ARGUMENTA OECONOMICA
No 1 (24) 2010
PL ISSN 1233-5835

I. INAUGURAL LECTURE OPENING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2009/2010

Tadeusz Borys *

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS AN EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE

The paper presents the consequences of evident axiological volatility experienced in many fields of social, economic and political lives. In particular, the educational system is vulnerably exposed to that *sui generis* schizophrenia. Compared with the past century, when axiology was obviously marginalized, the 21st century will be a major challenge for education based on a new development paradigm. The paradigm is characterized by balance, durability and sustainability, thus determining essence and logic of the second road. Its aim is to fulfil a holistic vision of humaneness. It is as well a core of a new educational model compatible with the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) which was announced in January 2005.

INTRODUCTION

A new development paradigm naturally serving as an unconventional (alternative) concept of development is applied worldwide as balanced development, durable development and sustainable development or sometimes, yet less frequently, ecodevelopment. In Poland, we often equate sustainable development with balanced and durable development.[1]

Unfortunately, the new development paradigm, notwithstanding its fundamental importance, is in Poland relatively unknown, is perceived as controversial, and generally, it is not a special favourite of the current civilization, including the educational system. Hence, the title of this presentation emphasizes educational challenge, although an alternative wording might as well be: "Sustainable development as a civilizational challenge" or "Sustainable development as an axiological challenge – a challenge to systems of values".

* Department of Quality and Environment Management, Wrocław University of Economics

[1] *Sustainable Development* is a worldwide term used with respect to a new development paradigm, therefore in this paper, it will also represent the remaining properties of the paradigm, i.e., durability and balance.

The present-day civilization is characterized by evident axiological volatility experienced in many areas of social, economic and political lives. In particular, the educational system is vulnerably exposed to that *sui generis* schizophrenia as detrimental consequences of that volatility are particularly acute and intense due to the fundamental role of education in social life. This introductory reflection should be supplemented by a necessary dose of optimism contained in a statement that it is precisely the idea of sustainable development which slowly becomes a real basis of a major change in education – and becomes a key educational challenge for the 21st century with many favourable chances to be successful.

What will the current century be like? What are the chances to create a new educational model based on the new development paradigm? These are key problems of our times.

1. WHAT WILL THE 21ST CENTURY BE LIKE? THREE ANSWERS AND TWO ROADS

This question is certainly fundamental. It emphasizes that the suggestion contained in the title of the lecture should be carefully examined considering all diversity of views, preferences and priorities, especially while differentiating a political class and circles of creators. The main source of the differentiation is definitely axiology, i.e., often non explicit and rarely disclosed system of values. A scheme shown in figure 1 clearly suggests that the 21st century will primarily be an age of major axiological awakening. In the past century, the axiology was obviously marginalized, either nonexistent or embarrassing topic, and in some disciplines (e.g., in economic and engineering sciences) treated as non-science.

There emerges now a most important question: why do current civilization and its significant modules, i.e., culture and education, avoid, just like the devils flee from the holy water, an unambiguous disclosure of value systems, and instead, prefer their fuzziness and “sleep”?

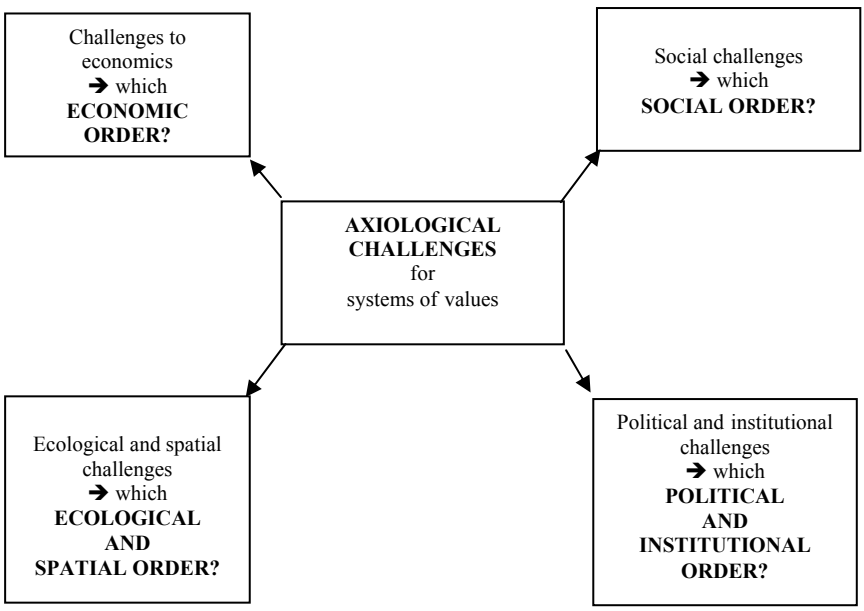


Figure 1. Superiority of axiological challenge

Source: own elaboration

It is worth emphasizing that without disclosing our systems of values, we are not able to clearly answer the question as to which social, economic, ecological, spatial, political and institutional orders we want to accomplish. Without axiology we do not know and we cannot know what those orders mean as diverse systems of values generate diverse orders. Without clearly exposing axiological aspects, we fail to answer the question: what is the true reason of the current economic crisis.

It is worth reminding that the collapse of Enron began in 1997 when a clear and human-friendly management style created by Richard Kinder was transformed to its opposite by Jeff Skilling who believed that the best motivation to work are negative emotions – greed and fear that guarantee survival of the fittest. Jeff Skilling consistently implemented his rule "results – profits at any price" and also at price of creative accounting and demoralization of top level managers. More and more evidence emerged that the current economic crisis actually stems from an axiological crisis. A part

of the evidence is quoted by Michael Shermer in his excellent book entitled "The mind of the market" (Shermer 2009, pp. 344-345).

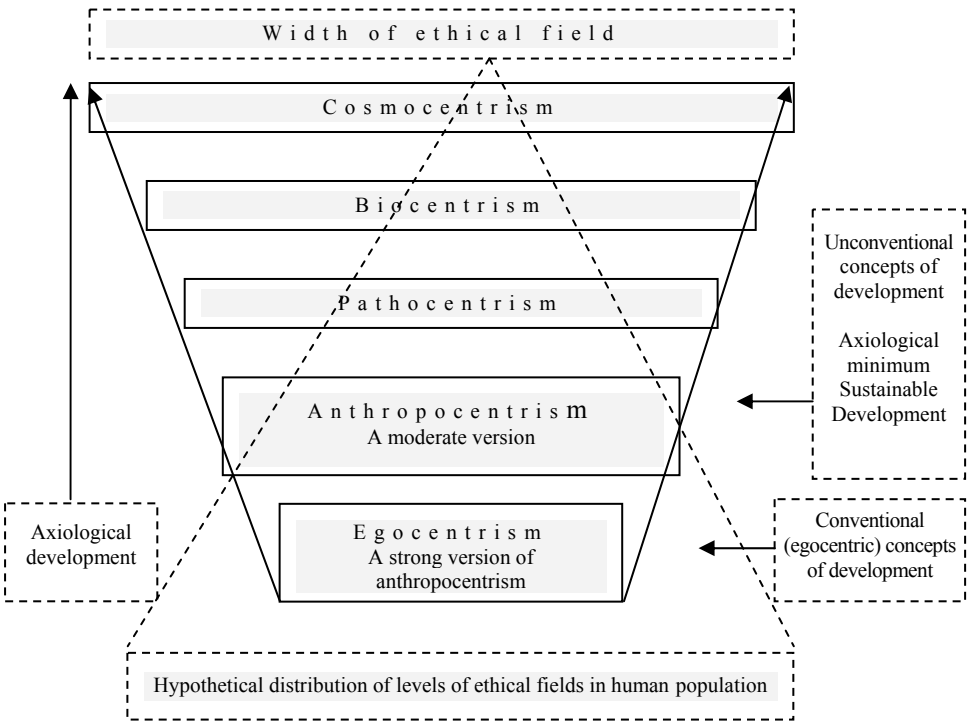


Figure 2. Systems of values according to the width of ethical field: Who has the right to development and to quality of life?
Source: own elaboration

When seeking an answer to the question what the 21st century will be, axiology offers two preliminary answers resulting from two different levels of ethical field that determine who has the right to development and to quality of life (cf. figure 2). Two first anthropocentric levels acknowledge that only a human being has such a right. However, as we will show later, the answers of an egocentric and a moderate anthropocentric are significantly different. Other levels of wider ethical fields that grant non-human beings the right to development and to quality of life are not easily acceptable within western civilization. Consequently, let us focus on two first levels of that field.

Hence, how to make an axiological diagnosis of a human? In my opinion, a good way – even if not the only one – to recognize a presented system of values is to answer the following fundamental question: WHAT IS A HUMAN BY NATURE? Or: WHAT IS A HUMAN'S NATURE? Typically, we obtain one of the three answers (cf. figure 2).

1. The first answer holds that a human is bad by nature (greedy, egoistic, acquisitive etc), hence, a human by nature is an egocentric with an excessive *ego* (cf. figure 3a). In terms of light, there is plenty of shadow in a human (quantum collapses) that results mainly in life goals; the primary goal becomes making money and material wealth based on a motto: "one can buy everybody and everything – depending on the price" which means that in an egocentric's opinion one can buy a human and human's feelings. Thus we obtain an "inhumane" human, whose humaneness is more or less deformed. Now, a quite rhetorical question emerges: Can a human have a deformed humaneness by nature? In spite of a seemingly obvious answer to this question, it is not adequately appreciated by lots of people in many fields of science (e.g., in economics).

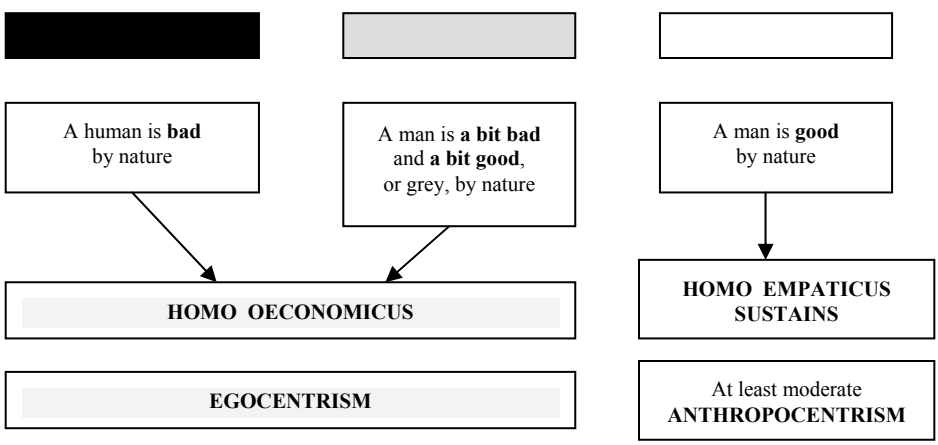


Figure 2. Recognition of a human's systems of values: What is a human by nature?
Source: own elaboration

2. The second answer is hybrid, i.e., a human is by nature a bit good and a bit bad, or "grey", a bit honest and a bit dishonest, a bit friendly and a bit unfriendly etc., thus, such a human is by implication a schizophrenic, and perversion is originally built into the human's essence. The inconsistency of this opinion seems obvious as it implies that humaneness is deformed "by nature" – could it be possible that the Constructor was wrong?

3. The third answer implies that a human is by nature good (empathic, friendly etc.) while due to some weaknesses there are some departures from the humaneness caused among other by educational errors in family, flaws in educational system, pressure by milieu etc.

Answers one and two represent a first road leading to an unbalanced quality of life. Answer three is a second road leading to a holistic quality of life.

A FIRST ROAD

A first road basically reflects the answers given by modern civilization that unfortunately refer to an African parable of two hungers: the great one and the little one. The *little* one wants whatever is necessary for life: goods and services, money to buy them. The *GREAT* one is the hunger for understanding the meaning of life, the hunger for seeking after the sense of life and the feeling of essence of humaneness – the hunger for being simply a human being (sensitive, empathic, honest, friendly,…) towards the self and another human.

Our western civilization used to presume comfortably and yet illusively that it is possible to satisfy the *GREAT* hunger (for sense of life, awareness of one's humaneness) by satisfying the *little* one (when making money becomes a major goal and not just one of the means for life), and thus satisfying the *little* hunger replaces the *GREAT* one – especially noticeable nowadays. It is worth noting that the first and second road mean different worlds of values, different worlds of energy and different systems of axiological patterns and anti-patterns. All compromises create and widen schizophrenia, both on an individual and social scale.

The first road therefore is a conventional development based on old paradigms, and in axiological terms, based on egocentric stream that reveals:

- Human's egoism and greed (*homo oeconomicus*);
- Domination of one generation's perspective in thinking, e.g., as regards natural resources;
- Commercialization of practically everything, including human relationships and assessing people exclusively based on their material success;
- Reluctance to business ethics and business social responsibility that is well illustrated by Kenneth Goodpaster's famous statement: "A firm cannot have and does not have moral obligations as it has no conscience – it has just legal and financial responsibilities – and no moral responsibility; its only goal is the maximization of profits for its

shareholders", and allegedly Milton Friedman's: "The business of business is business."

In a social field, it prefers the following:

- Cold values – material and financial, and linked values, e.g., striving for power, greed for power. It is worth reminding some time-transcending questions asked by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "What is the end of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, of power, and pre-eminence"? One part of the answer is: "It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us";
- A reversal of the polarity of warm values that is leading to redefinitions, e.g., honesty becomes naivety; public service that was declared during election campaign soon becomes imperceptibly transformed into power (sharing a cake after the election victory);
- Suppression of feelings (spiritual sphere), i.e., conscience, empathy, sensitivity, dignity;
- Building a vision of tool societies, e.g., information society, network society, that hide axiology or are void of values;
- Legal and institutional over-regulation.

With respect to environment, it reveals following opinions:

- Environmentalism is just a fashion, a must, or even a kind of terrorism;
- Environmental movements restrict economic growth.

The consequences of following the first egocentric (technocratic) road are manifest in all aspects of life. We have become increasingly aware of contradictory trends (tendencies and countertendencies) within certain systems of values. Possibly, such phenomenon was seen in all ages, but its recent intensification demonstrates that we are dealing now with *sui generis* civilization crash. Very often we want to build a consumer society (or more precisely, over-consumer society) and at the same time, a self-restricting consumer society (protecting resources). This evident contradiction should motivate to deeply examine four global threats that were identified by Jerome Binde (cf. Bauman 2000):

1. <u>Increasing disproportions in wealth distribution.</u> This threat is closely linked to others and is special. At the beginning of the 21st century, more than 1.3 billion people live in extreme poverty, and the trend is significantly rising; almost 1 billion people suffer from hunger or undernutrition; half a billion people have no access to medical services and basic education; 2 billion people have no access to electricity; 80 percent of global population have no access to basic telecommunication services. According to the United Nations Development Programme, "20

percent of poorest people worldwide share a miserable fraction of 1.1 percent of global revenues, while in 1991 it was still 1.4 percent and in 1960 – 2.3 percent. The wealth of ten world's largest fortunes is estimated at 133 billion dollars, or 1.5 times more than total domestic products of all underdeveloped countries." In other words, "A relationship between income of world's 20 percent richest population to remaining 80 percent of population was 30:1 in 1969 and 150:1 at the beginning of the 21st century" (Makowski 2001).

2. Syndrome of a drunken ship. This term stems from a wisdom of philosophers and sailors: "There is no wind that blows right for the sailor who doesn't know where the harbour is." It is related to many crucial questions: Do we have a clearly defined direction of human development in the 21st century, a definite tack? Do we have adequate instruments to follow the tack? At present, many countries, perhaps a majority, seem to have lost their directions and instruments of development.
3. Threats to peace and creating military illusions of safety. A significance of peace to humanity was aptly defined by the former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali during "The 21st Century Meetings" organized by the UNESCO. He noticed that it is a necessary condition of addressing all other civilization challenges. Since the end of the cold war, however, we have been seeing dozens tiny wars and some thirty serious conflicts, mostly international. In many regions of the world, there emerged a fourth group of countries, that are either engaged in a war at the moment, or just resolving their conflicts.
4. Ongoing unsustainable development, with the degradation of humaneness as one of its main symptoms. This real threat is supposed to be minimized by means of a new development paradigm while a fundamental question arises: Do the former development roads, based on prodigal economy of non-renewable natural resources, severely restrict the development of future generations? As noted by Michael Carley in a book "Sharing the world", one would need the resources from three to four times the actual Earth in order to reach the level of development and consumption of North America (Carley 2000). Presuming that the increasingly popular concept of Sustainable Development is one of the most characteristic recent mega-trends, one has to observe that it is accompanied by a major countertrend (mega-trend) that creates a standard technocratic civilization.

A SECOND ROAD

As mentioned above, the challenges of the present century, expressed as expectations or desires define the essence of the first and second road. Advocates of a technocratic conventional development warn that:

- "The 21st century will be rational or there will be no 21st century";
- "The 21st century will be competitive or there will be no 21st century";
- "The 21st century will be knowledgeable or there will be no 21st century";
- "The 21st century will see fast technological progress or there will be no 21st century".

The promoters of such a vision of a current century create diverse terms to name the 21st century society as a direct consequence of priorities that were mentioned before, e.g., information society, network society, knowledge society etc. The vision of development in the current century is sought after in techniques and tools.

The supporters of alternative development based on moderate anthropocentrism and on fundamental balancing have a different vision of this century and warn that:

- "The 21st century will be ecological or there will be no 21st century" – that is a view by the author of eco-philosophy, Henryk Skolimowski, in his book entitled "Visions of a new millennium" where he emphasizes that "the roads of catastrophism, pessimism and vulgar pragmatism are not appropriate options for the third millennium, while a world without ideals is just like life without oxygen or inspirations' (Skolimowski 1999, p. 8);
- "The 21st century will be an age of quality or there will be no 21st century" – the quality specialists emphasize the fundamental significance of quality, warn against poor quality and against fascination of quality;
- "The 21st century will be based on partnership or there will be no 21st century" – this view stresses a particular weight of non-abusive interpersonal relationships and prefers cooperation to rivalry or competition;
- And finally, "The 21st century will be founded on wisdom or there will be no 21st century", thus emphasizing that knowledge itself is not enough if it does not contribute to building more wisdom.

All the above prognostic assertions form a specific charity auction and paraphrase Andre Malraux famous statement that the 21st century will be spiritual or it shall not be at all. They are also consistent with the essence of one major thought by Al Gore who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in

2007. He said that either the 21st century will be an age of sustainable development or the world will stand on the brink. It means that technocratism of development under the old paradigm will threaten the very foundations of today's civilization.

2. HOW TO STRENGTHEN AXIOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL VALUES OF THE SECOND ROAD?

A new paradigm of development defining the essence of the second road will always be criticized because it presumes a different axiological foundation. The doubts emerging in literature and during conferences are mainly about a dilemma: Is the idea of Sustainable Development a utopia, illusion or a non-scientific and fuzzy or a real potential, a new holistic paradigm of development (cf. e.g., Zacher 2008, Szumski 2008, Szumski 2009). Sustainable Development without its axiological essence eliminates foundations from the discussion on the paradigm, thus transforming it into meaningless digressions. In doing so, one forgets that a new paradigm of development is both a general idea[2] and its ongoing concretization.

Sustainable Development as a GENERAL IDEA or a concept of development is typically identified with a principle of intergenerational equity in access to many habitats: nature, culture, economy etc. It was highlighted for the first time by the Brundtland Commission in a historical definition of Sustainable Development presented in "Our Common Future" in 1987. The report pronounced *hope conditioned upon the establishment of a new era of international cooperation based on the premise that every human being – those here and those who are to come – has the right to life, and to a decent life* ("Our Common Future" 1987, 47). This last century definition based on intentions was clearly reducing *sustainability* to a sustained access to a natural habitat. Over time though, the interpretation of *sustainability* was extended to more environments: human, cultural etc. The stages of the development in the concept of Sustainable Development are marked by successive mega-conferences, called Earth Summits, that were organized in 1972 (Stockholm), 1992 (Rio de Janeiro) and 2002

[2] It is not just vagueness that is triggering the attacks on historical commentary of the essence of Sustainable Development, but also still a narrow understanding of a new paradigm that prevails not only in common speech, but also in scientific discourse. Such a narrow definition of *sustainability* generated a category of ecodevelopment to large extent.

(Johannesburg). It is worthwhile highlighting two most significant commitments included in the *Johannesburg Declaration* (Wojtowicz 2002):

- A commitment to build a humane, equitable and caring global society, cognizant of the need for human dignity for all.
- A commitment to advance and strengthen the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – at the local, national, regional and global levels.

It is worth emphasizing that for the first time in life of our civilization, a goal of human development was formulated in such an empathic way, based on a radical change in social awareness.

A subsequent CONCRETIZATION of a new paradigm of development caused that it has become mostly an operational category today. An increasingly better recognition of the paradigm is due to describing three key features that define its conceptual domain, i.e., sustainability, durability and balance, and also to concretizing as regards:

1. Law: in Poland it is provided by the Constitution (article 5), the Act on environmental protection, etc.;
2. Diagnoses, plans and strategies: The states of development are diagnosed, the goals of development are specified, updated and monitored; the provisions by all major documents of the EU include the new development paradigm, especially highlighted in the new EU Sustainable Development Strategy, also in Poland's strategies for sustainable development at the national, voivodeship and local levels;
3. Axiology: Systems of values expressed in terms of orders (social order, economic order, environmental order, spatial order) and collections of principles that define the orders (e.g., the Earth Charter);
4. Measurement: Indicators of state, progress or regress when striving for sustainable development.
5. Areas or sectors: Sustainable development in transport, tourism, production, consumption, energy has been well recognized and established.

To sum up, both a general idea of the new development paradigm and its increasingly many concretizations demonstrate a strong stream of more mitigated anthropocentrism that is based on a holistic vision of humaneness and highlights:

- Warm values – honesty, friendliness, empathy of a human – *homo empaticus*;
- Domination of thinking about the quality of life of a present and future generations;

- Selective commercialization;
- Preferring business ethics (as being an organization's "conscience") and business social responsibility (as acting in favour of business ethics);
- Environmental protection as a condition of a human's survival on planet Earth.

That synthesizes the essence of the second road being currently largest civilizational challenge that is unfortunately not enough established in public awareness, in Poland and elsewhere.

What challenges to education result from the necessary axiological duties? A diagnosis of education is not optimistic. Alas, the educational system is still dominated by the evident "teaching inertia", thus increasing sustainable development challenges to education. The diagnosis rests on the following:

- Notwithstanding a new paradigm is now a constitutional principle, it was not adequately addressed by the educational system (including new programme minima);
- As few as estimated 10 percent of students at universities of economics have a chance to get acquainted with Sustainable Development and its tools, however the fraction has been consistently increasing over recent years.
- Teaching programmes of elementary and secondary education do not embrace Sustainable Development as yet.
- Sustainable Development is still mainly identified with the environmental protection that is an excessive and unjustifiable reduction of its domain.

Yet, it is evident that axiological compromises in the educational system are not possible. There can be no compromise between education based on:

- a preconception that a human by nature is greedy, acquisitive and egoistic, i.e., education based on cold values, hence, on illusion about the human nature!
- and on warm values – empathy, honesty, friendliness, respect for dignity, and truth (that is a basic assumption of education for sustainable development).

As plainly seen, these are two extreme educational worlds where any compromises may only lead to increased social schizophrenia – to schizophrenia in education. It is worth citing a key fragment of a preamble to "Berlin Theses", a document adopted in 2006 by a Polish-German network of scholars:[3] *Challenges of sustainable development exceed our present political and educational concepts, because politics and education respond*

[3] A document was signed by over 200 Polish and German professors, mainly from universities of economics.

inadequately and too late. THEREFORE IT IS TIME FOR NEW BRAVE INITIATIVES!

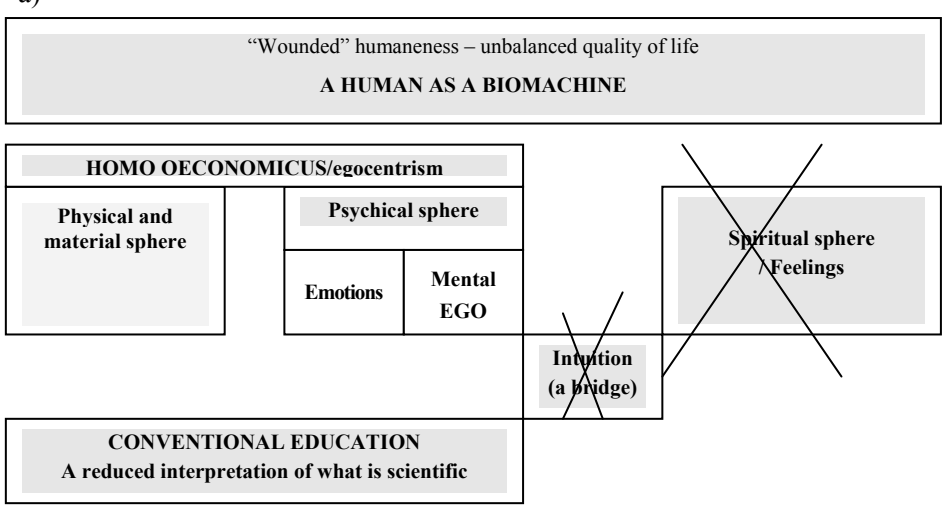
Such initiatives in education are most notably:

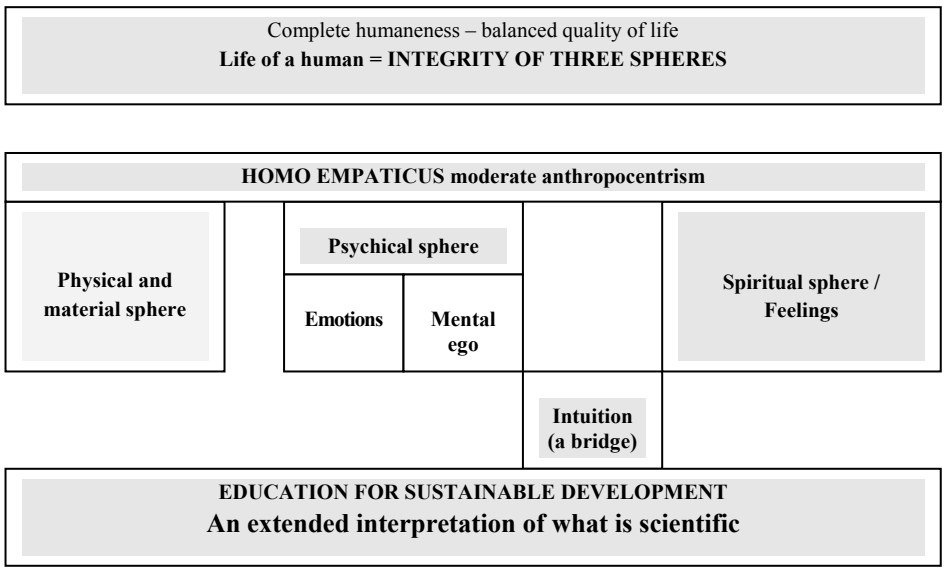
- globally, the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014, declared in January 2005;
- in March 2005, the UN Economic Commission for Europe adopted the Education for Sustainable Development Strategy to implement requirements and goals of the Decade in European countries.

What are distinctive features of Education for Sustainable Development? Among many, I would like to stress just two that mainly emphasize:

a) building civil responsibility and promoting democracy through making an individual aware of his/her rights and obligations thereby establishing educational foundations of a civil society; it is a highest ranking social goal of a new development paradigm;
b) supporting balanced/holistic human development, i.e., a human's physical, psychical and emotional/spiritual spheres; a holistic approach to human development is a fundamental discriminant of Education for Sustainable Development that makes it different from traditional or conventional education. Now, an extremely significant question arises: Why we presume that egoism stemming from emotions and highlighted by economics, can be regarded as scientific, hence we create economic theories based on it, whereas empathy that stems from feelings is regarded as non-scientific, thus it provides no premise to build theories upon? Cf. figure 3 a) and b).

a)





b)

Figure 3. Education for a new and old paradigm vs. quality of life

Source: own elaboration

A balanced quality of life should therefore be a superior goal of all educational activities. Where the goal is not clearly shown, there arise doubts why we undertake the activities at all.

CONCLUSION

The concept of sustainable development is a real (non-utopian) alternative to shifting our civilization to barbarity. Hence, we have a choice.

- We either manipulate and delude ourselves to build "tool," technocratic societies, and also we oversupply new pretty yet empty declarations on ethics, morality and warm values (honesty, empathy, public service, environmental protection etc.) – which means moralizing and realizing cold values without practicing good. That is the *FIRST ROAD* of social schizophrenia, mendacity, artificial (untrue) images of show-offs. That is a road of axiological dissonance between empathic declaration and egocentric realization;

- Or we rebuild the complete humaneness in our attitudes toward nature, ourselves and others through education and society of wisdom that is empathic and truly civil society. That is the *SECOND ROAD*.

On the road of balancing and lighting up our quality of life, we cannot, according to Charles Handy in "The hungry spirit", *count on magnificent visions of geniuses as they seldom occur*, but he have to seek after own ways *to enlighten the darkness however small our lights might be* (Handy 1999). The *SECOND ROAD* of making development more sustainable is certainly much more difficult, yet necessary and possible, when we remember an adage: *if you want to improve the world, you should start a change in YOURSELF!*

REFERENCES

Bauman Z., *Globalizacja* [Globalization], PIW Warszawa 2000.

Borys. T., *Wskaźniki zrównoważonego rozwoju* [Indicators of sustainable development], Ekonomia i Środowisko, Białystok-Warszawa 2005.

Carley M., Spapens P., *Dzielenie się światem – zrównoważony sposób życia i globalnie sprawiedliwy dostęp do zasobów naturalnych w XXI wieku* [Sharing the world: sustainable living and global equity in the 21st century], IiE, Białystok-Warszawa 2000.

Handy Ch., *Głód ducha: Poza kapitalizm: Poszukiwanie sensu w nowoczesnym świecie* [The hungry spirit: Beyond capitalism – A quest for purpose in the modern world], Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1999.

Makowski J., *Wiek nędzarzy* [A century of paupers], „Rzeczpospolita" No 47, 2001.

Skolimowski H., *Wizje nowego millenium* [Visions of a new millennium], EJB, Kraków 1999.

Shermer M., *Rynkowy umysł* [The mind of the market], Cis, Warszawa 2009.

Sztumski W., *Refleksja na temat rozwoju zrównoważonego rozwoju (Czy zrównoważony rozwój jest fikcją, utopią, iluzją czy oszustwem?)* [Reflection about sustainable development (Is sustainable development fiction, utopia, illusion or swindle?)], "Problemy Ekorozwoju – Problems of Sustainable Development", No 2, 2008.

Sztumski W., *The mythology of sustainable development*, "Problemy Ekorozwoju – Problems of Sustainable Development", No 2, 2009.

Our common future, United Nations, New York 1987.

Wojtowicz A., Pazdan W., *Johannesburg na żywo i co dalej* [Johannesburg live and then what], Fenix, Opole 2002.

Zacher L.W., *Trwały rozwój – utopia czy realna możliwość?* [Sustainable development – utopia or real possibility?], "Problemy Ekorozwoju – Problems of Sustainable Development", No 2, 2008.