

Conceptual considerations on notions of social change versus social development

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Abstract: Social development can be considered as a result of combining the effects of using economic development policies, tax policies, but also social policies. Social development mainly needs economic support, generally, but very important is the support on social change, that can be achieved by unconditioned access to education for the entire population, access to health care, knowledge, etc. terms that lead to sustainable social development.

Key words: social change, social development, development policies, social complexity

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Introduction

Neil J. Smelser (Smelser, 1997) says that there can be various social dimensions that can be associated with the economic development process, that can lead to producing different types of social changes:

- a) "changes in the social structure, including the organizational structure;
- b) changes coming from the diversity of developed societies;
- c) political changes, especially the development of democratic forms of government;
- d) changes referring to integration or increasing solidarity among societies".

In Smelser's opinion, „it is possible to think of economic development, even in very restrictive terms, without implying assumptions about the rest of the society and its social structures. These assumptions are often implied, but they must be presented in order to explain and to understand the relationship of mutual determination between economic development and social development”.

Smelser's concern is to answer the question: „how and in which way the social structures are re-organized during the process of economic development?” He answers the question using the structural differentiation concept, which is sometimes names specialization of structures, or increment of social complexity.

„The development process, through specialization is accompanied by a structural differentiation of the state”, says Smelser (Smelser, 1997) that generates new systems of public officials. What Smelser proves is that all these differences determine a new complexity of the social system and impose the creation of some new institutions and organization forms, in order to make the system as much efficient as possible. Following these specializations, new, complex and differentiated roles there are constituted new social groups who are aware of their economic and social position in society.

We can say that social development is firstly a type of social change. This last concept is a neutral one, being able to have a whole spectrum of positive or negative connotations.

Beyond all these meanings and controversy on social change, social development is perceived as positive social change, targeted, the significance of the concept emphasizing the transition from initial state that wants to be converted, to a final one, desired.

2. Social change

To complete our approach to define social development, which we can define as a type of social change, we will first deal with defining the social change concept.

In L. Vlăsceanu's vision there is made references to social change as „the passing of a social system or of its component from one state to another state, qualitatively and / or quantitatively different” (Vlăsceanu, 1993).

If we consider the classical sociologists' opinions, they defined the social change as being a synonym for progress, development and evolution (Comte, Spencer, Darwin, Durkheim), all of these being considered as being positive effects on society. Under the influence of functionalism, social change is redefined and it appears the idea that this can also be perceived as a phenomena with possible negative effects, that could also produce a regress of the system, or maybe of only some of its components. (Parsons, Merton).

Weber claims that we should take into account the ideas, especially the meanings that we give to some things, and the role played by changing ideas in the production of social change. His ideas are totally at odds with those of Marx, who denied the importance of material factors, but also with those of Durkheim, who denies the notion of external social facts to individuals.

All these meanings and controversy on social change, suggest us a possible definition of social development as being a positive change, consciously directed towards making a transition from one state, to another state, a desired, final one.

Often the concept of development is used interchangeably with the one of progress, there are differences between the two concepts.

C. Zamfir argues that „the idea of progress is reflected in the perception that the present is better than the past and certainly the future will be better than the present. Society, pushed by internal diffuse forces, while progressing for the better” (Zamfir, 2006).

From the above, an item emerges as a defining element that customizes the social development, apart from social change. This item is the welfare, which requires that social development should produce a series of consequences, resulting in the creation of better life(social) conditions.

In statements of L. Vlasceanu „class struggle is the basis of all social transformations” and in Marx's opinion, „the man is the architect of its own history, transforming the world according to his needs” (Vlăsceanu, 1993). If we consider, that social welfare may be unequal to the individual one, this fact may generate adverse interfere in the process of social development as a whole. The only body that can create a balance and constructively resolve the problem is the state. It has the ability and quality to achieve a redistribution process, judiciously developed, to ensure fair and effective economic and social development.

3. Social development

Social development can be considered as a result of combining the effects of using economic development policies, tax policies, but also social policies. Social development mainly needs economic support, generally, but very important is the support on social change, that can be achieved by unconditioned access to education for the entire population, access to health care, knowledge, etc. terms that lead to sustainable social development.

The theories of social development fall within the canons of the three major paradigms of sociology:

- *functionalism* (functionalist structuralism/ the theory of balance);
- *conflict* (The conflict paradigm is based on three main trends: a) Marxism; b) Neo-Marxism; c) the theory developed by Ralf Dahrendorf.);
- *interpreting* (The interpretive paradigm is based on two main trends: a) symbolic interactionism; b) social phenomenology) ;

- *Theories of multiple perspectives and of change* (reconciliation between agency and structure)¹.

Analyzing social systems and their components, from a functionalist perspective, but containing elements of the theories of conflict, Jacobs, Macfarlane and Asokan [8] identify social development, in contrast with the other two social processes: the survival and growth of societies. „Survival is the process whereby a community sustains itself to the minimum necessary level for existence, without any trends, manifests of horizontal expansion or vertical ascent”. The three, in their work, say that a society providing means, resources and opportunities, only for survival, has the power to satisfy a number of strictly fundamental human needs, but doesn't have enough funds to generate increasing welfare and sustainable development.

The concern of the authors is directed also towards societies that have developed, or that are in the process of rising above the required minimum level for survival but remain organized along the same lines that they had in the past. „People in these societies may be driven by technological progress, or by the example of other communities to intensify their efforts, to expand the purpose of undertaken activities and to adopt techniques or methods for improvement, but life remains essentially organized as before”.

From the studies presented above, it is noticed an extremely interesting observation, that the gap between development, survival and growth is given by the need for higher levels of social organization, and when it comes to development, it is not just a quantitative increase in economic activities and achieving set targets, but rather a qualitative change in how the activities are carried out in society.

Starting from these premises, Jacobs, Macfarlane and Asokan (Jacobs, Macfarlane, Asokan, 1997) state that „the term of development, denotes a qualitative vertical movement to a higher level of performance, while the term of growth denotes a quantitative horizontal expansion of activities, in any level of organization that the society has achieved in a particular field”.

A definition of social development is also given by C. Zamfir: „Social development refers to the orientation of a country / region / community / institution towards achieving a desirable state, set as target, through a planned process, conducted by a set of joint actions” (Zamfir, 2006).

The essential dimensions that define social development refer to the need for uniformity in distribution of progress and the economic development within the various groups of the social system and equal access to different opportunities, as fundamental elements of sustainable social development.

These dimensions also appear in the meaning of the World Bank, which states that social development has a large extension of targets. „Social development aims, firstly, the complex major changes in society, reflected in the rules and institutions, changes that can cause a more equitable and inclusive development for all members of society”.

The World Bank is one of the most important institutions, which developed important social development programs in the the last 40 years. The social development department of the World Bank has four departments for analysis and intervention:

¹ The theories of multiple perspectives and of change (reconciliation between agency and structure) are based on five main trends:

a) Simple morphogenesis developed by Walter Buckley ('Society as a Complex Adaptive System,' in *Systems Behavior*, ed. by John Neishon and Geof Peters, NewYork; Harper and Row, 1976; "Society - A Complex Adaptive System", Routledge; 1998, 1st edition);

b) Double morphogenesis developed by Margaret S. Archer ("Morphogenesis versus Structure: On Combining Structure and Action", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Dec., 1982), pp. 455-483; "Realist Social Theory", Cambridge University Press, 2003);

c) Active society developed by Amitai Etzioni ("The Active Society", Free Press, 1968; 1971; "Monochrome society", Polirom, Iasi, 2002).

d) Collective action developed by Alain Touraine ("A Method for Studying Social Actors", *Journal of World-Systems Research*, vi, 3, fall/winter 2000, 900-918; "La production de la société", Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1974).

e) The theory of structure developed by Anthony Giddens ("Central Problems of Social Theory", University of California Press, 1979; "The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structure", University of California Press ,1984).

- Community development and social capital,
- Social analysis and social policies,
- Participation, civic engagement and responsibility,
- Prevention of conflicts and reconstruction.

Over time there has been an expansion and refinement of social development policy analysis. Amartya Sen says that a developed society must provide: „1. guarantee of political freedoms; 2. economic facilities; 3. access to social opportunities, evenly distributed throughout society; 4. ensuring transparency; 5 social protection” (Sen, 2004).

As emerges from the above definitions, and we must admit that we can not stop on a specific one, social development is performed using strategies and social development programs, aimed at achieving goals, of welfare, on medium term and long term. Professor C. Zamfir says that „orientation towards social development did not manifest in countries placed on top of development, in most developed countries, which are in a non-problematic process of improvement, or in prosperous communities, but in the ones that face crisis situations of development” (Zamfir, 2006).

Professor Zamfir states that societies in West have developed rather as a result of a relatively unplanned development process, centered on solving current problems in the relationship individual / state, in the context of a strong marketing economy. „Initially, the issue of social development has occurred in countries characterized by lagging behind”, as the case of Romania, and „development programs have emerged from within, intellectual and political leaders, seeking to formulate strategies and to organize collective actions in order to achieve them” ((Zamfir, 2006).

What should be noted is that defining the concept of social development and of achieving this goal, state intervention can not deprive. The state is the one that can provide social public expenditure for social protection, the costs of producing public and social development goods and services but also expenditures of investment and other expenses, to ensure the economic development of a country.

Along with the decentralization and initiation of programs addressing development through projects such as the Social Development Funds, initiated and supported by the World Bank and other institutional actors there have been aimed increasing local autonomy, solving social problems, developing social capital etc. . A very important support in reestablishing and strengthening the economy came from the World Bank, which, over time, has allocated many funds for social development within Romania. Funds allocated under the PHARE program have been an important source that facilitated the steps of pre-accessing Romania to the European Union.

PHARE program is one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the European Union in the process of assistance provided to countries of Central and Eastern Europe, applying for membership within the European Union. Among the known targets of this program there are also the ones promoting economic and social cohesion.

A great variety of social development is starting in all levels: international, national, regional, local and in the district. It should be pointed out that orientation towards social development, did not appear in the most developed countries, or in thrive communities, but in countries facing underdevelopment and major economic delays.

In the last decades, an important role in the social development process is held by non-public organizations: associations, NGOs, private organizations with economic profile, but there must be highlighted the fact that the main part in the process of social development is the one of the system of public institutions. It is worth noting the fact that efforts made by public institutions are moving towards social development through an organized effort conducted in time.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, resulting from the display of specialized literature, above, follows several criteria; from their perspective social development can be assessed:

- From the perspective of the assumed targets;
These targets must have, as final purpose, ensuring the welfare of each individual as part of a whole, but also the one of the whole society.
- From the perspective of the way of managing the process that leads to achieving the objectives;
In order to ensure this process there must be implemented an institutional, functional and coherent system of redistributing national wealth in order to ensure everyone's access to these resources.
- From the perspective of ensuring the welfare of the individual and of the society, as being the aimed target;
The ultimate goal is the „greater good” and finding values and criteria for assessing actions and policies that can affect the human condition and social development, in the positive sense.

In an analysis dedicated to mechanisms of social development and to its explanatory theories, G. Reyes (Reyes, 2001) connects social development and quality of life, defining development as „a social condition in a state where people's real needs are met through rational and sustainable use of natural resources and of various systems”. He goes on to say that. This use of natural resources is based on a technology that respects the cultural characteristics of the population of that country. Such a broad definition of development includes the statement that „social groups have access to organizations and basic services such as education, housing, health and food, and above all this, the culture and traditions are respected in the specific social context of that country”.

We can also notice in the above definition the introduction of non-quantifiable elements, but with implications in the development of the individual, namely those of education, culture, housing, health, and with great importance in ensuring his welfare. These elements, in addition to the quantifiable ones, included in previous definitions of social development, give the economic and social dimensions of the concept of quality of life.

Social development can be understood even in the sense of „development as freedom” theory promoted by Amartya Sen (Sen, 2004). Starting from this premise social development can be defined as „expansion of the space of opportunities for meeting the social and human needs through and for education, health, consumption and communication”.

Development in general is not only a field but also a perspective on the changes, evaluated in terms of the degree and manner in which they fulfill the social and human needs.

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