

El Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja (Spain) — Sustainable Development in the Shadow of a Metropolis

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Abstract

The authors recall the genesis of the term of “sustainable development” and its complex evolution over the past decades until its contemporary meaning covering humans and their economy and culture, the natural environment, and the cultural landscape. The examples analysed in the text are two municipalities in the New Castile Community of Madrid (Spain) and their capitals: El Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja, which are hidden in the shadow of Madrid and have been declining until recent times. Over the past several years, they and their surroundings have been experiencing a period of peaceful and harmonious development, which can be associated with sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable development, countryside, rural areas, landscape, social capital, local products

Beginnings

The concept of sustainable development has undergone various ups and downs, especially when it concerned rural and peripheral areas or developing countries. It was defined (and redefined) multiple times and its meaning changed with time and research of the problem (also as the result of the discovery of its complex development.) Even today, near the end of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) proclaimed by the UN, it is still controversial.¹

The idea of sustainable development was born almost fifty years ago, in the late 1960s, during an international discussion over multiple forums, involving scientists, politicians, and—which is very important in this case—journalists. This discussion was widely promoted and commented by the media and had the support of the United Nations, which was becoming more and more interested in the condition of the Earth’s natural environment. The inspirations for the discussion included the information concerning various industrial disasters, which released toxic substances into the environment, produced local contamination and victims among the workers and local residents. This information was leaked to the public and eagerly magnified by the mass media, although back then no one referred to these events as ecological disasters.

Two documents, nomen omen reports, played a particular role in inspiring research in this area and broad discussion on the new issues: the report entitled “The Problems of Human Environment” internationally presented in 1969 by U Thant, who at the time served as the UN Secretary-General,² and the so-called Club of Rome Report entitled “The Limits of Growth”, which was published in the early 1970s (Meadows et al. 1973). Both of these documents were somewhat a reaction to the challenges resulting from the noticeable high demographic growth pace of the time (there was talk of a “demographic explosion” and demographic bomb”), intense urbanisation, rapid

1. See: UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014. The DESD at a glance, available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001416/141629e.pdf>.

2. See: “The problems of human environment”. Report of the UN Secretary – General U Thant dated 26. V. 1969, available [in Polish] at <http://archive.is/ryLgY>.

consumption of finite natural resources (mainly fuels), rising environmental degradation, increasing demand for basic needs of the growing population, and the escalating imbalance between the Earth's natural and socioeconomic systems. Furthermore, they both attempted to propose and develop an international, global strategy of counteracting the present and future hazards.

The results of the research from numerous fields of science (including geography) inspired by the aforementioned reports, the results of discussions conducted at countless scientific conferences and seminars attended by the representatives of various scientific fields, politicians, and journalists, and various other campaigns and programmes (e.g., MAB) had great influence on the formation of the contemporary concept of sustainable development (Zabłocki 2002, 215) but the road to it was still a long one.

The so-called Club of Rome report was focused on the fundamental variables of development: population, food production, use of natural resources, industrial production, and environment pollution (Secomski 1973). Based on the results of computer simulations and extended feedback analysis, the authors proposed that further growth potential would end and the evolution of human civilisations would cease before the end of the 21st century if the current (late 1960s) trends of population growth, food production, use of natural minerals, industrial production, and environment pollution would be preserved.

Like U Thant's report, the Club of Rome Report omits the term of "sustainable development." Its authors refer to the world as a whole, although their analyses mainly concern the nature and directions of development in the conditions of well-developed capitalist countries (Secomski 1973, 8–12). The Club of Rome Report does not refer to development in scale of individual regions or localities. It does refer to the need to provide humanity with controlled development leading to the "state of global balance" with "zero growth" and "state equality." The authors of the Second Report for the Club of Rome, entitled "Mankind at the Turning Point" (Mesarovič and Pestel 1977) replaced the concept of "zero growth" with the "limited growth theory," which definitely brought it closer to the later depiction of sustainable development. Some researchers see the limited growth theory as the "precursor to the theory of permanent and sustainable development."³

The sessions of the UN Stockholm Conference (1972), which were crucial to defining sustainable development, were conducted under the expressive and quickly popularised slogan of "Only One Earth," which is eagerly referenced to this day, and, other than the U Thant report and the First Report for the Club of Rome, were fundamental in the future development of the sustainable development concept. Over the course of the sessions, environment protection – which was the main theme of the conference – was raised to the significance of fundamental state functions. The term of "environment protection policy," which was deemed as an integral element of state policy, also entered common circulation.

The conference included the development of rules for the purposes of the environment protection policy, referred to as the so-called Stockholm Declaration. Its preamble contained the suggestion that "both current and future generations should care for environment protection,"⁴ which was important to the concept of sustainable development. The conference also indicated the need to appoint a special UN agenda to tend to environment protection issues, which was established in December of 1972 under the effect of the UN General Assembly Resolution. This is the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the purpose of which is the UN's promotion and performance of actions in scope of environment protection and permanent monitoring of its condition throughout the world.

The Stockholm Declaration established the foundations for the formation and development of environment protection law. The final document summarised the previous initiatives and provided impulse for new ones, which were oriented towards sustainable development,⁵ especially through such issues as legislation for adequate life in the environment, liability for protection and improvement of the environment for the current and future generations, human responsibility for

3. See: Anna Zajęcka. Polityka zrównoważonego rozwoju, [a:] http://mfiles.pl/pl/index.php/Polityka_zr%C3%B3wnowa%C5%BConego%20rozwoju.

4. Ibidem.

5. Ibidem.

natural heritage, the battle with polluted ecosystems, and the ecological policy (Machowski 2003). However, it was the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), commonly referred to as the “Brundtland Commission” from the name of its chairperson, Ms Gro Harlem Brundtland, established in 1983 under the initiative of the UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, which developed the concept of sustainable development and published the report entitled “Our Common Future” in 1987.

The Brundtland Commission’s Report defines sustainable development as “development, which meets the main needs of all humans and preserves, protects, and rejuvenates the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and without exceeding the long-term capacity of the Earth’s ecosystem.” The “needs” discussed by the Report are the main needs of the poor, which need to be raised to top priority; the “ability” is the idea of limited potential and resistance of the Earth’s natural environment (which also appeared in the First Report for the Club of Rome).

The World Commission on Environment and Development noticed that humanity achieved a level of prosperity, which could be sustained only with appropriate management. Such management covers consciously established relations among economic growth, care for the environment, and living quality (including human health). The postulate of sustainable development means the acceptance of economic growth oriented towards social cohesion (including the reduction of social delamination, equal opportunity, and prevention of marginalisation and discrimination) and improvement of the quality of natural environment. Today, sustainable development is also referred to as permanent development or eco development (Żylicz 1998).

Close to the idea of sustainable development is the concept of livelihoods or sustainable livelihoods (Chambers and Conway 1992; Stenning et al. n.d.), often present in geographical research on poverty and underdevelopment (Czerny 2014). A significant role in it is played by the social importance of assets (the asset-based livelihood approach) that exist in the community, such as natural resources (environment), people skills, abilities, traditions, culinary habits, etc. For the livelihood it is beneficial if the assets remain constant or are increasing (growing, their quality is improving), which contributes to a successful existence—less prone to crisis, shock, disaster (Chambers and Conway 1992; Czerny 2014). Such an enriched understanding of sustainable development fully meets the objectives of our work.

1 The two small towns and their surroundings

Our reflection on sustainable development on a local scale, including the relations binding towns, regions, and residents with the surrounding natural environment, was based on two municipalities (municipios) and their capitals: El Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja, located in central Spain. They were chosen from among several similar municipalities after consulting the geographers of the Departamento de Geografía Humana de la Facultad de Geografía e Historia de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid.⁶ In our opinion, these cities and their inhabitants, seen through the prism of the relationship between man and the environment, seen through the values of the people—their abilities, skills, culinary traditions, and seen through the traditions, of which they are carriers (and many other assets), are suitable examples of sustainable development and in particular of the concept of sustainable livelihoods (Chambers and Conway 1992).

Our field surveys were aimed at the identification of the geographical location and surroundings of both towns, their structure and physiognomy, and covered numerous conversations and meetings with the locals, including extensive interviews to obtain information about the towns and their phenomena and processes. The conversations and interviews were conducted in the streets, in stores, in bodegas (wineries), and in museums, as well as restaurants. We also gathered an extensive photo documentation, which covers both the towns and their close surroundings. The research was conducted in May of 2011 during a scholarship trip realised within the scope of the ERASMUS programme. After returning to Warsaw, the materials from the field surveys were completed with data obtained from various publications.

6. We owe special thanks to Dr Consuleo Canto Fresno.

The surveyed towns are located in New Castile, not far from each other (about 10 km), in the southwest part of Comunidad de Madrid, just a short distance away from the capital city of Madrid. The cities are on the historical trading route running along the valley of the Tagus River. The first settlements in this region predate the Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula (197 BC) and date back to at least the Neolithic era.

This part of New Castile has always been an agricultural region. The fertile and well-hydrated oases (vegas) in the valley of the Tagus and its tributaries hold great significance to the locals. They served to cultivate mainly cereals and vegetables. Their diversity grew considerably following the discovery of America and the import of crops previously unknown in Europe.⁷ The local plants cultivated outside of the river valleys included olive trees, grapevines, aniseeds, and numerous herbs and spices used in local cuisine and determining its authenticity to this day. Other activities included beekeeping (especially in the municipality of Colmenar de Oreja)⁸ and livestock breeding. Farming was complemented by pottery—a trade practiced locally for thousands of years—and the exploitation of the local limestone for construction purposes, which continues to this day. The history of the region's agriculture and economy was volatile, determined by wars and times of peace. There were more bad times than good times. A certain improvement occurred in the second half of the 20th century, after the reinstatement of monarchy and Spain's joining the EEC.

The dreamy, declining, and depleted by emigration towns of New Castile came alive again (most importantly, emigration dropped and both towns recorded a slight population growth, visible mostly in Colmenar de Oreja).⁹ In recent years, both municipalities underwent a metamorphosis—they became attractive to tourists; madrileños, the inhabitants of Castilla-La Mancha and central Spain, as well as foreign tourists seeking new travel destinations. One of the advantages of Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja turned out to be their proximity and easy access to Madrid, Toledo, and other cities of the region, as well as their unique landscape. Contrary to appearance, both municipalities, especially their cabeceras (capitals), have plenty to offer for visitors, especially those qualified as “cultural tourists,” even those who are not aware of their consideration of cultural aspects (Przybyś 2008).

The towns offer their visitors a charming medieval settlement landscape, which accompanies them at all times. In both cases, the buildings are arranged around a small round plaza – Plaza Mayor, which is used for both religious and civil holidays and is transformed into a bullfighting arena twice a year. There is little space surrounding the Plaza Mayor, the houses are close, and they all have arcades. There are other buildings farther from the plaza, including valued monuments of sacral (churches, monasteries) and defensive (the castle, ramparts, most of which are from the 16th and 17th centuries) architecture, the list of which would go on and on.

The towns, especially El Chinchón, are commonly known for their colourful location, history, arts, culinary traditions, and the variety of flavours offered by the local cuisine.¹⁰ Tourists perceive both towns individually, uniquely. If Chinchón gathers more glory from the visitors, it is because of its size (it is almost half the size of Colmenar de Oreja and may be slightly more colourful and intimate). In our opinion (and in the opinions of others), Chinchón is filled with a peculiar charm, and when you walk around it, you can discover small treasures on every step: a twisting lane so narrow that only a mule with a small load (or bicycle today) could pass through it; an alley, where someone embedded a marble column in a house wall, or a bakery with delicious, out-of-this-world pastry. Other important attractions of the towns include the local restaurants and the “bodegas,” the local wineries, some of which have hundreds of years of tradition and rooms for wine tasting (which are often inside caves created in rock). Then there are the familiar and alluring wine

7. Following the discovery of America and import of plants unknown in the Old World, the local plantations started growing tomatoes, various peppers, cucurbit vegetables: including pumpkins, and beans. The new cereals included corn.

8. See: Información de Colmenar de Oreja, [a@:] <http://todosobremadrid.com/municipios/colmenar-de-oreja/municipio-informacion>.

9. In 1996, the population of Chinchón was 3 849. It rose to 4 868 in 2005, 5 344 in 2010, and 5 428 in 2013; the population of Colmenar de Oreja grew from 5 452 in 2002 to 8 424 in 2013—datos demográficos municipales, published at <http://www.madrid.org/cs> [accessed 2014.07.07].

10. See: Chinchón (Madrid): ajos y anís, [a@:] <http://www.ganasdeviajar.com/2011/09/chinchon-madrid-ajos-y-anis/>.

festivals (Feria del vino del Colmenar de Oreja, Feria del vino y del anís del Chinchón) and other cultural happenings, like the three-weekend long contest for the best tapas (Ruta de la Tapa de Chinchón) made with the best local products by the dozens of local chefs, which attract hundreds of tourists seeking new sensations.

Nature in the Castilla–La Mancha region is generous. The diverse ecosystems and rich natural heritage are among the biggest in the country, which is manifested in the great scenic landscape diversity. The terrains outside of the towns are only green in the winter and spring. During the summer, the landscape is a greyish brown with spots of subdued green, where the small hills intertwine with the valleys, plains, and small marshlands. It is cut with field trails leading between the grape, olive, and plum plantations and the fields. There are tree complexes within the fields and plantations, which serve as refuges for birds and other small animals and are visible from the distance. Besides the attributes offered by the towns of Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja, the abundant and diverse landscapes of this part of Castilla–La Mancha are perceived as the biggest attractions of ecotourism and rural tourism, both of which are experiencing an unprecedented evolution, which is expressed in both the rising numbers of tourists and the growing hotel accommodations. Tourism is becoming the most dynamic sector in the development of the Castilla–La Mancha rural regions. This is because of the landscape attributes and charm of the medieval towns, as well as the growing social cohesion of the locals resulting from the research, which is evidenced in the drive to broad cooperation for the benefits of development (which also involves family bonds) through preventing discrimination, reducing social delamination, equal opportunity, improvement of the natural environment quality, and skilful promotion.

2 Sustainable development

As already mentioned, both municipalities underwent a metamorphosis—they became attractive tourist destinations, which stimulates economic development (through the development of such services such restaurants, hotels, and trade) and requires care of the material culture monuments, the values of spiritual culture, and the natural environment attracting the visitors. They owe it all to their inhabitants. All tourists can experience this metamorphosis. With a little curiosity, you can discover the history of this land and the relations between the locals and their region in the scorching sun of the Plaza Mayor, in the dark alleys, and the nicely smelling meals served in the local restaurants. Each owner (manager) of a restaurant, hotel, bar, bakery, butchery, each garlic or anisette salesman has relations with all other locals, the suppliers of various products to the local market. These are either family (which is very common) or economic (business) relations based on long acquaintanceships, common business, and trust—Sociedad de Cosecheros.¹¹ They have been evolving over decades, including the time after the local authorities neglected to capitalise on the opportunity of industrialisation and when the Spanish government started to promote tourism under the sun and the Mediterranean beaches, and definitely precede the term “social capital,” which was coined by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986) and popularised by James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

Tourism, which has equal appreciation for the local natural and cultural landscape, found the municipalities of El Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja to be filled with attractions and simultaneously became the main factor stimulating its development. Both towns serve as the start and end of numerous tourist trails (e.g., Ruta por el Tajo, the ecological trail of La Ruta del Cristo, Ruta de las Fuentes), which allow the tourists to get better acquainted with the cultural landscape and the people living within and contributing to it. The development of tourism engages most of the locals and creates a market for the local products, mainly food, as well as jobs. In recent years, the number of houses offering accommodation in Castilla–La Mancha surpassed 1 600, taking the number of total accommodations to 11 300.¹² There are over 20 operating hotels in El Chinchón alone.

11. See: Manuel Carrasco Moreno: “Contribución de la Sociedad de Cosecheros al Patrimonio histórico inmueble de Chinchón, [@:] <http://manolo-eleremita.blogspot.com/2010/11/contribucion-de-la-sociedad-de.html>.

12. See: Protegemos nuestro patrimonio natural. La naturaleza se muestra generosa y hace de Castilla-La Mancha uno de los enclaves de mayor diversidad biológica de Europa, [@:] <http://www.castillalamancha.es/clm/unlugar-paravisitar/naturalezaypaisajes>.

The success of tourism (tourist satisfaction) in El Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja and the consequential prosperity of its residents are determined by social capital—the quality of relations among the people and the various economic entities operating within the municipalities. The quality of these relations is so high that the tourists leaving the region are amazed. The restaurants and bodegas of Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja do not just sell them wine—they offer the history of the region hidden in the wine's aroma, colour, and taste, the traces of the Roman domination, which provided roads, traces of the presence of Visigoths and Muslims in the aqueducts preserved over the centuries, echoes of the presence of kings (Alfonso VII, who visited in 1139, and Phillip V, who was pronounced king at the Plaza Mayor in Chinchón and who never forgot about it, granting the town the title of *La Muy Noble y Muy Leal* after several years, which remains in its coat of arms to this day), signs of visiting artists, including Goya, whose work created here includes the painting of Maria Teresa (the famous Countess of Chinchón) and several others, and Ulpiano Fernández-Checa Saiz—a sculptor and painter born in Colmenar de Oreja; there is a museum dedicated to his art in the town today. The wine also recalls the distant sounds of battle, the screams of the defeated and the victorious in the dozens of battles in this land, and finally the tales of the current and past locals. The glasses and bottles are used to sell the entire natural environment of the region accompanying the wine with all the changes made by man—the offer covers the hills and valleys, the greyish red soil, the olive gardens and grapevine plantations, the castles and the monasteries, the music and the painting. In large part, this is due to the efforts of the restaurant and bodega owners, who were able to mobilise both themselves and the entire region by promoting cheeses, wines, olives, honeys, vegetables, and the local cuisine, which is extraordinary and unique.

One of the paths taken by the vineyard and winery owners is the development of enotourism, which is based on the regional wines and expands to the rich local cuisine, traditions, history, and landscape (natural and cultural—historical heritage—heritage sites, etc.). The local wine labels have been entered into the Spanish wine appellation system under the name of *Denominación de Origen Vinos de Madrid*. The discussed municipalities are located in one of its three regions, Arganda del Rey. The local winemakers are doing their best to expand the offer for the relatively new wine tourism. It already includes tours of bodegas combined with wine tasting and wine (and often other regional products) available in the company stores, as well as the *Rutas del vino*. Both towns are located on two of the numerous wine trails offered in scope of the *Madrid Rutas del Vino*: *El Tajo y los vinos de la Orden de Santiago* (Colmenar de Oreja) and *Escenas y Crónicas de Francisco de Goya* (El Chinchón). Wine and enotourism are gradually becoming important elements of the region's tourist product, a tourist attraction. As they try to “sell” the region, the locals take care of it. They know that it is the foundation of their existence. The seeming catastrophe of no industrial investment 40 years ago turned out to be a blessing, as the municipalities do not have to cope with air pollution from factory smoke or vehicle exhaust. The management method following light ecologically and locally oriented tourism benefits the preservation of the landscape for tourists and for the future—the olive trees, grapevine, anise, and garlic plantations present in the landscape for hundreds of years will be here for hundreds more. It seems that the entire community is involved in this goal—the people are eager to talk about their home, brag about their little homeland to others, and unite to preserve the local culture, traditions, and economy.

The socioeconomic development observed in El Chinchón i Colmenar de Oreja, discussed in the local interviews, and indicated by statistics presumably (Golinowska et al. 2011) results from the growing social cohesion, improving living conditions (manifested by the dropping immigration and growing population), and growing social participation (elimination of social marginalisation and poverty)—assets found in the concept of sustainable livelihoods. The social cohesion and growing participation condition the economic growth, to which the locals contribute and of which they take advantage. The conducted research leads us to believe that the observed development of the municipalities of El Chinchón and Colmenar de Oreja satisfies the criteria of sustainable development, and in particular of sustainable livelihoods defined in professional literature. It meets the fundamental needs of the locals, preserves and protects the landscape, and does not threaten the satisfaction of needs of future generations.

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