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## Sustainable Development of Rural Areas A Project Approach\*

### Sustainability as a modern development paradigm

Sustainability generally accepted as a developmental paradigm of humanity at the turn of the 20th century represents the reaction of scientists and numerous citizen's groups to the endangered nature, the very basis of human existence and development as well as their reaction to the lack of respect towards cultural heritage as a component of man's historical determination.

However, it has to be admitted that it has become more and more evident that the modernity of a contemporary society does not solely depend on the level of its economic development but also if not predominantly, on its long-term policy of the environmental protection in terms of its sustainability. According to Thompson [1992:17, 18], it is sustainability which today replaces the past hope 'that history would convert individual misery and folly into a comprehensive progress for all humanity... As post-modern men and women, we abandon the notion of progress, but as humans, we need something to take its place'. Sustainability appears as the post-modern substitute for progress, a less boastful and confident goal, but one that is equally ephemeral and contested.

An ever growing enthusiasm of people (scientists, politicians, civic groups and societies, individuals) for sustainability as the paradigm of the present and the future, can be on the one hand, ascribed to the awareness of actual, and measurable indicators of the environmental degradations (water, soil, air pollutions) as the result of the developmental paradigm concentrated almost exclusively on economic growth. On the other hand,

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\* This is the revised and extended paper published in Barbič, A.; *Sustainable Development of Rural Areas: From Global Problems to Local Solutions*, D. Wastl-Walter eds. (1995), Klagenfurter geographische Schriften, Heft 13, Institut für Geographie der Universität Klagenfurt, p. 22–34.

this enthusiasm may simply be due to a human trait according to which a man is at once capable of replacing an unsuccessful or ended paradigm with a new one which reveals to him new horizons and an optimistic future.

The initial enthusiasm for the paradigm of sustainable development has been most likely already overcome. There has been a growing number of critical warnings presented by scientists, professionals and managers, as well as by ordinary citizens who, as producers and as consumers, have to pay the price of sustainability. Doubts in the realization of sustainable development are at least, to a certain extent, justified by its internal contradictions and conflict as well as, by the impression that, indeed, the sustainable developmental paradigm represents simply a replacement for the unrealized (and maybe unrealizable) past developmental programmes.

Yet, this paper is based on just such a notion of sustainability, one that makes it possible to protect resources and by the same token enable development.

As the developmental paradigm I accept the definition of the World Commission on Environment and Development according to which a sustainable development is 'a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs' [WCED, 1987:9]. While for agriculture I rely upon the FAO definition [FAO, 1989:xi] according to which sustainability refers to the 'successful management of resources for agriculture to satisfy changing human needs while maintaining or enhancing the quality of the environment and conserving natural resources'.

Both definitions of sustainable development stress the necessity to satisfy present and future needs of mankind but at the same time call for such a management of resources and technological investments which, within relevant institutional arrangements guarantee their long-term existence. The development within the frame of sustainability means securing/increasing the quality of life which, to a certain extent, depends on the economic and predominantly on factors of a non-economic nature.

#### SUSTAINABILITY: SOME BASIC DILEMMAS

The life of the residents of a rural area is certainly co-determined by natural and cultural heritage which the residents treat either negatively or positively, they respect and protect it or they do neither. For analytic purposes it is possible and maybe even necessary to distinguish between the respect towards and the protection of the heritage. While its (non)respect is part of an individual's or a community's value system, its (non)protection contains clear economic dimensions, for in populated areas it is possible to market it. 'Marketing the heritage' sounds somehow rough while 'the heritage as, for example, a part of a touristic offer' is totally acceptable. The

historical dimension of the heritage self-evident at first glance, combines value systems and economic patterns in time. Time dimension of the heritage relates, on the one hand, to the past intending to preserve nature and man-created objects, and on the other hand to the present-time objects as future heritage [Bogataj, 1992:12]. In other words, neither natural nor cultural heritage are non-changeable goods. On the contrary, they are exposed to natural and social laws and their quantity and quality can be changed. When, where and to what extent these changes will be caused predominantly by socio-historical, when by the present economic and when equally by both, depends on both the global and on the local processes. Thus, the option of protecting the heritage and at the same time promoting its development which has still been measured by the growth of the gross domestic product, that is, by the economic criteria, requires the definition of the relationship between local and global.

#### GLOBAL-LOCAL DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The relationship between local and global is in the first place a political and economic question, it is a question of the relations between rich and poor states of the contemporary world. The rich states favour the exploitation of resources against their protection [Redclift, 1984:21] while at the same time loudly speak in favour of the environmental values. In spite of the fact that this had been more typical for the 80's and years before that, than it is in 90's, numerous authors have been calling attention to a so-called double morality of the developed World in its relations towards the protection of the environment. Thus, Allen and Sachs [1992:31] stated that 'the environmental degradation in the Third World is often the direct result of the needs of First World capital to maximize profits by lowering costs of production and externalizing environmental costs'.

Societies oriented predominantly towards economic growth, support the development of those technologies which lower production costs and diminish the required labour force. All other, non-production human needs and activities including the need to protect the environment, are determined by the technological innovations related to the production processes. Environmental damages caused by many of them have increased the awareness that man is endangered by his own inventions. Thus, the question 'should it be permitted to put into practice everything a man has invented' raised by Franc Bernik [1994:5], the president of the Slovenian Academy of Science, seems to be truly justified. According to the same author, only the synthesis of the techniques and culture can create the balance between man and nature which would guarantee richer and, above all, safer development of humanity in the present as well as in the future.

Modern communication technologies diminish physical distances and abolish information self-sufficiency and information isolation of contempo-

rary societies. Thus, geographical vicinity is no longer the condition and the guarantee for the relations or similarities among the residents as well as physical distance itself does not implicate their unrelatedness and diversity [Mlinar, 1994:11]. Even more, mass media (printing and electronic) when technically available, disseminate information across the states' and continents' borders and literally create McLuhan's global village.

It is true that the contemporary globalization processes connect individuals and groups bringing them from isolation and self-sufficiency and include them into an interdependent World community. But, at the same time these very processes depersonalize them in a sense of transferring the responsibilities for their actions from the individual and local to the global level. Thus, the residents of a locality feel powerless for they are no longer in the position to influence their own and their communities' lives and actions as they used to. They are losing self-confidence and self-esteem which results in feeling insecure. By becoming propulsive and removed as obstacles for cooperation, a territory's boundaries are losing their protective role and at the same time discharging the residents of the responsibility for their territory. Because of these processes, for example a farmer who pours out the remains of a poisonous liquid onto a field, a meadow or into a nearby stream, is not aware that by doing this he endangers not only others but himself as well.

These 'new spacial locations' are in the World context the Third World Countries, within Europe post-socialist countries and within each country rural areas.

Post-socialist countries trying to catch up with the economic development of the EU-member countries, in their liberal concepts of the economic growth tend to neglect the environment protection principles, or at least, do not apply them strictly even though they are aware of their long-term relevancy and even include them in the relevant laws. For these reasons the conflict between the necessity of economic growth and the need to protect the environment as well as the formulation and realization of a sustainable development strategy is in post-socialist countries stronger than in the developed ones which have been for three decades dealing with environmental protection problems, although not always successfully.

As a reaction to the globalization processes, the processes of individuation of individual countries, their regions and local communities which more and more resolutely form their own identities and manage local resources, have been identified [Mlinar, 1993]. The coexistence and interdependency of both, globalization and individuation processes, is in this paper understood as the frame for defining the role of the local in the global sustainable development strategy.

## LEVELS AND ACTIONS AIMED AT THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

At a global level only the agreements on minimal common environment protection policy obligatory for all parties which sign them, have so far been reached. How difficult it is for such an agreement to be reached and even more difficult to be realized is illustrated by the UN conference on the environment and development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (June 3–14, 1992). One hundred and twenty states and government leaders 'expressed their concern about the prevailing developmental pattern which has already caused global ecological changes'. Indeed the two signed conventions: The Convention about the Climate Changes and The Convention About the Biological Diversity have identified the need to register the emissions of gases and to secure the sustainability of resources (agricultural land, forest, oceans) but it has remained obvious that the Rio agreement is not an obligatory document. The decisions as to what extent it will be respected, have remained the domain of individual countries and their respective environmental protection laws [Bricelj, 1992].

It seems that international non-governmental organizations and societies can be more effective in protecting the environment than the international community. One of them has certainly been ECOVAST (European Council for the Village and Small Towns), founded in 1984 with the aim of promoting the well-being of rural communities and the protection of their heritage all over Europe. Two hundred and seventy members from 22 European states is not many — the members of 76 societies joining ECOVAST are not counted as individual members, but have so far reached envious results and formulated realizable plans. It participated actively in The European Countryside Campaign in 1987–1988. In its frame there has been an active group for rural architecture; it coorganized two conferences in 1990: the conference on the development of the countryside and the conference about rural tourism. Its programme, Telecottages International aims to promote the founding of firms in the European countryside on the basis of modern information technologies, etc.

The possibilities of taking measures for protecting the environment are certainly bigger at a state than at a global level. Namely, each state can itself pass relevant laws and control their implementation. A simple matter at first glance, but a complicated procedure in practice which has to synchronise the interests of different fields and government departments in order to secure sustainable development. This has been an especially demanding task in planning rural development. Besides the need for the horizontal synchronization of relevant developmental plans at the state level, vertical connections from a local community up to the state level also need to be secured. Especially stressed relevancy of horizontally and vertically adjusted developmental plans seem to be justified in the ever present inferiority of

the countryside in its economic as well as in its human potential. According to Kayser [1991:262, 263] there have been three main groups of factors determining a century-long discrimination of the countryside.

From the economic point of view the politicization of the countryside's issues in Slovenia as well as in other European countries, may, indeed, be due to the political parties' battles for attracting electorates but at the same time may well be, at least partly, also attributed to the fact that decisions about developmental programmes are taken at a local level with the residents' participation.

There are at least two options available to rural communities in formulating their developmental programmes. The first is to follow the concept of urban industrial development about which, according to Meyer and Burayidi [1991:33, 34] rural residents hold the wrong impression that they will gain with industrial development. The authors argue that industrial development is far from bringing the benefits to the expected proportion of the residents, especially to women, elderly residents and residents of lower professional groups. The second option for rural development is diversified economic activities based on local resources and/or aimed at satisfying local needs. In spite of Brown and Deaver's [Meyer & Burayidi, 1991:14, 15] warnings that even locally initiated developmental programmes will not be able to offer jobs to all concerned, Meyer and Burayidi argue that more services provided within the rural community have to be available to local consumers which will retain more money within the community. Setting up new firms reveals considerable potentials for improving local rural economies and offers new job possibilities. At the same time, locally defined programmes are consistent with rural values of stability, self-sufficiency and sustainability. In such a case there is no need to hide economic rural development programmes behind the paradigms such as eco-social, socio-economic or whatever development but the economic one.

However, one has to be aware that it is much easier to formulate a sustainable rural development programme than to carry it out. Namely, rural communities are far from being isolated islands and their residents continuously compare their lives with the lives of urban residents and are not ready to deprive themselves of the industrial development achievements in favour of a global society. Therefore, there are usually local residents who demand economic programmes which will bring new jobs and secure as high an income as possible to the individuals and to the community. In such a case, the conflict between the global society's interests — if it is the sustainable development, and local interests seems to be inevitable. Such a conflict can be additionally accompanied by various local conflicts, for the residents of different social and residential origin, workers of different professions and residents with different sources of income most likely have not only different interests but also different relations towards the environment and available

resources. Even the same person might have in his/her different roles contradictory interests. For example, a farmer as a producer does not object to the use of pesticides/herbicides etc., for utilizing them to heighten the yields. He/she can easily overlook the fact that conventional agriculture not only endangers the environment but also him/herself. There have been quite a few cases of farmers being poisoned by chemicals [Nilsen, 1990; Solecki, 1992]. At the same time, the very same farmer/farm woman as a resident of the countryside might as well fight for a clean environment and healthy living conditions, and object to ecologically unacceptable industry being located in his/her community.

### Sustainable rural development project

The suggested sustainable rural development project is composed of a model, some of its requirements, and of the specification of some roles of the residents as the project's actors.

#### A MODEL OF A SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Any developmental project has to specify its goals, identify and analyze the situation, evaluate local potentials in relation to the goals and design the actions/activities for realizing the stated goals (fig. 1).

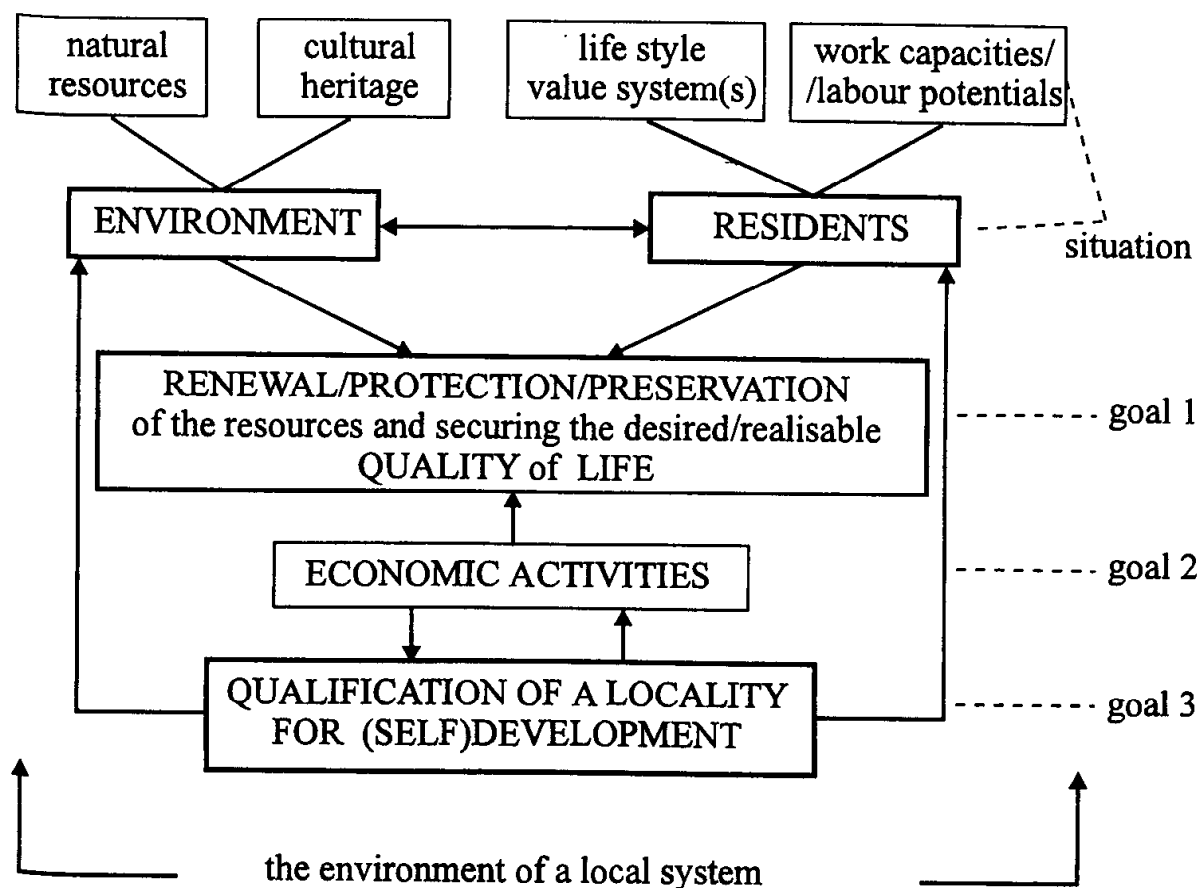


Fig. 1: A model of a sustainable rural development project

The basic goal (goal 1) of any development project is to secure/increase the quality of life of the residents which means:

- assured conditions for income generating activities (economic aspect),
- social security (social aspect),
- possibilities for leisure/interest activities (psychological aspect),
- participation in decision making (participatory aspect).

However, quality of life is a relative matter. Residents of a particular local community usually define it as living a bit better than at present which at the same time means that such a goal can be realized rather easily, mostly on the basis of local resources and local actions. If these actions are at the same time protecting local resources (ecological aspect), increasing the quality of life can become a long-term endeavour of a rural community which will qualify it for a so-called (self)development (goal 2). There is no need to say that a qualification for (self)development does not mean the isolation of a community from the rest of the World. But it thus means its relative independency which enables it to be an equal partner with other social units of the same level and a self-confident negotiator with the upper-level units, e.g. a state.

#### REQUIREMENTS FOR THE REALIZATION OF A SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

A sustainable rural development project strategy is a multi-dimensional endeavour which has its normative/legal, economic, and socio-cultural components. Each of them must be designed in a way as to enable/support the realization of the main goal as specified in the model (fig. 1), that is, the promotion of economic activities which will contribute to the quality of life of the residents on the one hand, and to secure the sustainability of the resources on the other hand. Among the necessary requirements I am going to discuss adequate legal arrangements, desired economic activities, and socio-cultural characteristics of the residents as a support or as an obstacle for the efficiency of such a project.

By **adequate legal arrangements**, a local self-government is understood to be opposed to the central government. According to the European document, local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law to regulate and manage a substantial share under their own responsibilities and in the interests of the local population [*European Charter of Local Self-Government*, 1985, Article 3].

Individual states define the competence of local self-government in a relevant law. Thus, the Slovenian Law About Local Self-Government specifies 20 tasks a commune performs in order to satisfy the residents' needs. Among them the following ones are particularly relevant to the present discussion:



— provides the conditions for the economic development of the commune — promotes social security services, provides services for pre-school children, for a family, for socially handicapped, disabled and elderly residents;

— protects the air, soil, water resources, takes care of noise-protection, collecting and dumping waste and performs other environmental protection activities;

— promotes activities in the field of education, information, documentation, culture, and supports different societies and touristic activities on its territory;

— accelerates the development of sports and recreation activities — builds and maintains local roads, recreational and other public grounds [*Zakon o lokalni samoupravi*, 1993, article 21].

The tasks listed above cover four out of five aspects of the quality of life of local residents (economic, social, psychological and ecological aspects). The direct election of the mayor and the members of the commune council as well as direct participation in decision-making at residents' meetings, referenda, citizens' initiatives which cover the fifth, that is the participatory aspect of the quality of residents' life [*Zakon o lokalni samoupravi*, 1993, article 44].

Sustainable rural development projects are definitely local tasks and, as such, to a great extent dependent on local leaders as well as on local economic and cultural elites. In traditional, democratic societies these elites are rather stable, especially in rural areas, while in new democratic states, e.g. in former socialist countries with centralized governments up to the fall of socialist systems in 1989/1990, local elites still have to be formed. In former socialist countries a local elite, in most cases, consisted of the secretary of the Communist Party, the president of the local council and some other state committed leaders most of whom were outsiders or immigrants who had little, if any commitment to a local community. Thus, it was not surprising that the basic change in the electorates' behaviour in the first democratic elections at the local level was that being well known and living in the community were the most decisive factors for candidates being elected [Táll, 1993:3].

Decentralization of the former centralized political structure will greatly affect or is already affecting rural communities. At a normative level it will enable rural residents to organize themselves in local communities and give them the formal right to manage local affairs. At the practical level, the transition from centralized political power to local autonomy will be faced by numerous problems, some of them caused by the eagerness of the residents to establish local autonomy and make it work as soon as possible, and other problems related to the passiveness of the residents which will

be difficult to overcome. In addition, the solution of many problems, rural communities in former socialist countries are facing, demands considerable financial resources the pauperized governments and citizens will hardly secure [Barbič, 1993a].

In this frame Slovenia seems to be a lucky exception for at least two reasons. Firstly, a strategy for stimulating balanced regional development had succeeded in reducing the number of less developed communes from 33 percent in the 1970s to 6 percent in the years 1986-1990. Promoting the development of less developed areas has in the new state of Slovenia been institutionalized by the Law on the Stimulation of the Development of Demographically Threatened Areas [*Zakon o spodbujanju razvoja demografsko ogroženih območij v Republiki Sloveniji*, 1990] which basically represents the continuity of the former strategy of policentric development. Secondly, local communities as self-managing units of communes which were the units of the centralized power structure had, to a certain extent, succeeded to organize themselves in carrying out some locally relevant actions on their own. Actions based on self-contributions (in money, labour and goods) had solved many local problems of rural areas especially by improving their infrastructures.

**Economic activities based on local resources and labour potentials** require as great a diversity as possible in order to avoid their negative impact on the environment. Options for diversified economic activities available to farm family members as well as to other rural residents are the following: the employment of some farm family members off the farm, encouraging small and medium-size firms to move to rural areas, the promotion of new economic activities on farms as well as in rural communities based on agriculture (food processing) or on other countryside resources (agro-tourism), utilising passive sources of income (bringing in the institutions and services for population groups which are either outside the economically active age or supported by state funds), and exploiting local resources for local development. In spite of several obstacles to rural diversification, which are faced by post-socialist European countries, sustainably oriented economic activities are pleaded as the only future for rural areas in Europe [Barbič, 1993b].

Supplementary activities on family farms can be developed especially by farm women who will then utilize and develop their creativity and labour potentials, gain the economic independency and provide social security for themselves.

The identification of **residents' capacities** to formulate and carry out a developmental project is, on the one hand related to their stratification characteristics (age, gender, educational structure), the availability of the labour force, their professional skills, their values, and, on the other hand, to their cooperativeness, readiness, and motivation to participate in such a

project. The analysis of the community social structure, relations among individuals and groups, formal and informal power structure (local leaders, conflicting and cooperating individuals and groups) give additional information relevant to any developmental endeavours of a local community.

#### A SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT'S ACTORS

The residents of a LC are not only the target but also the main actors in any SRD project. It is first of all their responsibility and the ability to formulate the objectives and the ways of reaching them. The residents can participate as individuals, members of informal (family, friends groups) and/or formal groups (local political parties, religious, sport, cultural and other organizations and societies). The top-down approach utilized in western countries in the fifties and sixties tends to overlook a large portion of rural regions and it has very little regard for those mainly affected by it, that is the local residents [*The Secret of Success*, 1992:7]. The bottom-up approach alone cannot successfully replace the top-down one, for only the combination of both can bring desired results. The mobilization of ideas and energies at the local level can be realized by maximum skills in the hands of highly committed individuals, combined with well-targeted and well-timed aid from higher levels [Chassagne, Maria--Elisabeth, 1992:3]. Expressing this in popular wording, a meeting between bottom-up and top-down initiatives should be the top guiding principle in a local rural development project. Without relevant financial and professional help from outside, local initiatives are most likely to fail even in the case of the highest level of residents' commitment.

In addition to the residents, different levels of government, sectoral ministries, government agencies, private businesses, professional associations, community voluntary organizations and other interest groups are potential actors and partners in rural development projects. Partnerships can be formed within the public sector involving inter- and intra-governmental partnerships or partnerships between public and private sector [*Partnerships for Rural Development*, 1990:18, 19).

As already stated, residents as the main actors of a rural development project have to be motivated to participate in it. As the very first stage they need to be informed that something is happening in their community. This can be done through informal get-togethers, house-to-house calls, village meetings, dissemination of leaflets or local mass media. In later stages of the project the achievements of individuals and groups as well as different opinions have to be disseminated, failures analyzed and residents informed about the results with suggestions for further actions [Barbič, 1991:113, 114].

Education and training adapted to the local situation and to the project goals is essential for the performance of local residents. The average level

of education of rural populations is generally low or at least lower than that of urban residents. In addition to general educational programmes, special training related to different economic activities residents can get involved in as well as the training aimed at furthering ecological awareness and building local identity is essential for the success of the project.

The professional and governmental officials, representing institutions involved in a development programme should not underestimate local people, their experiences, values and aspirations as well as the ways they communicate among themselves and cooperate, but learn about and respect them.

### Slovenian experiences

Long before the contemporary integrated rural development strategy was formulated, Slovenia paid special attention to the equal development of all of its regions. Thus, the contemporary strategy for development of less developed rural regions of Slovenia represents, to a certain degree, the continuity of the concept of polycentric development of the former Socialist Republic of Slovenia. The system for stimulating balanced regional development has succeeded in reducing the number of less developed areas. In 1970's 20 (33%) out of 62 communes did not achieve 50% of the average level of development of the Republic, while in the years 1986–1990 only four (6%) communes remained below the republic average [Briški, 1991:1]. Despite the application of this strategy for the last 20 years, the development of large areas of communes still lags behind. In other words, there are frequent cases where a portion of a commune has flourished where another part has not [Briški, 1991:1]. The starting point and the goal of the new state of Slovenia has remained polycentric development, which should guarantee the equal development of all regions and keep them populated. Development should be based on local initiatives and increased usage of local resources. The state, within its regional economic and social development policy, specifies the goals and the strategies of development for all regions. In the particularly backward areas with specific development problems, the state intervenes directly.

The strategy for the promotion of development of less developed areas consists of both legislation and relevant research/development projects. The normative part refers to the Law on the Stimulation of the Development of Demographically Threatened Areas in the Republic of Slovenia [*Zakon o spodbujanju razvoja demografsko ogroženih območij v Republiki Sloveniji*, 1990] which defines less developed areas on the basis of the following criteria for each local community:

- the population growth rate, since 1981 cannot have exceeded 25% of the average rate of population growth for the Republic of Slovenia ;
- the ageing index of the population must be at least 25% less favourable than the Republic average.

In addition, settlements and local communities within ten kilometres of the national border can be defined as demographically threatened under less strict criteria than other settlements and local communities, as can those settlements located in hilly, mountainous areas with limited natural conditions for agriculture. In these areas, settlements need to satisfy only one of the two demographic criteria to attain the definition of threatened. In accordance with this law, 48% of the surface and 20.8% of the residents of Slovenia [Briški, 1991:2] fall into this category.

In an effort to enhance competition in these areas, the Republic of Slovenia directly co-finances several types of enterprises. Among these are development programmes for individual demographically threatened localities, the initial development programmes and project documentation costs, the building of local infrastructure, investments in supplementary economic activities of family farms, investments in small business (up to 5 workers employed) in production and services, and investments in other production and service facilities as well as equipment to be used to enlarge what already exists or to start new production or service activities.

The act in the budget of the Republic of Slovenia for 1991 on the conditions for long-term investment credits in demographically threatened areas additionally stimulated investment in farming, supplementary economic activities on farms, and in production or service businesses with up to five employees. For such investments, long-term credits could be obtained from the state budget under specific conditions. The repayment period would be ten years with repayment beginning three years after the credit is received. The interest rate would be 2% with the value calculated according to the DEM.

The Ministry for Economic Relations and Development has co-financed 34 projects from 1991–1996 for formulating development plans mostly in the following fields of activity: supplementary activity on family farms, rural tourism, small firms and integrated development programmes for rural communities facing negative demographic trends. The total amount of money contributed by the Ministry over a period of 5 years was 41,615,042 SIT (301,558 USD) [Piry, 1996].

The development of demographically threatened areas has also been stimulated by other legislation such as the law on taxation of profits of legal persons, the law on income, and the dwelling law. The Ministry for Planning and the Ministry for Agriculture and Food Processing have primary responsibility in this area. In fact, the latter funded a special Centre for the Development of the Countryside and Village renewal in 1991. Its main responsibility is to (co)finance rural development projects initiated by local government interests [Barbič, 1993c].

Within four years (1991–1994) 76 such projects were co-financed (50% of the funds had to be secured by the commune applying for the state's

funds), and on average 7.4 percent of the total yearly budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Processing invested in them.

However, several other types of development projects have been carried out in Slovenia in the last fifteen years or so. The very first, known as the 'Trebnje FAO Project' was struck at the fifth plenary session of The Working Party for Women and Rural Family in Rural Development at FAO European Commission on Agriculture. The approach elaborated by Slovenian experts (Barbič, Rupena and others) was discussed and adapted at FAO Technical Consultation on Women and Pluriactivity in Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1983. Supported by the commune authorities, local agricultural cooperatives, local NGOs and local residents, an interdisciplinary team of Slovenian experts studied the situation and formulated a development strategy for the project area [*Developmental Project of Trebnje*, 1988]. The project has since been expanded and there are still various developmental actions going on.

However, there have been many other rural development projects in Slovenia, some of them supported locally, and others internationally (Council of Europe, EU). The majority of them are aimed at the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and at the same time utilizing it as a source of local development. In addition to the identification of the heritage, special attention is paid to the role of local residents as its users as well as its protectors.

### Conclusion

The sustainable approach towards rural development has altered agricultural policy into rural policy which perceives rural economic development in terms of rural diversification, the improvement and the protection of the environment, as well as in terms of local initiatives. The switch from the top-down to bottom-up approach or rather to the combination of both has promoted the utilization of local potentials and thus, not only shifting the one-sided state support of agriculture to the support of rural development programmes but also assuring better local economic and environmental control.

It is a social system which imposes itself upon the natural one. Nature itself operates according to its own laws which can in many cases be/have been broken by human intervention. Since in the cases of deep or permanent/continuous distortion nature is not capable of renewing, its sustainability depends on the population of a particular area. The individual residents, the households and the local community as the actors of a sustainable development (fig. 2), their production and consumption patterns either damage or protect the environment. It depends on the environmental consciousness and environmental behaviour of the actors (individuals,

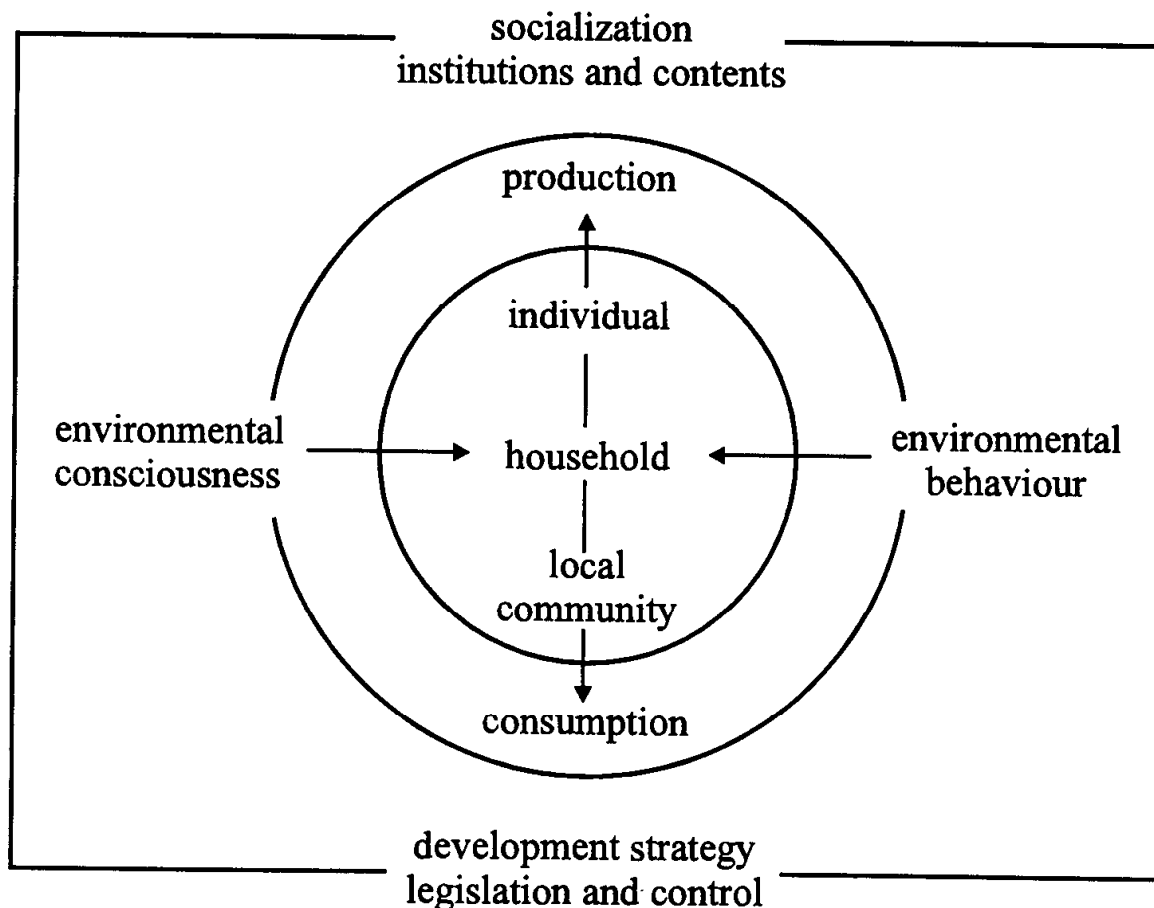


Fig. 2. The factors of a sustainable development [Barbič, 1993c:248]

households, firms and institutions, local community) to what extent the sustainability of residents' immediate environment can be secured. At a supra-local level, e.g. at the level of a larger social system, the socialization institutions and their contents together with the legislation and control mechanisms additionally determine the local actors' behaviour.

To conclude, it is the paradigm of sustainable rural development which combines the (economic) activities and the actors, who, through their permanent interaction formulate and improve/correct their actions in order to secure the sustainability of all developmental resources, e.g. nature, cultural heritage and the residents themselves.

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