



UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND

Critical Perspectives and Reflecting on Sustainable Development

Adult Education Promoting Sustainable Development – Module 6



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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union





Content:

1. What is sustainable development? 1 & 2
2. Different worldviews and implications for the concept of sustainable development by Hedlund-de Witt
3. Sustainable development critique 1 & 2
4. Sustainability competences
5. Questions to reflect
6. References



What is sustainable development? (1/2)

The concepts of Sustainability and Sustainable Development are complex, controversial and have political significance

- Hedlund-de Witt (2014) argued that:

"The concept of sustainable development does not articulate what needs to be sustained, developed, or how, and is consequently intersubjective and intercultural"

Also, sustainable development can mean different things for different people, i.e. individual's internalized worldview can have an impact on how the concept is understood (slides 4 and 5)





What is sustainable development? (2/2)

It has also been argued that neoliberal assumptions have pervaded even the notion of "sustainability", since neoliberalism has become a hegemonic discourse (Holford 2016, 544)

☞ Discourse of "the common sense"



NEOLIBERALISM



Different worldviews and implications for the concept of sustainable development by Hedlund-de Witt (2014) [\(Link to full article\)](#)

Table 2. A tentative overview of how different worldviews understand “development” and “quality of life”, and inferring what this may mean for their understanding of the concept of sustainable development.

Potential Views of SD Worldviews	Notion of Development	Quality of Life	Implications for the Concept of Sustainable Development
Traditional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclined to be critical of development and change; - Focus on conservation and preservation of the tradition; - Particularly critical of materialist/consumerist notions of development; - Potentially critical attitude towards science and technology; - Likely informed by how important traditional or religious leaders and authorities conceptualize development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on family and local community; - Traditional values like sobriety, humility, conformity, sacrifice, security, obedience; service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on conservation of “the commons” - Potential appeal to “preserving God’s Creation” - Oriented to the local rather than the global environment - Potential willingness to make personal sacrifices for the well-being of family or community - Boutelier/Castells environmental types of “Defense of own space” and “Responsible commons harvester.”
Modern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Views development and progress positively, in an unproblematic way; - Development primarily understood as economic, material development; - Celebrates science and technology; sees it as ultimate path to development or progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on independent individuality; - Rational-secular, materialist values, like power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on development of science and technology for sustainable solutions; - Emphasis on market-based solutions, win-win solutions; - Potential appeal to economic motives for sustainability; - Potential willingness to invest in science, technology, and sustainable business; - Boutelier/Castells environmental type of “Conservation.”



Different worldviews and implications for the concept of sustainable development by Hedlund-de Witt (2014) [\(Link to full article\)](#)

Potential Views of SD Worldviews	Notion of Development	Quality of Life	Implications for the Concept of Sustainable Development
Postmodern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical of development; tends to problematize and deconstruct it as an oppressive narrative; - Emphasizes what and who is excluded from or marginalized by “development”; - Often “anti-modern” sentiments; - Frequently emphasizes the shadow-sides of science and technology, and the way they serve vested interests; - Emphasizes ways of knowing beyond the rational-empirical methods of modern science. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on unique individuality; - Self-expression, postmaterialist values like creativity, imagination, emancipation, openness to change, self-direction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on inclusion and emancipation of marginalized voices; - Emphasis on fundamental changes needed in society as a whole, in the entire “Western industrial complex”; - Oriented to the global rather than the local environment; - Potential willingness for change of lifestyle; - Boutelier/Castells environmental type of “Green politics” and “Save the planet.”
Integrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Endorses idea of development but emphasizes other forms of development, e.g., cultural, psychological, and spiritual; - Attempts to include achievements of modernity (<i>i.e.</i>, science and technology, economic and social progress), while overcoming its shadow-sides (<i>i.e.</i>, cultural oppression and marginalization, exploitation of nature); - Often holds to an evolutionary, spiritual-unitive notion of development (“consciousness evolution,” “cultural evolution”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on embedded, relational individuality; - Self-expression and self-transcendence values, like universalism, benevolence, inner growth, self-actualization, interconnectedness, service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on personal growth, change in consciousness or mentality, different ways of relating to nature; - Emphasis on integration and synthesis of different interests and perspectives; - Attempts to integrate local and global, by applying global ethic to local stewardship practices; - Potential willingness for change of lifestyle and of self; - Boutelier/Castells environmental type of “Counter-culture” and “Deep ecology.”



Sustainable Development Critique (1/2)

Post-Development theory – Arturo Escobar (1992)

The development discourse, or the widespread idea of development that we know today, is in its uttermost Eurocentric. Premises of development should be questioned, and nations of the global south should promote non-western alternatives of what constitutes a thriving society.

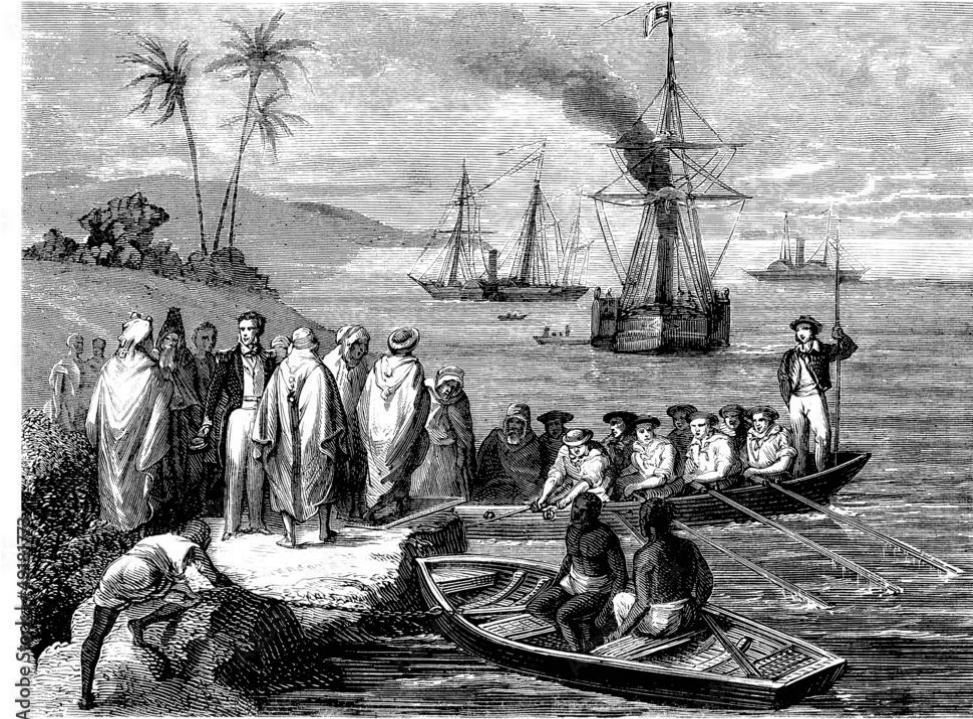


"Seven decades after World War II, certain fundamentals have not changed. Global inequality remains severe, both between and within nations. Environmental devastation and human dislocation, driven by political as well as ecological factors, continues to worsen. These are symptoms of the failure of "development". " **Arturo Escobar (2018)**



Sustainable Development Critique (2/2)

- Quijano (2000) and Dussel (2000) associate the development of wealthy nations with the hegemony of European countries and colonialism, which led to a massive exploitation of other countries
- Some authors criticize the ultimate association between development and wealth of a nation-state in the categorization as developed, developing and underdeveloped; they suggest models that include other criteria such as happiness, education levels, clean environment and so on. (Khokhar & Serajuddin, 2015, Rosalsky, 2020)





Sustainability Competences

As a complementary perspective for the sustainability critique:

- Arjen E.J. Wals (2011), proposes that environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD) should focus on **capacity building and critical thinking** (=emancipatory perspective to learning) instead of just trying to change students' behaviors (=instrumental perspective to learning)
 - Wals argues that *"One must be careful about using education as a tool to influence human behaviour in a particular direction because doing so contradicts the essence of education."* (p. 178)
- Learn more about the competence perspective: [\(PDF\) Learning Our Way to Sustainability \(researchgate.net\)](#)



Questions for reflection

- What kind of world would you like to pass to future generations? You can think about different aspects of sustainability (social, cultural, environmental, economic etc.) Do you think other people perceive sustainable development the same way you do?
- Hedlund de Witt (2014) presents different worldviews. To which worldview do you relate the most? How do you think it affects your understanding of sustainable development?
- What do you think about the competence perspective to sustainability?
- What do you think about Arturo Escobar's critique towards sustainable development?
- You can think the questions on your own, discuss with another student or include your reflections on the learning task.



References

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References (2/2)

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