Chapter 2

Integration as a Central Aspect of Sustainable Development

2.1 Introduction

The concept of sustainable development consists of various components. Deriving from the complexity of the concept, these components have been defined and categorized in different ways. Depending on the field of science undertaking to define these components, also the methodological approaches differ significantly.¹

In the legal realm, in particular in public international law, a range of diverse components has been identified. Sands, for example, distinguishes four main elements;² the International Law Association defines seven core principles;³ and a report published by the European Commission points to

² Sands lists the (i) need to preserve natural resources for the benefit of future generations (principle of intergenerational equity); (ii) the aim of exploiting natural resources in a manner which is sustainable, or prudent, or rational, or wise or appropriate (principle of sustainable use), (iii) the equitable use of natural resources, which implies that use by one state must take account of the needs of other states (principle of equitable use or intragenerational equity) and (iv) the need to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into economic and other development plans, programmes, and projects, and that development needs are taken into account in applying environmental objectives (principle of integration). Sands, 2003, 253.
³ The ILA New Delhi Declaration is based on those core principles: (i) the duty of states to ensure sustainable use of natural resources, (ii) the principle of equity and the eradication of poverty,(iii) the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, (iv) the principle of the precautionary approach to human health, natural resources and ecosystem, (v) the principle of participation and access to information and justice, (vi) the principle of good governance; and (vii) the principle of integration and interrelationship, in particular
The principle of integration remains the most fundamental and operationally significant. Article 4 of the 1992 Rio Declaration noted that ‘[i]n order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.’ While this early focus on integration only illuminated one side of the equation – the integration of environmental protection into development – present understanding sees all three main components – the social, economic, and environmental – as integral aspects of a triangular relationship.

The various categorization attempts take the importance of integration for granted, thereby underwriting its central position in the concept of sustainable development. Sands states that ‘[i]n many ways, it [the element of integration] is the most important’. Similarly, paragraph 7.1. of the New Delhi Declaration accepts the somewhat quintangular structure of ‘[t]he principle of integration reflect[ing] the interdependence of social, economic, financial, environmental and human rights aspects of principles and rules of international law relating to sustainable development as well as of the needs of current and future generations.’ Consequently, the ILA Committee on International Law on Sustainable Development defined the reliance on the principle of integration as the key feature of its work. It explains this focus by defining the principle of integration not only a ‘substantive principle of international law’ but also a ‘practical tool by which issues relevant to sustainable development can be synthesised.’

The Committee notes that ‘[i]ntegration is thus pivotal to the promotion of sustainable development. It is the principle of integration that both brings together the many challenges confronting the international community and,

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4 See the study of Michael Decleris who lists 12 principles, including the principle of (i) Public Environmental Order; (ii) Sustainability; (iii) Carrying Capacity; (iv) Obligatory Restoration of Disturbed Ecosystems; (v) Biodiversity; (vi) Common Natural Heritage; (vii) Restrained Development of Fragile Ecosystems; (viii) Spatial Planning; (ix) Cultural Heritage; (x) Sustainable Urban Environment; (xi) Aesthetic Value of Nature, and (xii) Environmental Awareness. Decleris, 2000.
6 See Sands, 2003, 263.