

# **SPECIFICATION A MODEL FOR THE STUDY OF POLITICAL RATIONALITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSUMPTION**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this document was to conceptually analyze Sustainable Development against theories of political rationality favorable to the conservation of the environment. In this sense, seven concepts were chosen, based on their similarities and differences, to interpret the nature-society relationship in terms of the equitable availability of resources between species and generations. This conceptual analysis of Sustainable Development will allow us to glimpse theories, diagnoses, and interventions to promote rational lifestyles favorable to the conservation of the environment.

**Keywords** - Structure, Sustainability, Rationality, Decision and Action

## **ESPECIFICAÇÃO DE UM MODELO PARA O ESTUDO DA RACIONALIDADE POLÍTICA, SUSTENTABILIDADE E CONSUMO**

## **Resumo**

O objetivo deste documento foi analisar conceitualmente o Desenvolvimento Sustentável à luz das teorias da racionalidade política favoráveis à conservação do meio ambiente. Nesse sentido, foram escolhidos sete conceitos, com base em suas semelhanças e diferenças, para interpretar a relação natureza-sociedade em termos da disponibilidade equitativa de recursos entre espécies e gerações. Esta análise conceitual do Desenvolvimento Sustentável nos permitirá vislumbrar teorias, diagnósticos e intervenções para a promoção de estilos de vida racionais favoráveis à conservação do meio ambiente.

**Palavras-chave** - Estrutura, Sustentabilidade, Racionalidade, Decisão e Ação

## **ESPECIFICACIÓN UN MODELO DE ESTUDIO DE RACIONALIDAD POLÍTICA, SOSTENIBILIDAD Y CONSUMO**

## **Resumen**

El objetivo de este documento fue analizar conceptualmente el Desarrollo Sostenible frente a las teorías de la racionalidad política favorables a la conservación del medio ambiente. En este sentido, se eligieron siete conceptos, en base a sus semejanzas y diferencias, para interpretar la relación naturaleza-sociedad en términos de la equitativa

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disponibilidad de recursos entre especies y generaciones. Este análisis conceptual del Desarrollo Sostenible nos permitirá vislumbrar teorías, diagnósticos e intervenciones para promover estilos de vida racionales favorables a la conservación del medio ambiente.

**Palabras clave:** estructura, sostenibilidad, racionalidad, decisión y acción

## INTRODUCTION

Nature and rationality are two central categories in the discussion about the conservation of resources for sustainability: the right of future generations to relate to animal and plant species. Although both categories have been external to the critical approaches to the hegemonic consumer system, both can be included in the contemporary discussion. This is the case of the exchange value of merchandise, mainly in relation to the objectification of abstract human labor, indicated by socially necessary units of time where it does not seem to be conditioned by the laws of nature, essentially by the scarcity of resources (SCHMIDT, 1976, p. 11).

Schmidt (1976, p. 12) notices two natures linked to nature. A first where it ensures that Marxism considers it as a source of the means of production and a second instance allusive to the social as the materialization of nature from the mode of production. In both cases, the category of rationality is implicit, but not materialized as a determining factor in the relationship between nature and humanity.

Precisely, the objective of this work is to discuss different types of rationalities favorable to the conservation of resources, considering these categories as inherent to the differences between those who consume resources excessively and those who preserve them. To this end, authors who emphasize rationality as a central factor in the relationship between nature and humanity are incorporated into the review. It is about the exposition of categories related to rationality from its instrumental dimension to its environmental cultural projection.

In this sense: Will the revision of the rationalities allow to open the discussion towards the conservation of resources based on their dimensions?

The premise that answers this question and guides the present work warns that rationality is a central category in the discussion, but in relation to the conservation of resources, since it alludes to a cognitive system that determines decision-making and execution. probable of a favorable action to the conservation of the animal and vegetal species for the future generations.

### **Dasein being itself (being there)**

Martín Heidegger (2006/1889) proposed the term *dasein* (ser = sein) to refer to the ontology of man and analyze it from two categories: time and space, more concretely the *being being in time* and the *being being in space*. According to Heidegger (2006/1889), ontology refers to the moments taken away in the present that facilitate the constitution of being both in time and space and that can be recovered again and again, but on each occasion with a new face, mainly, with a new sense of being. Heidegger (2006/1889) proposes a new conception of the constitution of man overcoming the duality that has him anchored to his voluntary action and his determined action.

In this sense, *dasein* would be a foundation of the structuring if one considers that the being appropriates a moment to innovate, renew, and perpetuate itself. The beings that structure social reality are precisely those who capture a moment to eternalize through actions.

However, *dasein* is a term not yet linked to individual needs that, as inconsequential as ephemeral, only seek satisfaction and immediate pleasures bypassing the eternalization of being and reducing it to its simplest expression: the structuring of everyday life or worldly life.

It would be Max Weber (1997/1922) who would introduce the concept of *ideal type* to understand the *dasein* considering:

"The one-dimensional accentuation of one or more points of view (...) of specific fuzzy phenomena (...) which are placed (...) in a unified analytical construction" (p.11).

The Weber (1997/1922) *ideal type* refers to *instrumental rationality* that was developed in industrial organizations, which had degraded Heidegger (2006/1889) *eternal being* to a simple productive function.

### **The instrumental rationality**

Individuals who act on their convictions forget their responsibilities (Weber, 1919/1986). This individual principle is extensive in the organizational field. That is, a large part of the population is employed by micro, small and medium enterprises, but only a few MSMEs survive in their first years to follow their objectives and use the consequent means without considering the contingency of the market and the relationships between organizations. An organization with standardized bureaucratization principles in its productive relations supposed instrumental actions that would guarantee its perpetuity. It was about the achievement of objectives and the use of means or consistent resources from previous information.

In this sense, Simon (1957) proposed a *bounded rationality* to designate a decision-making process based on information limits that can be of a temporal, but essentially rational, order. In this sense, the costs of obtaining the information should be commensurate with the benefits.

### **The limited rationality**

Because human beings cannot aspire to know the information about the beginning and end of a sustainable process due to its transition, because it has been impossible to guess at the conjunctural moment from which humanity can develop sustainably, due to that humanity does not seek its transcendence as an antecedent generation to guarantee the capacities of subsequent generations through the optimization of resources, environmental situations and lifestyles with their corresponding expectations, needs, decisions, intentions, and actions are limited.

According to Simon (1957), humanity, mainly the supposedly rational individuals, cannot establish spatiotemporal intervals from which they calculate the probabilities of utility. For the most part, individuals employ *heuristics* in which they prefer low probabilities of success versus high probabilities of failure.

These are decisions that structure individual actions and amplify groups to end up structuring societies. According to Giddens (1979), it is practical actions that invert the Weber (1997/1922) and Simon (1957) process of limited instrumental rationality. Unlike Weber (1919/1986) and Simon (1957), Giddens (1991) speculates with the possibility that people are influenced by a social conscience that guides their heuristic processes.

### **Practical consciousness.**

Unlike the Heidegger (2006/1889) ontology that proposes the interpretation of man from the eternalization of its space-time, the Giddens (1979) ontology raises practical awareness as a rational action. It refers to a convenient practice regulated by the institutions (GIDDENS, 1991, p.204).

Anthony Giddens (1979) recognizes the influence of Heidegger (2006/1889) in his Theory of Structuring. He points out that his approach is derived from Heidegger (2006/1889) ontology. He even agrees with the overcoming of duality: voluntarism vs. determinism. This transcendence of duality would not be to elevate the being in its spatiotemporal eternity but to anchor it in a daily life of intention rather than reflection, decision rather than sedition, action rather than transcendence.

Practical consciousness linked to institutional rationality is the basis of social structuring in Gidenland. These are mechanisms of thought and action favorable to the interests of individuals concerning the security and uncertainty of the institutions and with them, the states. According to Giddens (1991), both institutions and individuals are the most practical way to link public initiatives with personal needs.

However, the practical conscience is based on intentions and decisions that are not deliberate, planned, and systematized. These are actions that seek results convenient to the individual and convincing to the group to which he belongs or wants to belong. In this sense, practical action is effective but ineffective. The instrumental conscience allows the attainment of objectives that only benefit the individual but that does not guarantee his perennial welfare. Practical awareness is an everyday mirage in which individuals look to strengthen their intentions, decisions, and welfare actions. Such limits of practical consciousness impede the structuring of sustainability by being exclusive with the same group to which one belongs and therefore not contemplative of the needs of later generations.

Before the limits of situations, decisions and personal actions, Habermas (1987) will propose a new foundation of social structuring: communicative rationality. It is a symbolic field in which the action leaves its place to the symbols, meanings, and meanings of the discourses. If dasein transcends time and space (Heidegger, 2006/1889), the discursive being transcends situations, especially personal ones, and anchors the individual in the shared symbols to which they assume different meanings, but which

belong to a cultural repertoire that already It was before the individual emerged. Before practical awareness, symbols had already structured societies.

### *The communicative rationality*

The structuring of sustainability has been analyzed from the Heidegger (2006/1889), Weber (1919/1986), Simon (1957), and Giddens (1979) proposals of time and space in which being is eternalized in a continuous present through innovative practices. However, the symbols, their meanings, and their senses of discourse have already been before any action, even to say of Habermas (1987), they determine, delimit, and differentiate.

Unlike Giddens (1991), Habermas (1987) argues that being does not transcend, with its actions, time, and space, but rather, shared symbols are those that have already overcome all meaning and sense of being in time and space. The communicative act is evidence that the symbols transcended the being. It is the verbal discourses that would lead society to structure the desired sustainability.

However, the structuring of sustainability implies the transcendence of the environment-humanity relationship in the past and the present. It is a prospective transcendence that, although symbolic, influences the balance between the availability of resources and human needs. It is about returning to the causal relationship between decisions as determinants of actions. It is about making decisions that maximize benefits and reduce costs, actions that reduce uncertainty and risks.

However, Kahneman (2003) showed that human decisions are not necessarily related to actions. Even decisions that maximize benefits do not result in actions that reduce risks.

### **The prospective decision**

The structuring of sustainability from the approaches of Heidegger (2006/1889), Weber (1997/1922), Simon (1957), Giddens (1979), and Habermas (1987) seems to obey a series of infinite decisions and actions in the same moment in which needs arise without considering the availability of resources. In this sense, Kahneman (2003) established a fundamental law in the decision making that revealed the drawbacks of the structuring of sustainability.

These are heuristics that guide the intentions of being. Faced with a situation of uncertainty, individuals seem to prefer to risk winning large amounts than to preserve minimum reserves. In the case of the resource-needs balance, individuals seem to be oriented to market their waste than to preserve scarce resources. In a situation of uncertainty, risks define human actions. Natural reserves are sure to be exhausted, but public policies, private initiatives, and technological innovations specialize in optimizing, regulating, or moderating the exploitation of resources instead of preserving them and assuming new forms of consumption and lifestyles.

Precisely, current lifestyles, perhaps influenced by the symbols, meanings, and meanings of the wasteful past, are the object of study by Bauman (1998; 2002; 2005; 2008) who affirms the liquidation of nature and next to it: humanity.

### **Environmental rationality**

A type of rationality contrary to human needs; quality of life, subjective well-being and satisfactory experience is one that opens the discussion to the reappropriation of nature and resources (Leff, 1994: p. 224). Environmental rationality is a complex proposal for the deconstruction of consumption thresholds based on individual objectives. It refers to episodes of consumption based on the availability of resources. It is about building a new culture. In this sense, it acquires an instrumental dimension when linked to ecotechnologies (Leff, 1994: p. 218). In accordance with the bureaucratic rationale, the instrumental rationality oriented towards sustainability establishes calculations of losses and benefits based on means and ends.

Even environmental rationality is included in a cultural transformation project. The diversity and specificity of cultures, norms, values, use and customs of communities, groups and neighborhoods are scenarios of limits to consumption. Multiculturalism and interculturality are compatible with environmental rationality by coinciding in the preservation of the environment, common resources and universal heritage of future generations (Leff, 1994: p. 241).

The communicative dimension is also in environmental rationality. Being a project of reappropriation of nature, the limits of consumption must be disseminated through different cultural channels, since it is environmental knowledge that will translate into a guiding rationale for human consumption (Leff, 1998: p. 300) . This dialogue of

knowledge between cultures will allow to build intersubjective discussions that preserve the environment (Leff, 2008: p. 310).

Unlike communicative rationality and prospective decisions that assume scenarios of availability of resources and satisfied needs to carry out the public discussion on the consumption of nature, environmental rationality is directed towards the effectiveness of environmental management. In other words, environmental rationality is proposed for discussion from cultural differences and similarities to arrive at a system of cultural and nature reappropriation.

### **The consumerist life**

Sustainability has been structured from decisions and improvised actions, heuristics, and creativity, but not for that reason innovative or transforming inequitable relations between nature and humanity. Over exploitation of natural resources has been a function of human needs, desire, and expectations rather than their equitable distribution among animal and plant species.

According to Bauman (1998), the imbalance between the availability of resources and human consumption evidenced a context in which humanity structured its history based on modernist, materialist, and consumerist assumptions. In this context, societies were structured under the assumptions of modernity.

However, societies did not finish their modern structure when they already presented postmodern symptoms (Bauman, 2002). If the modern structure of society consisted of the idea of progress, growth, utility, exploitation, production, expansion, identity, security, success, confidence, loyalty, and happiness, the postmodern structuring of society now consists of uncertainty, risk, ubiquity, frustration, detachment, fear, terror, stress, and unhappiness. It is a new structuring: a liquid post-structuring or a solid destructuring (BAUMAN, 2005).

In this sense, the structuring of sustainability is liquid due to its unstructured modern foundations of identity, security, and progress. Also, it is a solid post-structuring to appear to be anchored in hedonism and nihilism. However, sustainability seems to be more structured in terms of consumerism.

Precisely, it is in the notion of consumerism that Bauman (2008) explores the structural foundations of a postmodern society. In this regard, sustainability is anchored



to the notion of the market and its corresponding fundamentals of maximizing profits and minimizing costs, reducing uncertainty, and amplifying risks.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this work was the discussion of the category of rationality from approaches that studied the relationship between nature and humanity. The contribution of this work lies in the comparison of definitions and dimensions related to the category of rationality, although the review of the subcategories suggests the extension of the discussion towards knowledge and discourses for sustainability.

In relation to Schmith's (1976) proposal on two levels of discussion, one related to human labor instruments and the other allusive to production, this paper warns that the category of rationality mediates such a relationship between nature and humanity, more precisely between demands and resources. In this mediation, rationality is disseminated in dimensions for observation and analysis in order to explain the differences between consumption and preservation.

In this way, the Heidegger (2006/1889) *dasein* clings to supply and demand. The Weber (1919/1986) instrumental rationality is now known as consumer competencies, the Simon (1957) limited rationality is now called consumer credit, the Giddens (1991) practical conscience is presented as a seasonal offer, the Habermas (1987) communicative rationality is only acquisition in cheap and the Kahnemanian prospective decision It is a merchandise auction.

From the context of sustainability, the structuring of societies is carried out through markets of extraction, transformation, distribution, hoarding, and reuse. As resources become scarce, societies attempt to deconstruct their modern lifestyles in postmodern forms of coexistence. A decrease in energy reserves has its corresponding increase in merchandise without using only consumed once to be reused. The life cycle of natural resources seems to determine the structuring of societies. If natural resources become disposable commodities, humanity seems to have that same end in accelerating the imbalance between saving and waste.

A limit observed in the approaches put forward is the question of structuring conceptions. Schmidt (1976), Heidegger (2006/1889), Weber (1997/1922), Simon (1957), Giddens (1979), Habermas (1987), Kahneman (2003), Bauman (1998) & Leff

(1994) seem to focus their approaches on rationality external to individuals which seem to be determined by the norms, values, and beliefs of their predecessors. In this sense, another limit of the expositions is the relative one to the transcendence of the being in the past, reinforcing the idea that the limits of the sustainability would be in the decisions and current actions, but not in the future ones.

However, it is in rationality, whatever it may be, the possibility of returning to the balance between the needs of humanity and the availability of resources. The rational concepts exposed open a bridge between our decisions and actions of consumption, among our customs, values, beliefs, and reasons for saving and waste. An increase in rationality in humanity would be inversely proportional to the depletion of resources.

If humanity recovers its *dasein* it will have an opportunity to structure new forms and austere lifestyles. The implementation of instrumental rationality in the care of resources would lead to optimized consumption. The information, processed by limited rationality, could be used to reveal the limits of sustainability. An increase in the practical consciousness of the individuals would accelerate the waste, but at the same time, it would show the option of saving. Humanity needs an expansive universe of symbols to produce creative and innovative ideas as alternatives of sustainability and only communicative rationality would make possible such a prospective decision: increase the uncertainty to assume new risks of austerity.

In these scenarios, the environmental rationality proposal proposes the reappropriation of the relationships between nature and humanity. It is a project of social change that will lead to economic and political change, but not without first starting from environmental knowledge and discourses.

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