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## **APPROACHING ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article is about organizational identity, approached from the perspective of sustainable development. However, sustainable development is an imperative in modern society. All human activities, directly or indirectly, are closely dependent on our environment and the resources that ultimately ensure our quality of life.*

*The proposed subject is in correlation with the Agenda United Nations Organization for Sustainable Development 2030, as well as the process of adapting the 2030 Agenda at the national level. Undoubtedly, today, each of us, each person, consciously or not, can contribute to sustainable development, although, we must admit, it is quite difficult for us to achieve a change in mentality, despite the many evidences around us, which affect us direct and stinging (drought, consequences of war, possible food crisis, etc.). For this, it is imperative to develop a long-term thinking, a responsible thinking, a thinking oriented towards encouraging socially active positions, as well as to form skills capable of ensuring to today's generation, but also to those of tomorrow, adaptation to the realities of life and the ability to protect the human ecosystem. The promotion of organizational identity through the prism of sustainability, according to us, must start from changing the mentality "from the head to the bottom", continue with the reconceptualization of the tools for building the organizational identity.*

**KEYWORDS:** *organizational communication, organizational identity culture, iconic signs, symbolic signs, sustainable development*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** A10, D23, D78, D83, M10, M14, Q01

**INTRODUCTION.** The subject of sustainability is a priority in modern society, since all human activities, directly or indirectly, are closely dependent on our environment and the resources that ultimately ensure our quality of life. A priori, the concept aimed at environmental problems and the crisis of natural resources, being approached, rather, as "a solution to the ecological crisis determined by the intense industrial exploitation of resources and the continuous degradation of the environment and sought, first of all, to preserve the quality of the environment." [1] Later, the connotation of the term expanded, including, in addition to the quality of life as a whole, also the interest, concern for justice and equity both between generations and between communities, states.

From a methodological perspective, we can define the notion of sustainable development as a set of strategies, methods and forms of socioeconomic development, aimed at guaranteeing a balance between social, economic, ecological aspects etc. The most usual and cited definition of the concept of sustainable development remains that proposed in 1987, within the works of the Brundtland Commission, convened by the United States of America to examine the degradation of the global environment, namely in the report "Our common Future" (common), as follows: "meeting today's needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." [2]

**BODY.** Sustainable development has been the subject of increasingly intense public discussions since the 1970s, with the issue of environmental damage due to human activities directly affecting the human habitat being displayed more insistently. As an example, in this sense, we can mention the works of the Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, from 1972, the work of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), from 1983, with the rigorous Resolution, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, "Summit- the Earth" held in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, with the participation of about 170 states, the Summit on sustainable development, which took place in Johannesburg in 2002, etc.

"In September 2015, world leaders adopted the UN agenda entitled 'Transforming the world we live in: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', which sets out a series of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, protect the planet, ensure the protection of human rights and guaranteeing the prosperity of all. The adoption of this agenda marks a historic shift towards a new paradigm by addressing economic, social and environmental disparities in a universal and integrated manner. This process fully reflects the European values of social justice, democratic governance, social market economy and environmental protection." [3]

Among the first premises of resonance. which, in our opinion, led to the emergence of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, are:

- *The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, which consisted of two nuclear attacks, at the end of World War II, August 6/9, 1945, involving the dropping of two atomic bombs, "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" respectively, on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan; [4]

- *The discovery of the phenomenon of the Ozone Hole above Antarctica* [6], in 1985, which, according to the Copernicus Atmospheric Monitoring Service, in 2020 reached an impressive size, the largest in recent years, of about "24.8 million square kilometers on September 20, 2020" [6] and which, according to Paul Newman, science director of NASA's Earth Sciences Division, [7] "is 3-4 million square meters smaller than it would have been if no action had been taken and the level of chemicals released into the atmosphere would not have been reduced. Because society listened to the advice of scientists about 30 years ago, the ozone layer began its long healing process." [8]

- *The Chernobyl disaster*, from April 26, 1986, which "injected into the earth's atmosphere 400 times more radioactive material than that of Fukushima (Japan), several times the amount of radioactive material corresponding to the bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but from one thousandth to one hundredth (depending on the evaluated isotope) compared to the atmospheric emissions of surface nuclear tests of nuclear weapons tested worldwide until the prohibition of their carrying out in the atmosphere and which according to the "Report of the Chernobyl Forum of 2005, conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), were recorded as 56 direct deaths (47 workers and 9 children with thyroid cancer) and estimated that more than 9,000 people of the approx. 6.6 million highly exposed may

die from a form of cancer. The report cited 4,000 cases of thyroid cancer among children diagnosed in 2002"[9]

- *The Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear accident*, which occurred on March 11, 2011 at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan, and which caused a "dramatic" increase in radioactivity in the surrounding area, according to the Japanese Power Plant Administration. [10]

A first step in the process of adapting the 2030 Agenda at the national level, taking into account its complexity and universal character, was "adjusting the objectives, targets and indicators to the specific context of each country (nationalization), so that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to become more conclusive, feasible and effective. [11] The basic prerequisite for ensuring the integration of the SDGs into the national policy framework is their inclusion in the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030".

Undoubtedly, today, each of us, each person, consciously or not, can contribute to sustainable development, although, we must admit, it is quite difficult for us to achieve a change in mentality, despite the many evidences around us, which affect us direct and stinging (drought, consequences of war, possible food crisis, etc.). For this, it is imperative to develop a long-term thinking, a responsible thinking, a thinking oriented towards encouraging socially active positions, as well as to form skills capable of ensuring to today's generation, but also to those of tomorrow, adaptation to the realities of life and the ability to protect the human ecosystem.

At the industrial level, things moved much faster. More and more companies are recognizing that they can promote their products, services, even divisions more successfully and on a larger scale, both domestically and globally, by creating a distinct, focused identity on the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals, provided by the 2030 Agenda). This vision of communication goes beyond the well-known fields of advertising and marketing: it is an area of confluence between marketing communication and image, sustainability and quality of life, practices that converge towards the integrated communication of the organizational image.

Currently, economic units are increasingly aware of the importance of developing and managing, communicating strategically, correctly and ethically the organizational identity. The activities carried out, the responsibilities assumed are the strategic tools that communicate about the company, disseminating the organizational image. All organizations have an identity, whether they manage it or not and whether they are aware of its existence or not. As a rule, the organizational identity is, a priori, perceived through symbols, logos, colors, design and visual appearances. In retrospect, we are convinced that, de facto, organizational identity requires a much broader approach. Thus, sustainable development becomes a priority in promoting the organization's image, offering "viable opportunities for businesses, becoming a development model that allows, in an intelligent way, to benefit from economic, social and environmental advantages." [12]

The promotion of organizational identity through the prism of sustainability, according to us, must start from changing the mentality "from the head to the bottom", continue with the reconceptualization of the tools for building the organizational identity, among which we mention:

- *The mission statement*, which is used for both internal and external communication. The mission statement has the role of helping managers to maintain the strategic decision and to remind employees what the organization is about, in other words, to provide direction for strategic planning, focused on SDGs, on democratic, responsible visions, on values cultivated in the spirit of equity, justice and tolerance, on beliefs oriented towards the well-being and good of employees and beneficiaries, the immediate community and world society, on bio-socio-professional characteristics specific to the economic unit.

- *Visual identity*. The whole society, marked by the informational fulmination, is largely under the sign of the image. Faced with the exponential growth of information, the transmission of knowledge resorts to iconic coding (diagram, tableau, scheme, graph, etc.) capable of achieving economical, synthetic, easily readable data storage. "Any iconic sign, the effect of codifying a perceptual experience, requires a learning process; we often see in an object what we are taught to see." [13]

The organizational identity can wear various "visibility outfits", which lead to a certain behavior, obviously supported by the variety of visual elements. Recently, the respective visibility elements are focused on iconic signs that convey the key message of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, for example:



A symbol also plays an important role in visual identity and is often a part of the logo. It is extremely important for the organization to find the right symbol because it can really sum up what the organization wants to communicate. Symbols have a high financial value to organizations. Steps are usually taken to protect symbols through various licenses. Organizations try to communicate through symbols empathy, trust and intensity. They tend to include modern, easy-to-remember, and perennial features. It is, of course, difficult to achieve this, and therefore organizations spend a lot of time and money to develop an effective symbol.

In addition to iconic signs, some companies use symbolic signs, often known as symbols. The symbolic sign is the opposite of the iconic sign. The signifier and the signified bear no resemblance; the connection between them is culturally perceived because it comes from the conventions of language. Symbolic signs can promote the organizational image through the brand/brand, for example Chişinăul de seara, Bucuria, Franzeluţa, Povestea, Cuşma lui Guguţă, Biocamara.md, Bio Carpathia, Republica BIO, GreenPack, Biopack Trading SRL, etc.. "A name of mark may include words, phrases, signs, symbols, designs, or any combination of these elements. For consumers, a brand name is a "mnemonic," a way to remember their favorite products." [13]

- *Web page.* A website is an appropriate tool for managers to communicate their vision and philosophy, to build identity both internally and externally. Through the Internet, communication programs for customers, partners, collaborators, financiers, but also internal communication programs for employees can be applied. In operational internal communication, the intranet is mainly used for internal purposes, and the extranet is a way to connect business partners in an internal secure computer system. But the Internet page, beyond its value as a functional communication tool, has a representative role. Therefore, designing a website that fulfills all these functions is laborious and must be done carefully. As an example, we bring to the reader's attention the example of those from the Farm with Origins: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/143857111/Ferma-cu-Origini-Website-Redesign> sau *Biopack Trading SRL*: <https://greenpack.md/despre-noi/>
- *Nomenclature* (the names used to identify the organization) and brands (the combination of symbols and signs that represent a product, service, or the organization itself) are of primary concern to managers because they often identify an organization. Since the information society often creates a need to synthesize information, nomenclature and branding must be effective means of identifying the organization. Thus, because significant efforts are made to create a stable nomenclature, any change in mission and identity is delicate and must be handled carefully. One way to communicate the change in identity is to make a change in the brand name of the organization. When the organization merges with another organization there are two ways: one can add a name to the existing one or simply change the name (the change strategy is more risky though, keeping the old name for a while alongside the new one ensures an efficient transfer of image capital). However, organizations decide to operate under several names, where each name is related in some way to the founder of the organization or completely different; depending on what kind of change they want to make. If the organization aims to show off certain SDGs, then it will rely on a string of structural lexical elements, such as: *bio, eco, save, children, law*, etc., or on certain iconic signs.
- *Graphic design* refers to the overall visual presentation of the company, where the **logo** is considered the heart of the graphic design system. Graphic design was initially the main target for organizational image consultants; it is distributed along with the logo, the style of the organization's literature, uniforms and signs. Different styles must be coordinated in such a

way that they are easily recognizable in order to correctly reveal the organizational identity. The most visible identity for an organization is the logo, and often a change in the logo reflects a change in the organization. A change in an organization's logo conveys that it differentiates itself from competitors. The development of a suitable logo is a major stake for an organization, since the chosen symbol must work both inside and outside the organization and, at the same time, it must be adaptable to the spatial and temporal evolution of the activities. In the development of the organizational image, the logo offers "two very important spaces: the space to create visibility and the space to generate credibility and trust. The visibility space belongs to the organization. It must strive to ensure its visibility by transmitting and harmonizing communication. *The trust space belongs to the target audience.*" [14] If the image of the organization conforms to the horizon of expectation, then the image is credible and will be accepted. E.g:



Among the most well-known techniques for building the organizational image are:

- Use of the "*halo effect*", imagological flipping, unitary use of image multipliers and image differentiation. These techniques can be applied either individually or combined, depending on the goals pursued, the state of the current image, the interests of different categories of the target audience and other factors.

The technique based on the "halo" effect involves the use of the image of an organization, individual, phenomenon or object, which already has a reputation in order to gain more credibility for one's own organization. The effect obtained is more effective than the result of some advertisements, due to the image transfer that is carried out. It can also be successfully used within the same organization: image transfer can be between the organization and its members, or between the organization and its products or services. In using the "halo" effect, it should be taken into account that it also applies within the negative image.

- Another technique for building the organizational image is the *imagological reversal*. It aims to change the character of an organization's image, in a short time, by associating with positive events of wide audience and with major implications in people's lives. Differentiation can also be used to construct the image. Today, more than ever, your target audience is bombarded with messages from all sides. That is why differentiation is very important. Proposed by Philip Kotler as part of company management, the technique can also be successfully applied to organizations that do not have an economic purpose. This technique consists in differentiating the transmitted message to emphasize the organization's own character. For the differentiation to be significant, it is necessary that the respective characteristics are relevant and important to the organization.
- *The unitary use of image multipliers* is also an image building technique. These are the vectors with which information about the organization is transmitted: employees, former organizational members, neighbors, customers, admirers, the media. The unitary information of the multipliers is carried out in the hope that they will relay relatively unitary messages about the organization.

The organization should not limit itself to providing quality goods. It must inform the consumer about the advantages it offers and this is done through promotion. Promotion of an organization "represents the area where *advertising, publicity, the use of opinion leaders and event-making techniques interfere.*"

- ▲ *Publicity* is a way of spreading the message in a way that attracts the attention of the target audience. It contributes to the consolidation of the organizational image, being a *communication phenomenon* (with its help messages are sent that try to capture the goodwill of the public), but also a *social phenomenon* (it is not only addressed to the target audience, but to the entire population).

- ▲ *Advertising* includes all the means and techniques whose purpose is to attract the public's attention in order to influence the purchase and use of a certain product or service. It helps to strengthen the brand image, individualizes the products or services, makes them more visible and distinct, reveals them to the public perception and gives them notoriety and credibility. *Advertising aims to sell products or services, while advertising aims to strengthen the reputation of the organization.*
- ▲ *Opinion leaders* have an important role in promoting the image, being part of the category of opinion leaders. They show an increased interest in a particular issue. Thus, messages migrate from the mass media to opinion leaders, and from them they reach the less active segments of the population. *The use of leaders* has the advantage of countering and annihilating public resistance to mass media.
- ▲ *Creating events* is another way of promotion. The event represents "an occurrence, a fact, a special action, somehow out of the ordinary, which acts on the individual and collective mind, determining appreciations, evaluations and opinions". The use of events is based on the major impact they have in forming social images and determining major attitudes of people.

**CONCLUSION.** In this context, we subscribe to the opinion of researcher L. Covas, Ph.D., Univ. Prof., ASEM, according to which "the inclusion of sustainable development objectives in organizational strategies should not be treated only as a one-dimensional problem, involving regulations, added costs and additional responsibility, being determined only by the desire to create a positive image, but as a condition of building sustainable businesses, involving increasing operational efficiency and obtaining competitive advantage." [12]

Starting from the idea of promoting the organizational image through the lens of the sustainability of managerial and production processes, we note the increased need to demonstrate an attitude in relation to the SDGs. For example, "in 2011, PUMA's social report indicated that 94% of the negative effect caused by the company on the environment is caused by the production and distribution process (PUMA Social Report, 2013). Based on this conclusion, PUMA developed a new sportswear line, which was called InCycle, made from biodegradable and recyclable materials, essentially reducing (by almost a third) the negative impact on the environment. In the case of Coca-Cola HBC Romania, in the list of priorities for 2018, "addressing environmental and sustainability issues" is placed. According to the recently published sustainability report, the company managed to reduce, for ten years, a large amount of PET (5,000 tons) by changing the packaging; also, by recycling packaging from bottling plants and packaging put on the market (three quarters and 56.7% respectively) and by implementing internal programs or avoiding emissions of 79 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> (Social Report Coca-Cola HBC Romania, 2016)." [15]

The principles of sustainable development cause essential changes in the way of evaluating organizational performance. Thus, global performance includes both financial (profit, return on investment, sales growth, etc.) and non-financial (quality, innovation, employee satisfaction, staff commitment, sensitivity to social issues, etc.).

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