

“THERE IT’S POETRY, HERE IT HURTS”.
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION:
A MATTER OF GLOBAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

“LÀ È POESIA, QUA FA MALE”.
SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILE E TRANSIZIONE ECOLOGICA:
UNA QUESTIONE DI EDUCAZIONE ALLA GIUSTIZIA GLOBALE

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Abstract

In the framework of sustainable development promoted by the 2030 Agenda, the paper aims to lay the knowledge bases to support an advocacy action for the promotion of a political agenda on equality in education, understood as equality of opportunity. Starting from the results of an empirical mixed methods research carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean, the paper highlights the link between sustainable development, climate change and ecological transition emphasizing the urgency of manifest a “pedagogy of indignation” against the structural injustices that characterize our realities, calling out loudly to the right and duty to change the world. The precarious unsustainable condition in which our world finds itself today requires urgently new global and common solutions. The numerous difficulties faced by large sections of the population around the world can only be eliminated if these conditions of vulnerability and disadvantage are made the subject of serious political and educational reflection and consideration.

Nell’ambito dello sviluppo sostenibile promosso dall’Agenda 2030, il contributo intende porre le basi conoscitive per sostenere un’azione di advocacy per la promozione di un’agenda politica sull’uguaglianza nell’educazione, intesa come pari opportunità. Partendo dai risultati di una ricerca empirica a metodi misti condotta in America Latina e nei Caraibi, il contributo mette in luce il legame tra sviluppo sostenibile, cambiamento climatico e transizione ecologica sottolineando l’urgenza di manifestare una “pedagogia dell’indignazione” contro le ingiustizie strutturali che caratterizzano le nostre realtà, invocando a gran voce il diritto e il dovere di cambiare il mondo. La condizione precaria e insostenibile in cui si trova oggi il nostro mondo richiede urgentemente nuove soluzioni globali e comuni. Le numerose difficoltà incontrate da ampie fasce della popolazione nel mondo possono essere eliminate solo se queste condizioni di vulnerabilità e svantaggio sono oggetto di una seria riflessione e considerazione politica ed educativa.

Key-words: sustainable development; ecological transition; global justice education; global well-being; intercultural challenges.

Parole chiave: sviluppo sostenibile; transizione ecologica; educazione alla giustizia globale; benessere globale; sfide interculturali

1. Introduction

The world is moving towards a post-pandemic phase marked by uncertainty, inequalities and ever deeper, ever more global symmetries. The pandemic crisis has in fact exacerbated the already existing inequalities inherent in our planet by increasing socio-economic divergences within and between countries around the world as well as social suffering.

The planet is at risk and with the pandemic, we have received an *ultimatum*. All the signs point towards the unsustainability of our model of development and economic growth: the dispersion of

resources, the upheaval of natural balances and the impact of climate change. With Morin's words we can deduce that: "short-term development is unsustainable. We need a richer and more complex concept of development, which is at the same time material, intellectual, affective, moral" (Morin, 2001, p. 70). The concept of "sustainable development" is at the center of the political agendas of many countries of the world, of news reports and television debates. In fact, the idea that the current development model is no longer sustainable is now widely shared, as the time has come to question the paradigms, schemes, actions, behaviors and perspectives followed up to now. The increased awareness of the vulnerability of our development model invites us to ask ourselves what is the development idea to pursue, the ways in which to implement it and the tools to use to achieve it (Sen, 2013).

2. Which sustainable development? A global intercultural challenge

Nowadays, development is a term that finds its way in the majority of national and international documents and guidelines but historically it has taken on different meanings. The origin of the concept of development roughly coincides with the birth of Western economic thought and with the decolonization process that has affected many countries in the "South of the world". According to this meaning, development and economic growth were associated with the concepts of well-being and wealth while, on the contrary, underdevelopment and poverty presupposed conditions of backwardness, influenced by an economy with low growth rates. Over the decades, the economic perspective has been gradually abandoned to embrace a more complete vision of development, placing the emphasis on the human being, on the person. The adoption of this new paradigm has made it possible to break away from the logic of traditional theories of economic growth to conceive a broader, more complex idea of development that is not limited to income growth but also includes other variables. Over the years, a new concept of development emerges which translates into an idea of a society based on respect for individuals and their "humanity", capable of determining the wealth of a nation on the basis of the opportunities offered to their citizens. These conditions guarantee an opportunity for everyone to be able to live an existence ideally proportional to the value attributed to it. To think of a new model of development we must ask ourselves what life each person wants and can lead, starting from the identification of the freedoms they actually enjoy. Considering the teachings of Amartya Sen, development can and must only be conceived as the expansion of personal freedoms (Sen, 1999). The synthesis of this process is summarized in the concept of sustainable development. Considering the definition used in 1987 in the "*Our Common Future*" report drawn up by the commission chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland (Prime Minister of Norway) of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), we can understand sustainable development as the process aimed at satisfying "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987, p. 16). As can be understood, sustainable development intertwines complex and deeply interconnected issues and processes. From the Brundtland report to date, the concept of sustainable development has further expanded its spectrum of action, assuming different meanings and orientations, including not only aspects related to the environment and ecology, but also embracing the economic and social dimensions. During the Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and, subsequently, with the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development in 2002, the foundations on which to found a system of sustainable development were defined: the social sphere (linked respect for man), the environmental foundation (i.e. the safeguarding of natural resources) and the economic foundation (understood as shared growth and prosperity, which improves the quality of life for everyone).

These requests led the United Nations General Assembly to adopt, on 25 September 2015, the resolution "*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*" and the related

17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), divided into 169 Targets/Goals and 240 indicators to be achieved by the year 2030. The ambitious action program signed by the governments of the 193 UN member countries underlines the commitment by the international community towards a truly sustainable and adequate response to today's crises and emergencies affecting our societies (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The 2030 Agenda must be configured as the "roadmap for a shared change on a large scale" (Sandrini, 2021, p. 3).

This is the great challenge that, as citizens of the world, we face. We must think of a "global" and "fair" sustainable development towards society as a whole and individuals as one. A transition and transformation that implies a radical change in the system, which leaves no one behind.

The challenges contained within the Agenda 2030 require that current development models be called into question, embracing a broader vision of sustainability, guaranteeing equal conditions to everyone, locally and globally, in addition to equal opportunities.

We need to adopt a 360-degree approach to sustainability that is able to combat the global structural injustice created by our own economic model of growth and globalization. A paradigm shift is essential which must lead us to recognize that the development model adopted to date, if not radically modified, will lead us towards a situation of unsustainability, jeopardizing our very existence. We cannot think of promoting sustainability if we do not question our current development models. The assumption of this critical perspective must push us to consider the ecological limits of development, adopting a new cultural orientation. Hence the question of how to achieve sustainability from a practical point of view. If we consider that the processes of change are not neutral and have differentiating impacts on different social groups (Greig, Hulme, Turner, 2007), the questions we must ask ourselves are: sustainability for whom, for what and under which circumstances? The main goal is to promote a new paradigm capable of responding to this challenges ensuring respectful, fair, peaceful and sustainable communities.

3. Methods

Climate change, loss of biodiversity, extreme events and man-made disasters are probably the most evident effects of the overexploitation of natural resources and the unsustainability of the development model we have created.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022), vulnerability of ecosystems and people to climate change differs substantially among and within regions all over the world. In fact, regions and people with considerable development constraints have high vulnerability to climatic hazards. From an educational point of view it is therefore important to testify what is happening in the differing contexts to better understand the complexity of the phenomena. The case presented in this essay examines the reality of the Dominican Republic, an island state located in the Greater Antilles.

Specifically, on the methodological level, the research was carried out according to an extensive multi and mixed-method perspective starting from the assumption that, in order to approach a vast field such as that of development policies, it is necessary to adopt an integrated posture and vision. The research study carried out in the summer/autumn 2022 by the writer was focused on understanding the educational dimension of the cooperation for sustainable development in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. According to a pragmatic perspective, from the analysis of the data obtained during the first qualitative sequential exploratory phase carried out in the Dominican Republic, there have been main categories of meaning identified that describe the phenomenon and the link between development and sustainability from an educational point of view.

The multilevel empirical research for the dimensions investigated, the territorial realities and the targets involved generated several results that allow to understand this complex research topic. Specifically, the research was carried out in Ensanche Capotillo, a Sector in the city of Santo Domingo

in the Dominican Republic and involved ten community representatives and organizations who know the local situation and the reality of the high-density communities that are living in vulnerable conditions along the riverbanks Ozama and Isabela rivers, a high-risk area in the Distrito Nacional vulnerable to floods and landslides. The face-to-face interviews with the ten key informants had the aim of framing the reality in order to bring out the main issues to be analyzed. The conversations collected are around 45-60 minutes in length and all the interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder, transcribed verbatim. The topics dealt with during the interview mainly concerned: local problems, the approach used to address current social emergencies, the meaning attributed to the concept of sustainable development and the type of ecological transformation that can be implemented in that specific context.

The qualitative phase of the research used the Grounded Theory in a constructivist way as a method of investigation (Glaser, Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) and the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool (Atkinson, 1998). After completing the transcription work of the interviews, the material collected was analyzed to bring out, in an inductive way, the first “categories” (open coding). In this phase, after having read the interviews several times, the most significant phrases and concepts were identified, assigning to each element a label. The approach used aimed at identifying similarities and differences by constantly comparing the words expressed by the local key informants. Memos were written throughout the entire analysis and included thoughts about codes, categories and concepts.

4. Sustainable development and climate change: pedagogical reflections from a research study in Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is a presidential republic located in the heart of the Caribbean Sea. The “Hispaniola” in which it is located welcomes two states: the eastern two thirds of the Caribbean island are occupied by the Dominican Republic while the remaining part of the territory is occupied by the Republic of Haiti. In recent years, the Dominican Republic has experienced enviable macroeconomic stability, establishing itself as one of the most dynamic economies in the entire region. Despite being a small island state, it has a thriving economy derived from the industries of the export processing zones which has led it to reach one of the highest growth rates in Latin America and the Caribbean in the last 25 years (Murillo Garcia, 2019). Dominican economic development supported by progressive economic growth, an exchange rate and inflation that is maintained at uniform levels and political stability has shown itself to be resilient and proactive thanks to its excellent performance, even during the pandemic period, acquiring the title of best country in the world for tourism recovery (UNWTO, 2022). Despite this exceptional performance, the government of the Dominican Republic finds itself having to respond to multiple prevailing needs and facing enormous challenges, primarily social inequality, for which the country loses more than a fifth in Human Development Index.

As reported in the Second National Voluntary Report of 2021 on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda “*Crecimiento con equidad y respeto al medioambiente*”, the high economic growth experienced by the country in recent decades, doesn’t meet the expectations of the country, and subsequently is not the hoped-for results, producing little improvement in the living conditions and well-being of the most vulnerable members of society (Comisión ODS República Dominicana, 2021).

In fact, even today 23,4% of the Dominican people live in conditions of poverty and 3,5% in conditions of extreme poverty. Of the 10,535,535 million inhabitants, about 83% are concentrated in cities while about 17% live in the rural areas of the country, where the incidence rates of major poverty are recorded (Ministerio de Agricultura de la Republica Dominicana, 2021).

Moreover, another emergency facing the Dominican Republic is the issue of climate change. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2017 (Kreft, Eckstein, Melchior, 2016, p. 23), due to its

position and geographical characteristics, the Dominican Republic is one of the countries in the world most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, highly exposed to natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes, tidal waves, droughts and floods), which frequently create emergency situations.

Like many other Caribbean countries, the Dominican Republic, due to its island conditions, is affected by rising temperatures, rising sea levels and extreme rainfall variability. In the Dominican Republic, during the hurricane season, in the period between the end of August and the beginning of November, the inhabitants who live in vulnerable zone, sometimes in makeshift houses made of cardboard, sheet metal and wood, near rivers and streams are completely overwhelmed by these disasters, considerably worsening their conditions of life.

In this case, development and climate change go hand in hand. In fact, there is a strict relationship between social inequality and climate change:

“...now all the problems of poverty are due to climate change. All flood problems are due to climate change. All the problems of drought are due to climate change, global warming... but the development model is not considered. The basic problem is not touched upon. Now the simplest thing is to blame climate change. Not to the social foundations of capitalism, to the development models that have been imposed on us that do not allow us to develop... now all the fault lies with the sun. An excuse to avoid the causes of the problem”.

Hurricanes, floods, landslides are very frequent but obviously they do not affect the members of society in the same way. In fact, we know that most of these natural disasters have a greater impact on the most vulnerable communities, on those who, due to a variety of factors, live in rural areas and in urban areas particularly exposed to these phenomena.

Living in an area at risk means not being able to access basic services, increased exposure to the spread of diseases related to the hygiene of living environments, considerably limiting one's development opportunities and life alternatives, leading to loss of personal belongings and their homes. All of a sudden your “world and livelihood” can disappear.

The case of climate change is particularly functional to illustrate the development gaps existing between the different parts of the hemisphere (Anderson, 2012). Taking up the metaphor of the “butterfly effect”, the panorama that emerges from this interview is very emblematic:

“Climate change is something natural on the planet. This situation affects us all, it affects everyone... but in different ways. The rain is not the same for those who live in the central polygon of the capital, in one of the towers in the Malecon area, in the Mirador neighborhood where everyone wants to live. The rain is not the same for those who live in a building of this size, which is almost romantic when the rain falls and you are there at your window watching the rain fall... it is not the same for the lady who lives close to the river... where the rain hurts. Here the rain is poetry, there it hurts. So don't tell me that rain affects everyone the same. It is not the same for everyone... when there is a hurricane and the house falls on people. Houses made of cardboard, of wood, built by the community themselves. Fortunately, we live in safe and protected places. But we are privileged. Not everyone has the same luck, the same chances, opportunities. So it is not true that a hurricane affects everyone in the same way”.

Despite being all together in the same storm, we are not all in the same ship but we travel in very different boats. Climate change does not affect everyone equally. In this sense, climate change exposes part of the global population in a situation of vulnerability to a condition of “human frailty that entails a fragility of rights” (Milani, 2020, p. 447). When we talk about sustainability, about climate change, about ecological transition we must remember that these phenomena and processes will have different impacts on a global level and that these impacts will mainly depend on the development models we carry out. We urgently need a paradigm shift capable of questioning the economic and financial rules that have generated the current situation. Education could help us to find new paths and solutions, to shape our view and our approach to this issue, to provide new basis

for alternative ways of thinking. As can be seen from the words of the interviewees, we find ourselves operating in contexts in which a large number of people worldwide are subjected to a system of domination and deprivation of resources and opportunities (Pogge, 2008). It is necessary to become aware of the fact that each of us is partly responsible for this ethically, culturally, socially and ecologically unsustainable situation and, precisely for this reason, each of us is required to act, to contribute to change, to commit to fight the processes structures that produce injustice globally (Young, 2006). We must strive to build a new social contract based on the win-win approach, to accompany a transition towards more just, inclusive, democratic, ecological and resilient societies, which guarantee equal opportunities and conditions of well-being to all.

Borrowing the words of Paulo Freire, today more than ever, we are called to manifest a “pedagogy of indignation” against the structural injustices that characterize our societies, working for an ethical-political dream that allows us to overcome the unfair reality (Freire, 2022, p. 51). It is therefore necessary to make explicit a new reflective posture capable of developing critical approaches that solicit other educational and cultural orientations. An occasion to resist any universal definition of what the best conception should be, problematizing “our own usual perspective, grounded in an individualistic and Eurocentric assumption” (Pescarmona, Gozzelino, 2020, p. 246).

Intercultural education today must measure itself against this paradigm, denouncing the reductive and antisocial traits of dominant thought by intercepting other messages, meanings and perspectives (Mortari, 2018, p. 17).

Today more than ever, especially in this post-pandemic phase, the issue of inequalities are persistent and strongly condition the experience of precariousness, fragility and vulnerability that we are all experiencing (OXFAM, 2022).

“The Dominican Republic has divine, privileged geographical conditions. Here, where you sow something, even on the street, that is born, it grows, the earth is very fertile. We could be, with the quality of the land we have, the suppliers of all the Caribbean islands. However, currently, we find ourselves having to import chicken, garlic, onion... and the funny thing is that we produce all these traditional products. We shouldn't be importing anything from anyone. But that dominant development model made us produce for others so that those others can develop. An example? We produce cocoa, one of the best, and then we send it to Switzerland so that they can sell the most expensive chocolate in the world. With the quality of the land we have, we could have it all. However, the Dominican Republic has one of the highest malnutrition rates in the entire Caribbean area. Therefore a development model must take into account all these dimensions: the economic, social, environmental and cultural component. Another example? We are an island and in our cultural tradition we are not used to eating seafood. The sea is there, fifty meters away. But we are not in the habit, it is not part of our culture to eat fish or seafood. Of course, also because to eat an half kilo of salmon you have to shell out 500 pesos. 10 dollars for a packet of raw salmon... because you need to take it home, to cook it obviously, because it costs much more at the restaurant. If you want to eat lobster in a reastaurant... wait a minute! Actually, who eats lobster in this country? Who can afford it? We are an island and we live with our backs to the sea. This model of development influences our dignity as a people, it influences our culture, our development, our possibilities”.

Current development paths are unsustainable and the time available to reverse this trend is running out. The precarious unsustainable condition in which our world finds itself today requires urgently new global and common solutions. Only if we adopt a real intercultural approach to the issues of sustainable development we will be able to formulate new socio-economic and educational policies that recognize the limits of one's own understanding of the world, that incorporate other realities, experiences, perspectives and life views, that support real opportunities for achieving quality of life for all (Tarozzi, 2021). The numerous difficulties faced by large sections of the population around the world can only be eliminated if these conditions of vulnerability and disadvantage are made the subject of serious political and educational reflection and consideration. To think of a new model of

development we must ask ourselves what life individuals want and can lead, starting from the identification of the freedoms they actually enjoy. To paraphrase the words of Amartya Sen, development can only be the expansion the possibilities of choice of subjects (Sen, 1999).

Starting from this assumption, it is necessary to investigate the life contexts of the subjects, going on to explain the barriers and social policies that hinder the full development of individuals and that indeed reproduce situations of vulnerability and inequality by exploring different conceptions of human dignity and well-being. Formulating global justice in terms of real capacities and opportunities means seeking information on how individuals actually live in order to understand what objective conditions of well-being and what social policies to implement to promote equity, to facilitate the expansion of the capabilities of people. We must fight so that every human being has equal opportunities of social participation, in terms of equality of capability, to acquire those fundamental skills that can serve to concretely realize the substantial freedom of each to be and to do what has value and meaning for him/her.

The goal is to offer a large range of possibilities and opportunities for development, allowing for exercising and practicing one's skills (Nussbaum, 2011).

In this context, the "*Declaration on the right to development*" approved with resolution 41/128 on 04 December 1986 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, seems to be the focal point from which to start again, to imagine and build a new idea of development global centered on the common good that makes it possible to realize the rights and freedoms of all. According to this declaration, the right to development represents an inalienable right of the human being and the person is considered as a protagonist within the development processes. In this sense, the revolutionary significance of the right to development consists precisely in the fact that it jointly considers both the individual and the collective/community dimension. In fact, in article no. 2 of the Declaration it is specified that:

"All human beings have a responsibility for development, individually and collectively, taking into account the need for full respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as their duties to the community, which alone can ensure the free and complete fulfilment of the human being, and they should therefore promote and protect an appropriate political, social and economic order for development".

Today more than ever it is necessary to finally reach the implementation of this right to think about a new approach and a new development model.

5. Towards a new educational paradigm: cultivate a common culture of sustainability

"We can achieve greater awareness of climate change and adopt more sustainable development models only by strengthening educational policies [...] Education guides and shapes social and economic systems and its main mission is to promote knowledge of the complexity of world we live in, providing people the tools to act for change".

The message launched by Patrizio Bianchi, Italian Minister of Education, during the joint event of the Ministers of Education and the Environment "*Together for tomorrow: education and climate action*" is significant: we need to transform our current (in)sustainable development models by investing in effective educational and training action. Thinking about an education that looks at the challenges of tomorrow means planning educational actions that fall on a large scale and that have an impact on all citizens. Indeed, within societies, no real transition and transformation can occur without the participation of its citizens. To achieve a truly sustainable development for everyone, it is necessary to act on the processes and behaviors of everyone and at various levels: individuals, communities, institutions and governments. Sustainability is achieved only if it is shared adequately by everyone and if it is implemented on several levels. In the perspective of the pedagogy of human

development (Malavasi, 2010), to create a more sustainable world, it is necessary to educate and train the new generations (and not only them) so that they become the main protagonists of the processes of change. The citizens of tomorrow need to acquire and develop knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that make them aware of the contribution they can offer to the sustainable development of their communities. It is necessary to focus on educational sustainability that is able to spread a global awareness that facilitates empathy with different social challenges and a greater sense of individual and collective responsibility towards the other and the environment in which they are inserted (Tomarchio, D'Aprile, 2018, p. 153).

In this sense, education has a leading role in building a better world, committed to providing a comprehensive training to future generations (Riva, 2018, p. 48). A training that can only be transnational, dynamic, ecological, equal, democratic, respectful, inclusive and attentive to the needs of all, dedicated to the protection of nature and resources, open to sharing, committed to the local but with an eye turned towards the whole world. Making the younger generation aware of the global injustices that exist in the world and reflect on possible solutions must be the educational challenge of the twenty-first century. Educating future generations in sustainable development will therefore mean supporting them in the development of a new lifestyle, a renewed mindset, a critical ethical-moral approach that allows them to acquire the skills necessary to act consciously, to make informed decisions, to interpret the different social realities, to enhance critical thinking refusing the dominant discourse, to act responsibly towards others and the environment (Prisco, 2021, p. 164). The panorama described demonstrates a context characterized by lights and shadows, in which progress in the educational field is noted, as well as the persistence of important differences at the basis of enormous challenges for socio-educational policies, in guaranteeing the right to equal opportunities for all.

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