



Environment-Crisis and Human Activity

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Abstract: Our attitude towards the Environment has been changed since Industrial Revolution because our civilization is characterized by the overconsumption of natural resources, resulting in the appearance on health problems, while millions of people have also condemned into poverty. In order to change this harmful model of economy, we need to change our way of thinking by realizing our unity with the Environment. In such a case, it is obvious that a new model of economic growth will arise, which is based on Sustainable Development. This type of development combines the protection of natural environment with the improvement of quality of life, especially for poorer countries whose population suffers from poverty.

Keywords: environment, human activity, sustainable development

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The main advantage that nature has given to human beings is their ability not just to survive, but to adjust their environment in their needs. Thus, humans used their ability in order to create civilizations and become able to construct everything they needed in order to make their life better. This paper aims at describing the main consequences of this activity in human health, pertaining to the results of the overconsumption of natural resources. It will also be examined the need of a new model of economic growth, known as Sustainable Development, which combines environmental protection and economic profit.

Environmental impacts on Health

A basic parameter of the relation that humans develop with their Environment is not just to survive through the use of natural resources, but their aiming on economic growth. Especially in 18th and 19th century, when the transition from traditional handiwork to the machines took place, immediately emerged the need for more energy.

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This era, known as Industrial Revolution, initially took place in Britain and resulted in massive changes in the economy, which had a profound effect on the social, economic and cultural conditions. Also, goods produced from industry and high technology appeal to a wider group of people, while mobility became easier because of the development of new means of transportation. So, when a massive economic growth appears, it is obvious that industry will imperatively need new physical resources.

Although due to industry human societies managed to have a better quality of life, their attitude towards the Environment gradually changed. Environment is not considered as our “home” but as an object of exploitation, something that resulted in the use of physical resources just for economic growth. According to this conception of the relationship between humans and Environment, which is known in the field of Bioethics as “Anthropocentrism”, nature’s role is to sustain the existence of mankind (see Protopapadakis, 2009), a view which had a severe impact in human activity towards the Environment.

Therefore, humans not only tried to protect themselves from the Environment but, in several cases, they managed to adjust it into their needs, considering themselves as the top of the environmental system. As a consequence, human activity caused a severe deterioration of natural Environment.

This distinction between man and Environment was also obvious in economy, whereas many Western countries getting wind of their wealth proceeded into extreme use of physical resources from poor countries (especially in Africa), condemning them into poverty and economic debt. It is obvious that the main parameter of economic growth was the accumulation of more wealth, which was not accessible by poorer countries.

Poverty was not the only problem that occurred as a result of human activity in the Environment; health problems have also occurred. Various consequences of environmental contamination have been observed in many systems of the human body, such as the reproductive, respiratory and endocrine; it has also been observed a significant increase in cancer rates, especially in the developed industrial world (Nikolopoulou-Stamati, 2007).

Nevertheless, the fact that, in recent years, there has been a wide dissemination of scientific data proving that human interfere in nature causes severe health problems, there has been raised a huge debate about the limitations of pollutants. The first step towards this direction was made in 1992 with the Rio Declaration of Environment and Development (Rio Declaration), where it was proclaimed the vital need for a development with respect to the Environment and the ecosystem.

This declaration also included the proposal on taking up measures in order to reduce poverty in developing countries. Later, the members of the international community which signed the Protocol of Kyoto (1997) agreed that there must be a great reduction of greenhouse gases emissions, based on the premise that global warming exists and man-made emissions had a major impact on this state.

Therefore, the very fact that International Community has decided to take action in order to reduce the emission of pollutants is the sign of a global

awareness about the significance of studying environmental impacts on human health.

Sustainable Development and Environment

It is obvious that, in times of crisis, decision makers, politicians and investors are aiming at economic development. But what should be taken into account is the fact that economic growth should not only be a result of overusing of natural resources, but can incorporate regulations aiming at the protection of natural environment. This need was advocated by the Rio+20 Conference (at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2012), where “green economy” was considered as a way of reducing poverty, while protecting the Environment. This activity is known as “Sustainable Development”, which includes three basic parameters:

- economic growth
- environmental protection and
- social development, which imply that natural resources will be used reasonably in order not to affect adversely the ecosystem.

In this way, economy will not be considered only as a way of making more money, but will also establish ethical values, such as the concern about the quality of the Environment in which the future generations will dwell. This means that when investors set their targets for the development of their enterprise, they will have to assess public health risks and take up measures in order to reduce the pollutants. Especially in times of economic crisis, a possible deterioration of environment and human health will require more insurance funds for medication and treatment people who will suffer from diseases related to Environment. In this way, environmental impacts on health will be a burden on the State Budget.

In order to reduce the environmental cost, investors have to perceive that a company should not only aim at economic profit, but is also responsible for the environmental, social and ethical aspects of its activities (Nicolopoulou-Stamati et al., 2013). But a question arises here about how is it possible to alter our attitude towards the Environment. Therefore, we need to change the priorities of our civilization by considering the human as an integral part of nature and also bearing in our mind that any our activities have profound impacts on the Environment and our health.

This holistic approach to the relationship between humans and Environment was established in Ancient Greek Philosophy (especially by Presocratics Milesians Philosophers, Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes), which strongly supported the ontological view that the fundamental character of the Universe is *unity* (Kalachanis et al., 2013).

Thus, it is obvious that our industrial and economic activity needs to be ruled by the view that our planet is our home and that we are an entity integral to the whole nature. In this way, we can actually achieve an economic development with respect to Nature and human health, especially in times of economic crisis where new cheaper and friendlier to the Environment technologies need to be established.

Conclusion

It is concluded that our attitude toward the Environment has been characterized by the overconsumption of natural resources, a fact that has contributed to the appearance of health problems, while it has also condemned millions of people in poverty. Therefore, stakeholders (State, investors) should invest their wealth in a *sustainable development*, which will combine the protection of natural environment with the improvement of the quality of life, especially for poorer countries.

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Notes on Contributors

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