

## Role of Religion as a Social Institution in Sustainable Development: View from Ukraine

### Znaczenie religii i instytucji społecznych w kontekście rozwoju zrównoważonego – przykład Ukrainy

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#### Abstract

The paper presents preconditions of present social institutions in Ukraine in connection with the necessity to implement the idea of sustainable development. Similarity of basic religious norms with terms of sustainable development concept has been indicated. The role of religion as a social institution in spreading and implementation of the global idea of sustainable development in Ukraine has been substantiated. The necessity to introduce the religious and cultural values into systems of upbringing of people for support of the world community's sustainable development has been postulated.

**Key words:** sustainable development, social institution, religion, system of upbringing, religious and cultural values

#### Streszczenie

W artykule omówiono uwarunkowania obecnych instytucji społecznych na Ukrainie w kontekście konieczności wprowadzenia idei zrównoważonego rozwoju. Wskazano na podobieństwo podstawowych norm religijnych z wytycznymi odnoszącymi się do zrównoważonego rozwoju. Udowodniono znaczącą rolę, jaką na Ukrainie mogą odegrać instytucje religijne i społeczne. Wrócono uwagę, na konieczność uwzględniania wartości religijnych i kulturowych w procesach edukacyjnych i wychowawczych, aby lepiej wspierać zrównoważony rozwój globalnej społeczności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rozwój zrównoważony, instytucje społeczne, religia, wychowanie, wartości religijne i kulturowe

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#### Introduction

The ever-changing process of international relations is connected with the implementation of the global idea of sustainable development. Due to the continual political crisis in Ukraine, the role of social institutions have been increasing. Present social institutions are important instruments of social regulation. These institutions have significant influence on the behavior of individuals and groups of people, both in a narrow ethnic-regional sense and in a broader international relations aspect, and thus should be used for

spreading and implementing the global idea of sustainable development.

Today law nihilism and distrust of public authorities are characteristic features of life in Ukraine. This leads to the impossibility of a purposeful state policy formation and to the non-acceptance of any new ideas, including the global idea of sustainable development. At the same time, the level of trust religious institutions is growing. According to the results of the sociological research conducted by the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies named after Olexander Razumkov and Kiev International In-

stitute of Sociology in 2012, the level of trust of the Ukrainian population in the Verkhovna Rada (the Parliament of Ukraine) was 12%; the Cabinet of Ministers – 16%; the President of Ukraine – 21%. The highest level of trust (of all the institutions) belonged to the church – 61.7% (*Dovira Ukraintsiv...*, 2012). At the beginning of 2013, the level of trust of the Ukrainian population to the Verkhovna Rada (the Parliament of Ukraine) dropped to 6.4%; the Cabinet of Ministers – 8.7%; the President of Ukraine – 15.5%. At the same time, the level of trust in the church increased up to 63.8% (*Ukraine-2013...*, 2013). Thus, today in Ukraine the social institutions being the basic instrument of support for traditional values, have the ability to form new ideas within the consciousness of the population, and provide the pre-conditions for both stability and development in the local community. In such conditions, religion becomes one of the most effective and influential social institutions.

The level of religiousness of the Ukrainian population is significant. According to the results of the research, conducted by the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies named after Olexander Razumkov, more than 50% of the population considers themselves to be believers. More than 50% of believers are Christians, about 1% Islamites, and the rest belong to congregations of other churches and concessions (*Religiia i vlada...*, 2011). At present there are more than 34 thousands of religious communities in Ukraine, and their amount increases with each year. 95% of these communities belong to Christian concessions (the majority of which are Orthodox, *State Statistics...*, 2013). Consideration of religion as a social institution, able to influence the realization of the global idea of sustainable development, is related to its communicative function. As religion (as a social institution) is based on a long-time acceptance of conventional norms and their official or unofficial securing (Radugin and Radugin, 1995), where these norms regulate everyday contacts, various acts of group and intergroup behavior, define the order and the way of mutual behavior regulate methods of transfer and exchange of information etc., then religion can be considered an effective and influential instrument of social regulation, which can be used as strong support for sustainable development in Ukraine.

Of course, spreading and implementing of the global idea of sustainable development in one country is a matter of the political system. However, taking into account the low level of trust to politicians, changes in this area are not to be expected any time soon.

Therefore, taking into account the level of mistrust in political forces and the influential communicative function of religion, one can say that religion has the potential to be a strong support for sustainable development in Ukraine.

Thus, the aim of this publication is to show the similarities between basic religious norms and terms of

the sustainable development concept, to substantiate the role of religion as a social institution spreading and realizing the concept of sustainable development in Ukraine. The first part of the article addresses the topical problems of sustainable development, and the second part of the article attempts to uncover the role of religion in solving these problems.

## 1. The Sustainable Development Context

### 1.1. General terms of the concept of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development was first introduced in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987). This report presented the concept as a guideline for all organizations, enterprises, governments and institutions to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). Ban Ki-moon defines sustainable development as one of the key areas, where it is necessary for the world community to make progress for the future.

The sustainable development concept assumes the existence of three components: economic, environmental and social (Mensah and Castro, 2004). As the economic component is usually taken into account while setting development strategies and plans, environmental and social components might remain behind attention. However, the interaction of humans with the environment determines the state of the area where they live and the direction of environmental and human development.

Annually, the *United Nations Development Program* (UNDP) the global network of the United Nations in the area of development, prepares a report on human development, which exposes the problems of sustainable development in humanity, such as sustainability and equity (report in 2011), real wealth of nations (report in 2010), fighting climate change (report in 2007/8), and cultural liberty (*Human Development...*, 2004).

This report coincides with the goals of sustainable development, suggested in the report for the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2013 *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development (An action Agenda...*, 2013).

Based on various research findings on human development (Alkire, 2010, Mahbub ul Haq, 1996, HDR 1994-2011) the following problems of sustainable development can be distinguished:

- Existence of limitless necessities and limitedness of resources for their satisfaction;
- High level of social injustice in population income distribution, social inequality, corruption and shadow economy;
- Provision of literacy and education;
- Existence of interethnic conflicts and conflicts of civilizations;

The aforementioned issues are looked at in greater detail in the following section.

### *1.2. Existence of limitless necessities and limitedness of resources for their satisfaction*

The existence of limitless necessities and the limitedness of resources for their satisfaction, can be named as one of the main objective problems of sustainable development. This problem is primarily concerned with the necessity to save the resources for future generations. The necessities and demands in practical terms are limitless, which means that the necessities and demands of commodities and services are impossible to fully satisfy. Needs change as a result of the appearance of new commodities and services, or so-called new economic blessings. The ultimate goal of any economic activity consists of an aspiration to satisfy varied needs of people. However, many resources for realization of economic activity are limited (Nosov, 2008). At the same time the rate of resource consumption does not *stand still*. As a result of using marketing concepts by enterprises and organizations, the increase in consumerism by society and the impossibility of being satisfied results in the crisis of consumption society and the degradation of the national economic system (Kendyuhov). This demonstrates the necessity of rational and thrifty consumption of resources.

Ukraine can be characterized as diverse, with a high capacity of natural resources potential, which stimulated the development of the corresponding industries in Ukraine during the Soviet Union era: fuel and energy, metallurgical, chemical, construction industries, as well as agriculture. The Ukraine's supply of mineral resources is one of the highest in the world: about 20 thousand deposits and 113 types of mineral resources are found in Ukraine (among which are iron ore, coal, manganese, oil, salt, sulfur, turf, uranium etc.). Out of 97 different types of minerals, 9143 are of deposits of industrial value, related to the State balance of supplies, and about 3310 deposits are being processed by industrial enterprises in Ukraine (Kachan, 2011). The deposits of some of the resources are significant; for example, the present rate of consumption of coal will be sufficient for at least 300-400 years. However, the level of development and utilization of other resources' deposits are considerable (e.g. more than 74% for hydrocarbons and 84% for oil). Ukraine can satisfy its needs with its own extractions from oil by only 10%, and with natural gas – by 20-25% (Doroguntsov, Kotsenko, Khvesyk, 2005). The significant consumption of energy, the limited resources used to satisfy the needs in fuel resources, and the dependence on other countries led to the development of the *Energy Strategy of Ukraine for 2030 and beyond*. The Strategy promotes the use of fuel resources, like coal and uranium, as priority resources (which are enough to satisfy the internal needs of the country), the organiza-

tion of construction of thermal power stations, the development of hydropower engineering, and improving the usage of atomic power. In 2012 one of the biggest solar power stations in Europe was built in Ukraine with the capacity of 100 MW (with intentions to increase the capacity to up to 300 MW, Jurliga, 2012).

### *1.3. High level of social injustice in population income distribution, social inequality, corruption and shadow economy*

Economic inequality is the difference in economic assets distribution (wealth) and income within or between a population or individuals. M. A. Fletcher claims the result of economic inequality is an inequality of possibilities and a short life-span (Fletcher, 2013).

Statistic agencies use the decile ratio (correlation of total profits of 10% of the most provided and 10% of the least provided population) to measure economic inequality. By expert estimations, the decile ratio in Ukraine was 26:1 in 2000, and 40:1 in 2006. However, the official statistics presented absolutely normative values of this coefficient – 6.3:1 in 2008 and 5.5:1 in 2009, while in Belarus the coefficient is equal to 6:1, in Romania – 7.6:1, in Poland – 9:1, in Great Britain – 10:1, in Argentina – 31:1, in Russia – 17:1 (Moscow – 41:1), and the international norm is 6:1 – 7:1 (Ivashchenko, 2010).

There is an assumption, that 95% of Ukrainians who state that there is a significant difference in wealth think the problem of inequality consists not in the fact that *the pearls are seed* – but rather they are interested why they see the display of luxury by certain citizens with their declared *low official profits* (Ivashchenko, 2010).

The problem of income distribution is connected to corruption. According to the report by Transparency International, the corruption perception index in Ukraine was 26 in 2012, and placed the country on the 144 position (out of 176 total) in the rank of the countries' *cleanliness* and transparency (Transparency International, 2012). In 2011 Ukraine took the 153 position among 186 analyzed countries (Transparency International, 2011), and in 2010 – 134 out of 178 (Transparency International, 2010). According to a comparative analysis of national surveys from 2007-2009, and 2011 prepared by the European Research Association in cooperation with Kyiv International Institute of Sociology the actual corruption perception decreased between 2007 and 2011; however, the level of involvement of the population in corruption experience still remains high (*Corruption in...*, 2011).

Social diseases, which are not caused directly by wars or natural disasters, also bring a threat to the stability of society. Social diseases include criminality, alcoholism and drug addiction, moral degradation and social pessimism. And, in the conditions of

free distribution of information and people relocation, these calamities become global) (Degtyaryev, 2010).

#### 1.4. Provision of literacy and education

The provision of primary education for the entire world's population is one of the *Millennium Development Goals*, set by the United Nations.

About 774 million adults in the world are illiterate, and the two thirds of them are women. In addition, 72.1 million school-aged children do not attend school. Literacy and access to high quality education are within human rights. Literacy plays an important role in the participation of economic, social and political life, especially in today's knowledge societies. Literacy gives people the advantage to critically think, improve their health, engage in family planings, prevent HIV/AIDS, provides education for children, reduce poverty, activate civil position. For these reasons, UNESCO strives to form a political commitment to spread worldwide literacy.

Between 1999 and 2005 the number of children who attend primary school, for the first time increased by 4%, – from 130 million to 135 million. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the literacy rate increased by 36%, which is considered to be a great achievement after taking into account the strong demographic growth in the region. On average in the whole world education in primary school grew by 6.4% (UN, 2007).

According to UNDP, the literacy level of men and women in Ukraine is sufficiently high. In 2010 the adult literacy rate for both sexes in Ukraine was 99.7% (*International Human...*, 2011), and the expected years of schooling of children was 14.8 years. Furthermore, within the last 30 years, the number of years in school grew by 3 years (*International Human...*, 2011). According to the population census in Ukraine in 2001 more than 90% population (in the different regions of Ukraine the percentage may differ) have some form of education (higher and/or secondary, *State Statistics...*, 2010).

#### 1.5. Existence of interethnic conflicts and conflicts of civilizations

The unsolved problems of any society can threaten its existence, even if provided sufficient reserves of natural resources. A perfect example lays in inter-ethnic conflicts and wars, between countries or civil ones. There have always been wars in the history of the humanity, which resulted in heavy consequences, for those involved and, quite often, wiped the whole government and civilization off the map) (Degtyaryev, 2010). Today, interethnic conflicts have become a wide-spread phenomenon.

Cultural and ethnic conflicts may also arise in Ukraine because of intentional aggravation of the Russian-speaking and the Ukrainian-speaking population. Renaming the streets, changing the language of instruction at schools, attempts to unite churches, setting the *regional languages* as official

in the regions, boycotting non-Ukrainian speeches in the Parliament and other events give evidence to the confrontation (*Kulturno-etnicheskiie...*, 2013).

Cultural and ethnic differences are intentionally used today for provoking conflicts between the Eastern and the Western parts of Ukraine, which makes the present situation even more tense and dangerous.

Cultural and ethnic issue is usually named as one of the reasons of the 2014 inclusion of the Crimea Peninsula by Russia. However the inclusion may cause further ethnic and cultural conflicts on the peninsula. The Crimean Tatars leaders predicted possible further armed conflicts between Russians and Tatars: *annexation of Crimea (...) could deepen ethnic and religious divisions in Crimea itself, increasing the risk of communal strife and even armed conflict, as opposition to Russia is most intense among the Crimean Tatars (...) and the Crimean crisis could become internationalized*

(Chazan, 2014).

More than 60% of the 2.7 million population of Crimea are Russians. More than 60% of the 2.7 million population of Crimea are Russians, the majority of which are migrants populating the territories, which were deserted and abandoned after the deportation of the native population during several post-war migrations. About one fourth of the population belongs to ethnic Ukrainians, who are predominantly Russianized. The Crimean Tatars, who returned from exile places, mainly from the republics of the Middle Asia, partly from Russia, make about 10% population. The rest are national minorities. The dynamics of such significant change in the ethnic composition of the population in the last few years is related mainly to growth of the percentage of Crimean Tatars. In spite of a relatively small percentage of the Crimean Tatars in the total population of Crimea, the Crimean-Tatar factor plays a significant role in political, economic and social life of the Crimean peninsula (Belitser and Bodruk, 1997).

## 2. Role of religion in solving the problems of sustainable development

The Regional Summit on Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Dialogue in Tirana, Albania in 2004 made a significant contribution to the broadening of the dialogue among different peoples, cultures and civilizations. *The Tirana Summit Declaration* states that *relations among religious communities in the region have often been strained causing grievances and tensions. Religion must not be part of the problem, but part of the solution. Preserving space for diverse religious faiths is one of the preconditions for enjoying cultural diversity. The religions should be able to dialogue and contribute to societal dialogue in an effort that honors their deepest truths and holds promise for humanity. Dialogue must be at the core of*

*continued interreligious cooperation and collaboration in the region. All faiths convey a message of peace, justice and human solidarity. All religious leaders, like other civil society and community leaders, have the potential to exercise a moral and positive influence on how people in society understand each other and interact. Reconciliation of religious views is an increasingly significant challenge of our age. This also entails the need to create more awareness among peoples and government authorities about the need to respect the traditions of the use of religious symbols, images and expressions (Dialogue among..., 2006).*

This is the reason why the Heads of the States, present at the summit, long to educate a new European generation in the spirit of inclusiveness, instilling a feeling of forgiveness instead of hatred, promoting tolerance, understanding and coexistence rather than conflict and violence, reinforcing civic education and observing human rights.

For the discussion that follows, the list of grievances presented in the aforementioned paragraph will be addressed.

### 2.1. Existence of limitless necessities and limitedness of resources for their satisfaction

The analysis of United Nations' documents on human development shows the obvious inattention towards the problem of religious and ethnic regional differences in the context of sustainable development. However, sustainable development is, first of all, connected with the relevance of forming conscious *self-restriction of necessities* by the population. The best way to achieve this is by development of religious and ethnic groups. In each of group, a certain system of values develops based on relation and education.

The role of religion in solving the problem of how to preserve resources and save them for future generations is significant. The most important factor in the present use of resources is the excess of necessities, which are stimulated by producers of different industries with the help of advertising. Meanwhile, almost all the world and regional religions are oriented to self-restriction of necessities, as most religions preach the culture of moderation (frugality), and self-assertion of cultural values, which is an important factor in restraining the irrepressible consumption by society.

Often the problem of limitless necessities is bound by the population growth. For example, Albert A. Bartlett (2012), who believes that one of the conditions of sustainability is stopping population growth, mentions that a reduction in the population brings us in conflict with various religious groups that oppose any reduction of births, for these groups believe unrestricted reproduction is a basic human right. However, in case of Europe there is no problem with the growing population, but rather with rapidly shrinking population. The tendency of population decline

can be observed also in Ukraine. On April 1, 2013 the population size was almost 45,513 people (*State Statistics...*, 2013), while in 2001 population census registered 48,457 people.

As a result of the research conducted by Tajik scientists, it was set that almost all world religions preach the culture of moderation (frugality), self-assertion of cultural values, which is extremely important for restraining the irrepressible consumption by society. At present such interrelation of a man and nature is examined in new philosophical subdiscipline ecological ethics which requires harmonization and re-orientation from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. Analysis of theses about self-restriction of necessities in world religions is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of theses about self-restriction of necessities in world religions. Source: *Ekologija Moskvy*, 2008; *Tajikistan na puti...*, 2013)

Religion /People	Main thesis
Native Americans of the United States	<i>Whatever pitiful we may seem in your eyes, we consider ourselves much happier than you consider yourself, because we are thankful for small mercies that we have.</i> Chief Micmac
Buddhism	<i>Whomsoever in this world overcomes this base unruly craving, from him sorrows fall away, like water-drops from a lotus-leaf.</i> Dharmapada
Christianity	<i>It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.</i> Matthew 19:24
Confucianism	<i>Excess and deficiency are equally at fault.</i> Confucius
Ancient Greeks	<i>Nothing in excess</i> Inscription from the temple of Apollo at Delphi
Hinduism	<i>The person who lives completely free from desires, without longing, devoid of the sense of 'I' and 'mine' attains peace.</i> Bhagavad Gita
Islam	<i>Poverty is my pride.</i> Muhammad
Daosizm	<i>He who knows when he has enough is wealthy.</i> Dao De Jing

Apart from the indicated general principles of self-restriction in world religions, the presence of fasting practically in all of religions should be noted as well. Fasting is a form of religious asceticism, an exercise of spirit on the way to salvation within the framework of religious view and is defined as a voluntarily self-restriction in food, entertainment, socializing with the world. Thus different religions are in fact oriented to the practical realization of the sustainable development concept.

### 2.2. High level of social injustice in population income distribution, social inequality, corruption and shadow economy

The important element of religion is putting efforts supporting and securing social justice for poor people. Religious leaders and institutes often pay significant attention to the spiritual state of people, whereas government development programs are concentrated on the financial side of the question. Lately, the general concern of global problems and difficulties to overcome poverty sidelined this division. However, there are contradictions in some questions between government development programs and religious organizations. For example, there is a high level of income distribution inequality and social inequality in Ukraine. This problem is connected foremost with the high level of corruption, and the growing power of mafias. Therefore, the country needs certain changes in the state policy, which are directed to legalize the economy. These changes should apply not only to legal documents in the area of regulation and to the creation of stimuli to legal business (laws on large fines for corruption etc.), but to the area of cultural patterns. These patterns are being realized in systems of religious upbringing, education, culture and art. And with this system a person binds his life success and accordingly his behavior and practical activity.

The traditional and widespread models of corruption prevention usually suppose the development of appropriate economic instruments (model of resources allocation taking into account corruption, corruption with a hierarchical structure, corruption restriction, exchange of popularity for a bribe, collective reputation). However, an important aspect is moving away from purely economic statements of the question of corruption and overcoming it by the instruments of state policy (high level of officials' salary, fines, punishments, anti-stimuli) to the religious, cultural and ethnic instruments of social regulation.

### 2.3. Provision of literacy and education

Another important issue is the insufficient attention devoted to changing the systems of upbringing in different countries in order to orientate them to sustainable human development and to motivate a conscious self-restriction of necessities. Today the complex multilevel system of religious upbringing is the main condition of forming the attitude for sustainable human development. Because there is a very high level of mistrust in public authorities, politicians, programs of political parties in Ukraine, only the system of religious upbringing can become the base for forming people's views on the system of values, which meets the concept of sustainable development.

If we look at the current situation in Ukraine, it differs only slightly from the situation in other countries. As a result of the absence of the integral system of education, oriented to motivation of conscious

self-restriction of necessities, today a substitution of human values occurs in childhood. A man from a social being becomes a measureless consumer of goods, who maximizes their quantity and achieves his life goals in such a way. The situation in Ukraine is complicated with the absence of the Plato's *limiting measure* at the *governors*, and as a result of the significant disparity in income distribution. As a result, today in Ukraine one can clearly trace a tendency to law nihilism and non-conformism towards any government ideas, interests and concepts. Thus, the ideas of sustainable development still cannot be popularized among the population.

Understanding moral-religious upbringing is one of the most urgent and difficult tasks of state policy in the field of human development. This difficulty is explained by a whole number of reasons. The first reason is the objective difficulty of researching the history of human development and the development of human values. The second reason is that the prevailing view in societal concepts, paradigms, ideas, views and guidelines influence the study of history and usually impede the adequate understanding of the phenomena.

Religious upbringing is a set of spiritual ideas (notions), based on a faith in God (or supernatural forces), which have been inculcated in a person by his family, school, environment, and become apparent in his social life. The tasks of religious upbringing include the forming of spiritually-moral personality qualities and a society in whole. They consist in revealing to people of all ages the known circle of religious information and proper system of values, which become the basis of moral behavior during all man's life.

Therefore, the main attention today should be concentrated on creating the complex and multilevel system of religious upbringing, directed at the regional level to form the attitude of *self-restriction of necessities*.

### 2.4. Existence of interethnic conflicts and conflicts of civilizations

Religion as a world view, directed at the creation of the world, does not reject the use of force to oppose evil in society (Ryabykh, 2009). The conscience of a man cannot accept the system of public relations, which presents injustice, aggression, stealing, and exploitation of human passions. Human society should constantly make efforts to maintain kindness, as it is easy for evil to act, resting upon sins of a man. In conditions, where the conflicts show pronounced ethnic and religious character, the task of the religious confessions is to try to secularize the conflict; that is, to free a conflict between national communities from a religious constituent. It is especially important to do this in those regions where the tense relations between the communities exist. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church was able to secularize the conflict in such regions as Chechnya and

Nagorno-Karabakh. Such secularization gives religious organizations a chance to become peacemakers.

### Conclusions

The research concerning the synthesis of a religious world outlook and sustainable development concept in separate countries and their commonwealths, considering the growing cultural similarity and continuing creation of cultural diversity of international community, is of great importance. Religion as one of the social institutions has great influence on spreading and implementing the global idea of sustainable development for the world community. Having significant influence on behavior of people and single individuals and representing sometimes the only norms recognized by people, religion as a social institution can help to overcome the problems of sustainable development of the world community, and Ukraine in particular, by introducing the religious and cultural values into systems of upbringing of the countries.

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