house is the most valuable possession you have.

Conflicts of goals can be answered in the Integrative Concept via a complex mechanism of consideration that weighs up the good and the bad an action can do. If it were only this, it would be easy. The problem is, that we tend to feel that human lives are so much worth, that a good human would rather walk in torn clothes than let any other human starve. And a good human would rather drive by bike than let others walk in torn clothes. This means, that humans have a dignity, that is very special to mankind. This dignity means that most of the rules of the Integrative Concept are so that even when the rule is not fulfilled with one single human, it is violated. Another thinker of the Integrative Concept carefully analyses norms – which are all the things like rules or laws – and looks into the what-to-do-rules of the Integrative Concept. He first presumes that they are hybrid. That means that they could have a core region where they could only be satisfied, and they could have a peripheral region, where they could be optimised. Now, here, we spoiled the surprise with diligently present the findings before the argumentation, but in this case, the argumentation is interesting as well. Hybrid norms do not have to be fully achieved to make an certain effect. They need to be satisfied – just like eating. You can eat dinner and be full. That is what it is to have norm that needs satisfaction to a certain degree. But you can be full and still have plenty of room for biscuits or ice. That is what it means when a norm can be optimized. Unfortunately, there are many people in the world that are not well-fed. So the authors of the Integrative Concept have not the biscuits in mind, but the hunger of all of the people. And all of our other needs, let it be clothing, housing, education, energy, participation, food and safety. All they ask for is for minimal human dignity to be fulfilled. (Dusseldorp 2017 p. 229) So we can say that these minimal human dignity rules are not hybrid in nature. If they were, they would allow for them to be not fulfilled. But their nature is so that they need to be satisfied in order to be sustainable.

But what does that mean for the situation if an action does some good towards fulfilling one rule and some bad about fulfilling another? Well, here is to say that this is not a conflict, this would be a collision. If these colliding rules are substantial ones, at least. Because what Dusseldorp does not work on is the know-how or the ‘instrumental’ rules linked earlier. If there were only conflicts between these know-what rules, then his assessment would be plain and simple complete. But there could be conflicts between the what and the how. But this would mean that we could enter a mud fight between the political and economical dimensions on the one side and the ecological and social dimensions on the other side. It seems that collisions and conflicts come natural to differentiated approaches to global problems.

Conclusive to say, there could be one solution, which is problematic for its own: There could be the need of a unified sustainability theory, where there is no difference in the notion of sustainability. Maybe there is the possibility of a syncretic theory that takes the described concepts into account and make something where everybody knows what to do and how to do it even when some rules or goals oppose each other. It would necessarily be a concentrated effort, since it requires practical and intricate knowledge of every dimension. Kopfmüller et al. made an impact that cannot be overlooked, since they have assembled this knowledge into something that is a very concrete normative concept, but Dusseldorp is right when he states that:

> “These goals can only establish a weak coordination: The concept can appeal to take the substantial rules of sustainability as definitions of minimal human dignity and to act in accord of reaching this goal – no more, no less.” (cf. Dusseldorp 2017 pp. 228/229)

Our common future OECD 1987

Nachhaltige Entwicklung integrativ betrachtet Kopfmüller 2001

Nachhaltigkeit Grunwald/Kopfmüller 2012

Zielkonflikte der Nachhaltigkeit Dusseldorp 2017