SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FROM AN INTERCULTURAL UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE

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— *Abstract*—

The meeting of concepts that arise interest and high expectations also usually promote reflection and analysis in the search for definitions that contribute to a better understanding of their meanings, such as the terms *sustainability, development, interculturality*, and *community bonding*, particularly in intercultural contexts, that is, in spaces where communities that are supposed to converge are different, such as indigenous and mestizo, and that end up enriching the reflexive process. A lot of intention has run around the concept of Sustainability, but little has happened if we associate it with the concept of *Development* and *Interculturality*, a communion that allows you to take a look at the development of communities from a different perspective, from the look of people around their daily life under a sustainable approach, from their perception of things as obvious from day to day as is the handling of garbage in their homes to complex problems such as the contamination of rivers and basins by human actions. We have to ask ourselves how people want to live and how they apply sustainability in their environment and how it relates to other different cultural groups, but that share the same territory. In this sense, *Sustainability, Development*, and *Interculturality* promote the need of linking communities that come from different cultures, and they become the reasons for the intercultural university to mobilize and existing, whose purpose is to discover their thoughts and its actions around this issue of *Sustainable Development*.

The aim of this work is precisely to contribute to the reflection and analysis of the concept of *Sustainable Development* in a context of *Interculturality*, whose importance is that various universities, particularly intercultural ones, promote it as a professional career closely linked to a central pedagogical axis which is recognized as community bonding, which is seen as a training foundation of special importance for its professionals in training in *Sustainable Development*, which facilitates, among other attributes, recognizing and explaining the impact on the quality of life of Human communities have the use and preservation of resources (understood as natural, human, ecological, etc.), at present and predict their effect in the future.

Keywords

Sustainable, Development, Interculturality, Community engagement.

In the evolution of the development or progress of humanity towards better conditions of well-being, one of the central axes in this domain is the so-called "paradigms of development" that at the end of the Second World War had an unprecedented impulse, but without a fundamental proposal, since it privileges the use of natural resources for the sake of economic growth, which was supposed to be "unlimited". However, it is not until the 80s, when an element known as Sustainability bursts onto the scene, calling into question and puts on the analysis table "unlimited growth" and becomes a kind of measuring mirror of these paradigms and their implemented policies. This concept, until then not very well known, draws the world's attention by exposing the risks to the continuity, not only of human progress but of its very existence as a consequence or effect of those development policies implemented, even to this day, whose effects impact negatively on the environment.

Many nations finalized their development in these models, dictated from the centers of world power and that undoubtedly brought progress, but also consequences that the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations (UN, 1987) raised, realizing that human welfare, social and economic development, but also their survival, depends on the rational use and preservation of natural resources (NR) for future generations, placing it as a core factor in measuring development and therefore in the elaboration of new public policies that contemplate the development of nations from a comprehensive development perspective based on the ecological-economic-social trinomial.

Such premise brings with it challenges that summon to deepen in the study and analysis of the concept of *Sustainable Development*, from different possible perspectives, especially from a intercultural university since the reason that animates them is the understanding, as much of the visions as of the interrelations of the culturally different human communities, that converge in sites or common territories, employing actions that propose to discover the elements or components that sublime in these multi and intercultural territories, with the supreme purpose of forming professionals in this area that contribute to understanding better the local development from a sustainable approach.

INTERCULTURALITY AND ITS CORRESPONDENCE WITH *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

An element of great interest for the study of *Sustainable Development*, from the culturally diverse communities, but that coexist and share common territories, is the term recognized as *Interculturality* whose understanding has been treated by multiple authors like C. Walsh (2007), who explains it from three perspectives that he recognizes as relational, functional and critical,

while others like Albo (2003), situate it from three important questions: (1) Identity of people who share a specific culture, (2) Differentiation from other groups of a different culture, and (3) Correspondence of groups that share cultural elements and make possible the connection in cultural diversity.

However, it is very important to keep in mind that when we speak of *Interculturality* we are referring to a concept that implies changes through time and that can be static or dynamic, which we will refer to later.

Interculturality, in a first approach, we can observe that it is nourished by another concept whose main characteristic is its complexity, we refer to the term culture, which, at least, groups three relevant questions: 1.- relationship with nature, material and economic development (production, food, housing, etc.); 2.- social relations between people and groups (family, community, politics); and 3.- the imaginary (or symbolic) that gives meaning to the whole: language, religion, art, the legal and judicial system (Albo, 2003).

If to the culture we add the suffix *inter* we can observe two questions of interest, on the one hand, this suffix has a connotation of movement, of dynamism, as fluids that come and go in an intense connection; and on the other hand, it places a sense of the existence of, at least, two poles and thus refers to the recognition that at least there is a connection, a relationship, of two cultures whose fluids go from one side to the other and vice versa.

Not only two poles but many poles are connected or related. And such a situation makes the term *interculturality* of the greatest relevance for understanding the relationships between the different cultures of the world. At least this term has three aspects that should be highlighted:

The first is the dynamism present in *interculturality*. It must be understood as a deep relationship of at least two cultures, which have a generalized impact, particularly on behaviors (we refer to the visible ways in which human beings conduct themselves), above all, on the character of man (we refer to that which is not visible, but which is the real reason for a man's behavior), that is, the changes in the characterology of human beings (Fromm, 2006), which when they come into contact, influence each other, considering that this contact can be violent and imposing or subtle and friendly. In any case, the impact causes substantial changes in all aspects, from character to cultural manifestations, and this is what should have greater emphasis in the studies that are carried out from interculturality.

The second is *static* contact and exchange. It could be thought that it does not have major implications in the characterology of men and social relations; however, even when the changes are not considered of relevance for the cultures that are interconnected, they do not cease to have their importance in the modification of certain patterns of behavior and of some changes of perspectives and/or cosmovisions, which can lead them to a

sort of what Albo (2003), calls inculturation, or derive in some other like transculturation, etc.

Finally, we have a very important aspect to take into account, the historical analysis of the cultures involved (Harris, 1986; Quijano, 2000), both of the social groups involved and their predominant characteristic features and of the encounter itself, since from the historical analysis of these cultural encounters we find elements to understand the current evolution of the behavior of our interculturalities. As an example, in Latin America, the encounter of two opposed cultures could be enough: the Spanish culture and the Mesoamerican ones.

In the light of that encounter, it is possible to observe, from an intercultural perspective, a dichotomy that we can analyze from the roles of dominating-dominated, given in a framework of both violent and brutal encounter, and cunning and marauding, resulting in the subjugation and dispossession of one culture by the other, operated through the introduction of a new element or instrument of submission and power recognized as "race" (Quijano, 2000), which led to the structuring of a society of "races" and "castes" with all the characteristics of submission and exploitation of the dominant culture. This survives, in one way or another, to this day, which can well be identified as the *Coloniality of Power* (Walsh, 2006), which describes a whole culture of domination inherited through the centuries.

Considering what has been mentioned and based on our observations and experiences in the course of time, at the Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas, specifically at the Unidad Académica Multidisciplinaria de Yajalón, from a perspective of school formation-education, it has been possible to visualize, closely to the cultural groups that participate in it, a double relationship in the construction of intercultural relations, understood as Baronnet and Bermúdez (2019) say, as a construction that does not occur in a vacuum, "...but in the midst of tensions, conflicts, and appropriations, inserted in social and power relations, and shaped by the history of the regional context...", this is a positive effect that goes beyond the conversations and interactions of the bonds of friendship and coexistence between students who come from different cultures, whether indigenous or mestizo, since there is a harmonic development and mutual tolerance, we have also registered that historical legacy of racism, the disdain of one culture for the other, whether Tzeltal, Ch'ol, or mestizo, but which seeks the disqualification of the other.

At first, there is a tacit acceptance of the existence of other cultures different from one's own, accompanied by a growing interest in knowing more about the other, recognizing what they are like, how they behave, what economic-productive activities they carry out, what socio-cultural activities they undertake, how they do it, why they do it and what actions they take

to protect the environment, which can well be summarized in the actions that many communities carry out in rituals to ask for water, for example, or for crops, etc, Baronnet and Bermúdez (2019), recognize this as the relationship in the process of bonding. I consider that it is here where the concept of *Sustainable Development* and *Interculturality* find their greatest correspondence since *Sustainable Development* becomes a catalyst of values, behaviors, and attitudes of the people involved.

Sustainable Development is also the bearer of a wealth of knowledge that comes from both local communities and university classrooms, that is, although there is no term in the mother tongues that identifies and gives meaning to the concept of *Sustainable Development*, it does not prevent its study from the local languages, since somehow there are actions of the communities that are identifiable with the paradigm of *Sustainability*, in such a way that we have seen ancestral agro-cultural rituals, (for example of water). The same in the city of Yajalón, which is predominantly mestizo, that in the community Amado Nervo, which is Ch'ol, or that in the community Aurora Grande, which is Tzeltal, the students and teachers in the classrooms manage to abstract them and make them converge with the philosophy that animates the approach of *Sustainable Development*.

The study of the second case is very interesting for a historical analysis from the point of view of *Interculturality* since the cultural expressions observed can be inherited from colonialism, those that prevent, as Quijano says (2000) that "we all feel like citizens of the same category", which should be made visible and studied from a *Sustainable Development* point of view, in correspondence with *Interculturality*. Clarifying that although it is not the constant in the intercultural university environment, if it is perceived in the territory we reside, as mentioned by C. Walsh (2006), as expressions of a dominant and oppressive sector, political and cultural heir of those conquering and colonizing groups, and another original sector, subordinated, discriminated and oppressed.

Interculturality, seen from this perspective, should then be defined as the historical relationship between groups or persons from different cultures, who may or may not share cultural traits and who maintain a dynamic and/or static interaction of mutual influence; therefore, in the intercultural and *sustainable development* university environment, interpersonal and group relationships, as well as attitudes, behaviors, and exchanges, are the elements that articulate and carry out *interculturality*.

FROM *SUSTAINABILITY* TO THE EDUCATION OF PROFESSIONALS IN *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

It should be considered that we start from a concept -*Sustainability*- that has alluded, historically, to diverse perspectives and interpretations that have attended to different scales of application and that have derived in the formulation of different methodologies to make these recognitions (Sarandón and Flores, 2009), which are presented as reliable, opportune, and truthful from their perspective, which, it should be said, depends to a great extent both on the intentionality of the study (understood as what the researcher wants to understand, discover and/or know), and on the eye of the observer and the position in which it is located when it describes how a certain surface or space is found, that is, the position or volume in a certain situation (Martínez & Figueroa, 2014).

Therefore, perspective is key to understand the Sustainable concept, which leads to the need of pondering the concept in the context of research, and also in the planning of curricular maps, as it is the case of *Sustainable Development*, in intercultural universities, which must be approached with great care and interest and understand precisely what it refers to.

In this context, in my opinion, we have to recognize that the concept of *Sustainable Development* has three key elements: 1.- It explains the recognition and analysis of the use of resources (natural, human, cultural), in the present and its effect on the preservation for the future and 2.- the quality of life of the human communities now (and also in the future), but, attention! because they are culturally diverse communities (Dietz G, 2009), participating in the same territory and permanently interrelating, influencing each other, and such element introduces a situation of greater complexity to understand and apply the concept of *Sustainable Development*, therefore the third central element that permeates the professional training path is *Interculturality*.

The relationship of interest between those key elements and *Interculturality* is found in the effect or impact that they exert on each other, that is, the exploration of the quality of life is connected to the exploration in the use of resources in a given cultural context, which in turn affects the relationships that occur between cultures and which necessarily derive in the making and construction of proposals that should take into account the cultural context of origin, and propose, as mentioned by Sarandón and Flores, (2006), a development with sustainability.

According to the above, then, a professional in *Sustainable Development* is a person dedicated to the study and analysis of how human beings relate to their environment, in terms of the usefulness, use, and management of resources, but also how they relate to other different cultural groups, and their effect, on the one hand, on the quality of life of human communities

and the other, on their impact on the natural environment; whose explorations integrate into a first stage scientific investigations, which derive in diagnoses that sustain the planning of sustainable alternatives of a solution either in the design of development projects or in plans and programs for public policies.

Such a definition implies that the study and analysis must have a sequence that begins with the identification and organization of data that allows for a recognition of the territory and the cultures that coexist in it, and then a description of components (structure and function of the agro-ecosystem) or events (chronology and milestones), social actors (who and how is the social subject?), processes and contexts of experiences (Sánchez, 2010), and then establish their meaning, i.e., critically systematize what is thought and understood of that situation, what value and relevance do the community give to its reality? What are its prospects? (Bonilla *et al*, 2009).

The sequence leads the diagnosis to the identification of problems and needs (Ander, 1998), based on the relationship that has been established between human communities with a specific culture and the use of resources, how have human communities, from the particularity of their culture, appropriated these resources? How does the dominant culture, in this intercultural relationship, impact others and transform them? It is necessary to respond to questions that, it is assumed, will recognize relevant aspects of the daily life of the community (Bonilla *et al*, 2009), aspects that recreate how people's daily lives are with each other and their environment, to elucidate how they interact, communicate or interrelate as cultural groups.

Finally, the diagnosis must support planning, in other words, the sequence entails measuring the impact that the communities' relations with their environment have had on the quality of life and on the resources that lead to the construction of solution proposals and their planning, from a sustainable perspective.

PROFESSIONALS IN *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT* GRADUATED FROM INTERCULTURAL UNIVERSITIES

The profile of the professional in *Sustainable Development* in the universities that promote it, in particular intercultural ones, depends on the so-called formative areas, the group of subjects inserted in the study plans, which condition an area of expertise and this, in turn, projects the field in which the professional will be competent (Academic Program, 2013), therefore, the profile should, above all, correspond to the territorial reality where the major is located.

This premise is based on the fact that the territory of the university environment has a strong impact on the professional training of its students,

due to the diversity of cultures found there and the interactions they generate, which shape, modify, and maintain a vital influence on behavior, since they tend to strengthen their cultural identity, developing, in particular, their confidence in the use and application of cultural features of great interest such as mother tongues. This is precisely where the role of *community bonding* makes the most sense since it is the force that encourages and fosters intercultural relations in a positive sense.

Therefore, the subjects of the training area and the weight they exert in the educational plans should derive from the professional profile that is based on a reality of the territory in question and of the cultures that exist in it, considering their activities to use the resources and the agro-eco-cultural practices that they promote and the effect that these have on the quality of life of the human communities, in particular, those related to the problems and needs that this trigger.

On the other hand, the professional profile also results in "major" areas, that is to say, that they put greater emphasis on some topics of sustainability and that depends in this sense on the formative areas that are studied, for example, one can have a major focused on agro-ecological elements with a minor on the industrial area, therefore, the topic that touches the formative areas becomes substantial to reach the wished profile in the graduates.

In this sense, the concept of *Sustainable Development* implies taking into account the three dimensions of sustainability, which must be the source that nourishes the subjects of the basic, formative, and specialized areas, intimately joined to the axis of *community bonding*, whose practice promotes the attributes and qualities of the researcher, of the diagnostician and designer of integral proposals of a solution, sustained in the respect, responsibility, care and knowledge of the natural environment, basic ethical principles to affirm a relationship of harmony.

COMMUNITY BONDING IN THE TRAINING OF *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT* PROFESSIONALS.

In the training of professionals in *Sustainable Development*, from intercultural universities, the bridge that allows connecting community development and sustainability, and in turn sustainability with interculturality, occurs between the subject of study and the researcher through a pedagogical axis called *Community Bonding*, training foundation of great importance in the professional curriculum from a normative perspective (Casillas and Santini, 2009), since it forms a line or axis that crosses the curriculum of this career, as well as from real practice, in the relationship university-communities.

Of the multiple qualities that this axis has, there are two that stand out: The first, promotes the formation of professional skills in scientific research,

in the elaboration of community diagnoses, in community development planning, in the design of development projects, and management capacity. The second promotes an ethical formation, based on values that encourage *interculturality* based on respect, responsibility, care, and knowledge. In this sense, *community bonding* can be seen as a platform that allows not only a deep approach to the subjects of study, from a technical point of view, but also as a positive force that encourages those connections or relationships, that is, that dynamizes the process of socio-cultural relations in which subjects participate with their own "...cultural, economic-political structures and power relations..." Baronnet and Bermudez (2019), and who find ways to relate.

How is this community bonding bridge in practice? In other words, how is community bonding implemented? A necessary question that appears in the reflective process and that leads us through a research route. *Community Bonding* is the union of two equally *sui generis* terms, which it is appropriate to clarify and comment on. We refer, first, to the term of *Community*, which according to some researchers such as Montero (2004), "...is a polysemic, complex, and confusing term..." that is to say, it finds different purpose according to the topic in which it is involved. Whereas *bonding* is defined by the RAE as the action and effect of bonding, defined as well as: (1) To bind or found something in something else, (2) To perpetuate or continue something or the exercise of it, (3) To subject the fate or behavior of someone or something to that of another person or thing, (4) To subject to an obligation, (5) To bind or encumber property to a perpetual bond, and (6) To secure, bind with prisons. We then have a word that is used to explain various actions, so its use depends on the context where we place it.

Considering our experience in the exercise of *Community Bonding*, it is feasible to consider four basic issues: (1) who is the linker, (2) who is the linked one, (3) what do you want and why you want to link, and (4) the site or destination of the link. Located under a route of action, a first stage is recognized with two important elements, the first is the connection between the binding and the linked, for which the concept of 'first contact' is recognized (Freire, 1970), which becomes important by facilitating access (Hammersley and Atkenson, 2001) and/or introduction of the linker to the community that is the subject of the study, which will influence the future actions that will be followed, above all with the social actors, with whom we will have a relationship, and secondly, with the linkers, in their characterology and their way of acting in intercultural relations.

The next stage of the exercise involves the creation of links of social and economic interest that are established in action, through the interweaving of mutual interests, but also, and more importantly, in the creation of emotional ties. Therefore, we have to consider that this is an experiential process, that

happens between the involved parties, and that they build to establish a relationship of collaboration with clear, precise, and concrete objectives.

At this moment the *dialogue of knowledge* is essential, because it goes beyond the communication between subjects, since it involves diverse knowledge, visions, perspectives, and feelings in a horizontal relationship, of equals, and implies the recognition of those differences (Peña, 2017). In short, the objectives of the linker are combined with those of the linked one in a relationship where collaboration is very important for the relationship to be effective and to successfully achieve what everyone wants.

When the process has been achieved, a stage of completion begins, which may, in turn, be the beginning of a qualitatively higher stage, such question depends on the scope of the research and what the studied community limits. The evaluation of the process at this time is key to consider the results and propose, if necessary, new actions (Peña, 2017).

RESEARCH IN THE EDUCATION OF *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

Research, from intercultural contexts, has two essential questions that contribute to defining the *Sustainable Development* professional:

(1) In the exercise of *community bonding*, the professional is induced to use the scientific method, to make recognitions and analysis of the conditions of life of the communities under study, and their links with others, in an attempt to discover their intercultural relations.

(2) These studies, among other issues, propose both to relate the concept of Sustainability from the communities of study, and to measure the scope of sustainability in these communities, supported, the latter, in the demands of society arising from environmental problems, as well as in the commitment made by our country in favor of *Sustainability* (since it has signed several international agreements, at least at the institutional level), which means that it will impact on public policies aimed at achieving this objective, therefore, it is necessary to operate research of such complexity.

At this point, it is convenient to reaffirm that the term *Community* is more appropriate as a concept associated with the territory, or space, occupied by human groups, since it is the place that gives them a sense of belonging or "sense of community" (Montero, 2004), where they interrelate or interact, share a common culture and history, which has a dynamic and changing sense, in a holistic sense.

Likewise, the term *development*, associated with the improvement of people's quality of life, does not refer to quantitative economic growth, but rather, as proposed by Martínez and Figueroa (2014): "...to the deployment of potentialities in an environment of growing complexity... immersed in... the search for collective and individual welfare, through the use of the goods and services offered by nature, in multiple spatial-temporal scales of co-evolutionary systems".

Considering what has been written, it is pertinent to delineate the investigations based on three axes of analysis: (1) socio-cultural, (2) production systems, and (3) biodiversity. It should consist of an ordered series of studies, under a mixed research approach, to evaluate diverse components of the community system that locate the development of the subject of study from a sustainable perspective (Sarandón & Flores, 2006), but also their intercultural relations.

Finally, these investigations should take into account three issues: the first is to be oriented towards the recognition or characterization of the units of analysis, the second is to analyze the progress or evolution of the units of analysis towards sustainability, considering the use of indicators, as well as general sustainability indexes (Gravina & Leyva, 2012) and the third, is the study of community relations, which contributes to understanding the dynamic, static, and historical relations of the communities under study, and therefore seeks to understand how they interact, how they are influenced, and what results, problems, and needs arise.

CONCLUSION

From an intercultural university perspective, *Sustainability*, beyond being a concept both controversial and hopeful, is the core part in the search for a new paradigm of development of human communities and their ways of relating to their environment, which is lived and felt from diverse cultural contexts in a given territory, so that *intercultural* relations play an increasingly important role, becoming a central element for the training of *Sustainable Development* professionals.

The confluence of the *Sustainability* concept, with two other equally powerful concepts such as *Development* and *Interculturality*, are the basis for the formation of a professional in *Sustainable Development*, called to carry out studies and analysis about the relationship of human communities with their environment, from understanding the historical, dynamic, and static relationships that are established between different cultures that share the same territory, to recognize how these communities use and manage their resources, under a logic of measuring the sustainable development achieved, whose effects will impact on planning that promotes alternative solutions

under basic ethical principles, which contribute to an intercultural relationship of harmony and coexistence that are respect, responsibility, care, and knowledge.

Under these premises, a career in *Sustainable Development* follows research and a mixed approach, which analyzes the situations in which the subjects of study are and recognizes how much they are heading towards a sustainable life, and the diagnosis and design of solutions, hand in hand with a key axis that is the *community bonding*, because their actions can modify ideas preconceived by the people, ie, modify thoughts and acts of people, in the sense that they focus on the sustainable, in the context of the search for paradigms as new ways of relating to the environment.

Therefore, *development* and *interculturality* from the perspective of sustainability, are basic to propose public policies that strengthen in people a spirit of a harmonious relationship with their environment and promote, in turn, levels of quality of life without destroying the world around us.

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