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THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Recent years have seen an increase in interest in the circular economy (CE) in science and practice. In both cases, the benchmark for an activity is the degree of environmental degradation. CE is a concept based on sustainable development, taking into account the balance of three areas: environmental, economic, and social. While the first two are relatively well described and measurable by quantitative indicators, the third is still not satisfactorily represented in science and practice. To embed CE in scientific discourse, it seems appropriate to use the umbrella concept, which implies the integration of different fields and disciplines into new research areas. This article focuses on the social aspect, emphasizing the role of management sciences, which, with the selection of appropriate methods, can be the key to studying and describing this area. The purpose of this article is to try to select a research paradigm for the social aspect of CE, so that the concept fits more fully into the assumptions of sustainable development.

Keywords: circular economy, CE, paradigm, management sciences, umbrella concept.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the concept of a circular economy has been present in scientific research since the 1960s, it was only in the early 21st century that the issue rose to the ranks of key issues in both the scientific circuit and political and economic practice. For the past two decades there has been a marked increase in publications, but also in ideas for solving related problems. Reflection in this area has taken on a very elaborate form in the EU, not least because of the applied nature of the concept in the Community.

The EU's CE policy is a response to the environmental degradation that has been observed for decades. The discussion on this topic was triggered after the publication of the Club of Rome report entitled *Limits to Growth* (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, 1972). The authors, scientists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, prepared the report, which can be read as a warning to humanity that there are limits to economic growth. The European Council in 1972 pointed out the need to develop an environmental policy linked to economic development.

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Today, it can be said that there is a consensus on the general understanding of the principles of CE, which is defined as maximizing the added value of resources, materials and products while minimizing the amount of waste produced. At the same time, there are a great many definitions, emphasizing different aspects of the concept. A universal view of CE is presented by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, according to which it is the consideration of repair and remanufacturing in design and maintaining the highest utility and value of products, components and materials at all times, separating technical and biological cycles (*Towards A Circular Economy...*, 2015).

The main problem that accompanies the discussion of the modern economic model concerns the replicating pattern in which resources are turned into products and the latter into waste. At the same time, products are too quickly “stopped”, not put back into circulation (Hobson, Lynch, 2016). A key demand of CE is to separate economic growth from environmental degradation (Kama 2015; Webster, 2013). Some approaches treat the problem more broadly, linking it to local employment opportunities (Stahel, 2006). However, this framing is relatively rare, the most important aspects addressed by researchers being the economy and the environment. This is reflected in the actions taken in the EU, which can be characterized as a response to an overly expansive economic system (Korhonen, Honkasalo, Seppälä, 2018). The direction taken by the EU, but also by a growing number of countries, is based on the assumption that increased resource efficiency through closed material loops will reduce material extraction, waste disposal, and thus pressure on the environment (Ghisellini, Cialani, Ulgiati, 2016).

The reason why the article demonstrates the example of the EU is the degree of implementation of CE principals, expressed both in strategic documents and actions aimed at meeting pro-environmental demands. The second reason is the “inspiring” role of the Union, primarily for researchers of the subject, as many scientific publications refer to the decisions of Community bodies in the field of CE. This special approach of the EU to environmental issues is a direct result of the adopted principles of sustainable development. It is worth noting that the EU has pledged to adopt the United Nations Agenda 2030 related to, among other things, ecological transformation. Central to this is precisely the concept of sustainable development, which is achieved by combining economic development with environmental protection, as well as social justice (Laurent, 2016). Only the presentation of CE in the context of sustainable development gives a full picture of the concept.

The breadth of issues addressed in the discussion of CE makes this area difficult to identify on a map of scientific fields and disciplines. Most of the problems that scientists deal with are related to the environment and the economy. At the same time, researchers of the former are primarily representatives of the natural sciences. The second area is of interest to representatives of economic sciences. In addition to environmental and economic issues, there remains a social issue, very important in the context of sustainable development. The key to describing this sphere may be the management sciences, which have the task of proposing solutions for the management of enterprises to help managers make decisions, but also describe the operation of the public sphere. According to economics, the environment is a public good, while the benefits of generating economic growth and associated pollution are overwhelmingly private. At the same time, the social costs associated with environmental degradation are shared by all.

The description of the social aspect requires appropriate research methods, which are already being proposed by researchers in the management science discipline. Very often, however, scientists conduct their research assuming the constancy of the analyzed area, and use quantitative methods. Meanwhile, management science, like all social sciences, is

subject to evolution, and one of the directions of development is the critical approach. The purpose of this article is to try to select a research paradigm for the social aspect of CE, so that the concept more fully fits into the assumptions of sustainable development.

2. CE AND OF THE UMBRELLA CONCEPT

In the context of recent CE research, it can be described as an umbrella concept (Blomsma, Brennan, 2017). The researchers refer to a term coined by Paul Hirsch and Daniel Levin, who define an umbrella concept as “a broad concept or idea used loosely to encompass and explain a set of diverse phenomena” (Hirsch, Levin, 1999). According to the authors, umbrella concepts create relationships between pre-existing theories and fields that were previously unrelated by focusing on their common quality or property. Hirsch and Levin propose the concept of adaptive capacity as an example of an umbrella concept; Klein uses the term to describe the adaptive capacity to manage the environment and respond to the consequences associated with environmental degradation (Klein, Nicholls, Thomalla, 2003).

Hirsch and Levin take the position that umbrella concepts usually arise when specific fields or disciplines share common paradigms, but researchers have trouble theoretically linking them. According to the authors, there are a number of concepts that, although not related to each other, when combined, form a construct that helps organize certain areas that are just beginning to be studied. This applies mainly to the social sciences (including management and economic sciences). Without these connections, a cognitive gap arises, difficult to describe without treating the issues of interest as a whole. In this context, umbrella concepts can act as a catalyst in filling this knowledge gap by creating a new research space. The creation of this space can be seen as a simplifying and unifying act that establishes a discursive “handle” for relating to a particular phenomenon of interest, thereby defining it more clearly.

The authors of the concept observed an iterative trajectory that accompanies the creation of these spaces. The first phase is the articulation of the umbrella concept by grouping together pre-existing theories. This phase is characterized by enthusiasm, as the concept seemingly solves the problem of too many unrelated fields and disciplines by providing a new framework that brings them together (the excitement phase). After this phase, the umbrella concept is usually called into question when attempts to operationalize the concept bring to the surface unresolved issues regarding its definition and evaluation (verification phase). This is followed by a multiplicity of definitions, a search for tools and various indicators, which raises questions about the nature of the umbrella concept's binding capacity (the typology phase). This leads to further work in the form of additional theoretical development, which ultimately causes the concept to either unify, as theoretical challenges are resolved, or collapse (final phase). Blomsma and Brennan take the position that the current phase of CE research, in light of the umbrella concept presented by, can be described as a period of questioning and challenging key theses (verification phase).

The beginning of the increased interest in the issues that today are referred to as CE is associated with the emergence of the environmental movement. At that time, waste generation issues began to be equated with national responsibility (Melosi, 2005). Sticking to the concept formulated by Hirsch and Levin, the first three decades since then can be seen as a period of creation of basic concepts and problem areas. In the 1980s, proposals began to be formulated to make industry more responsible in terms of waste generated (Murray, Skene, Haynes, 2017). Since the mid-1980s, issues related to CE have entered

the scientific circuit and have been made more specific and explicit. Since then, strategies for dealing with resources, including through recycling, have also begun to be formed (Blomsma, Brennan, 2017). After the United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the view assuming a synergy of three factors: economic, environmental and social generated under the condition of adequate investment, assuming not only economic growth but also environmental sustainability, gained popularity (UNCED, 1992). Since then, the CE debate has become increasingly complex, with recurring themes related to fundamental challenges that have not been resolved: resource efficiency, zero waste, extended producer responsibility, sustainable production and consumption, and the green economy. These areas have become the focus of research units from all over the world, but also the source of legislation from many countries, especially the EU, which has taken up the challenge of implementing the principles of sustainable development set by the UN and called Agenda 2030 (*Transforming our world...*, 2015).

The lively discussion on CE has been accompanied by the development of many scientific disciplines, such as biology, physics, management science, economics, and at the same time several disciplines have emerged as a result of the interaction of these areas, such as eco-design and environmental economics. It can be said that the interplay of these fields and disciplines falls under the umbrella concept. Even this brief overview of the disciplines clearly shows a certain disproportion when it comes to the components of sustainable development. Areas from the environmental and economic fields dominate, with a small share of social issues.

3. PROBLEMS IN SELECTING INDICATORS

A similar disparity also exists in the EU, where there has been extensive debate over the shape and direction of CE for decades. Since the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986, which introduced the title “Environment” as the legal basis for common environmental policy, this area has become central to the setting of Community goals (Anderson 1995). The culmination of this trend is the European Green Deal, as a strategy of action for the entire EU, as a result of which member states are obliged to adopt laws within the designated framework. These laws focus not only on recycling, but also on an earlier stage, i.e. waste prevention (European Commission, 2019).

Both areas, i.e. regulations related to recycling and minimization of waste generation, deal with economic and environmental aspects. It is worth citing the main goals of the so-called European Climate Law of 2021, i.e. reducing EU net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels) and achieving climate neutrality in the EU by 2050 (European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021). Actions related to social aspects are addressed, but not at the level of the most important goals.

Giving social aspects less importance in the context of CE is not an EU-only “affliction”. This problem is pointed out by some researchers of the issue. Julian Kirchherr, Denise Reike and Marko Hekkert, who analyzed more than 100 definitions of CE, confounded the low share of terms referring to broad social issues (Kirchherr, Reike, Hekkert, 2017). The result of the above analysis in defining the circular economy and the way the EU's circular economy targets are set is worth supplementing with the issue of indicators, which are taken as a measure of progress in the CE. This is an issue that, like the concept of CE itself, is not uniformly grasped. The World Bank, the OECD, the Ellen McArthur Foundation, among others, have developed their sets of indicators. A common feature of the indicator sets used by the aforementioned organizations is that they are

related to the volume of consumption of raw materials, raw materials, as well as related to the volume of GDP.

This perspective is attractive to researchers, but also to politicians, including EU bodies, because of the relatively clear way of measuring economic growth. Relating growth to selected aspects related to the circular economy, such as raw material consumption, makes it possible to show the scale of selected phenomena, compare them year-on-year, or demonstrate progress. However, overemphasizing economic growth in the context of the CE can distort the essence of the entire concept, moving it away from the assumptions of sustainable development (Slaper, Hall, 2011). It is worth recalling the distinction between the concept of economic growth and socioeconomic development, proposed, among others, by Jerzy Hausner. According to the paradigm of economic science, economic growth falls into quantitative categories, referring to the aggregate value of goods and services measured over time. Socio-economic development refers to a broader category, it was introduced to describe changes not only in the economy, but also in society. In addition to the quantitative category, qualitative changes, which are more difficult to track, are also important. (Hausner, 2013). Due to the difficulty of studying socioeconomic development, indicators are most often formulated through the ratio of GDP to selected areas. While there are indicators in the scientific circuit to measure human development, the most popular of which is the HDI (Human Development Index), it relates to non-GDP areas. The HDI measures life expectancy, the average number of years of education in a specific age group, the expected number of education and national income in relation to purchasing power (Roser, 2014).

In view of the problems presented, establishing appropriate indicators that would broaden the perspective of CE research seems to be an important scientific as well as practical challenge. While in the case of the environmental factor the use of appropriate metrics does not pose difficulties, in the case of the economic and especially the social one some revision seems advisable. Adopting the convention of embedding CE in an umbrella concept, the discipline worth looking at is management science. The first reason is its "capacity", which manifests itself in the very broad spectrum of issues that fall within the scope of researchers' interests. The second reason is methodological, which is related to the pluralism of researchers in terms of the use of methods, often reaching into quite distant disciplines. Finally, the third reason is the potential of management science, the lively discussion going on in the international circuit, which opens the discipline to new paradigms. Some of the reasons cited make the very name ambiguous, but for the purposes of the argument the term management sciences will be used.

These sciences involve applying a scientific approach to solving management problems to help managers make decisions (Taylor, 2013). It is a discipline that continues to develop rapidly, with this development being multidirectional. The vast majority of research in the discipline is concerned with the operation of businesses, but nevertheless a significant portion also focuses on the operation of public institutions (Perlie, Lynn Jr., Politt, 2005).

4. PARADIGMS IN MANAGEMENT SCIENCE

Management science is part of those social sciences that focus on solving specific problems of organizations, less often on theoretical aspects. In addition, like all social sciences, they are not subject to such rigorous requirements for theory as the natural sciences (Goldman, 2016). Knowledge in this discipline is created on the basis of

observations, and then certain generalizations are made that allow the formulation of management methods and models.

In terms of research methods, the quantitative approach dominates in the case of management science. The most common practice is to make hypotheses and subject them to verification through research processes (Sulkowski, Gansiniec-Lenart 2021). The difficulty of capturing socioeconomic development may be the reason why more emphasis is placed on issues that cause fewer difficulties. It is worth noting a certain convergence. This problem was recognized in Poland as early as two decades ago (Sulkowski, 2004; Ćwiklicki, 2010), although it is worth noting that in recent years it is possible to observe a certain turn towards qualitative methods in both the field of management and quality sciences and economics (Glinka, Czakon, 2021). The tendency to use quantitative methods can be explained by the still popular belief among many researchers that they are superior to qualitative methods, which Wojciech Czakon called myths. Among these are that qualitative methods unsystematically analyze data, cannot test theories, or lead to random data collection (Czakon, 2009). Another reason may also be that these methods provide data that is “more certain” and easier to process. Meanwhile, if the social aspect is to be studied and analyzed through management science, it is worth going beyond quantitative methods.

In this context, it is worth asking the question of the location of management science among the social sciences. To this end, it will be helpful to refer to the concept of a paradigm, understood as a set of concepts and theories widely accepted by the scientific community, which makes it possible to isolate a set of claims and beliefs on which there is general agreement, which in turn makes it possible to explore new areas without returning to theses already settled (Kuhn, 1962). In the case of management science, researchers tend to believe that it is a multi-paradigm discipline. According to Georg Ritzer, who defines paradigm as “the basic image of the subject of scientific research”, this characteristic, i.e. the use of more than one paradigm, can be attributed to the social sciences in general (Ritzer, 1975). According to Ritzer, it takes a combination of at least several paradigms to effectively study social phenomena. The same author introduced three approaches in the field of social science that are now referred to as social science paradigms, namely the paradigm of social facts, the paradigm of social definitions and the paradigm of social behavior. The notion of paradigm, authored by Kuhn and popularized by Ritzer, has left a strong mark on the perception of social science, especially by researchers themselves, including sociologists. It can be said that one of the reasons why the term has gained such popularity is the ease of its adaptation to research areas and its application to organizing theories. About two decades after Kuhn introduced the term, there were some doubts about its application in sociology, due to the fact that the paradigm referred to projections rather than to the reality under study, it can be said that it had a “simplifying” task. Ritzer, who contributed to the popularity of the term, over time came to use the term metatheory, a concept that allows more freedom than the paradigm. In recent years, under the influence of so-called critical theory, there has been a blurring of the distinction between theory used to explain certain phenomena and the impact on practice (Bachmann-Medick, 2012).

While in the case of sociology the concept of paradigm has given way to the aforementioned metatheory, it functions successfully in the management sciences. Researchers most often cite Burrell and Morgan's 1979 work (Burrell, Morgan, 1979). The authors defined four basic paradigms, the criteria for distinguishing them were social orientation (regulation/change axis) and assumptions about cognition

(objectivity/subjectivity axis). From the intersection, four paradigms were identified: radical humanism, radical structuralism, interpretive sociology and functionalist sociology.

Radical humanism (change-subjectivism) assumes that the goal of research is to free the individual from the constraints of socially created reality. Radical structuralism (change-objectivism) analyzes social structures within objectively existing social reality. It refers to conflicts between elements of the social collective. Interpretive sociology (regulation-subjectivism) assumes that social reality is a social creation created as a result of interactions between individuals, and that understanding of this reality is only possible as a result of participation and interaction between with its creators. Functionalist sociology (regulation-objectivism) is based on the assumption that social reality has the character of a system of mutual regulation, and the purpose of research is simply to identify the elements of this system.

As for the first part of the axis (radical structuralism and radical humanism), according to some researchers, it is difficult to treat them as separate paradigms, due to the fact that both assume radical change, so they are often included together. Sometimes they are not even seen as full paradigms because they get away with being too exaggerated or “involved” (Kostera, 1996). On the basis of both paradigms, the critical approach (derived from radical humanism) and postmodern narrative deconstruction (corresponding to radical structuralism) have emerged. Both involve the entanglement of the researcher in the structure of the reality being described, which often prevents objective description. The critical approach and postmodernism are regarded as alternative currents in management science. The dominant currents are functionalism, neopositivism and systems theory (Sulkowski, Gansiniec-Lenart, 2021). Neopositivism can be considered related to functionalism from Burrell and Morgan's typology, with more emphasis on organizational functions (planning, monitoring, etc.). Functionalism seeks to describe the general rules and regularities of organizational objects. Today, the functional approach is often referred to as modernism, which seeks to describe the regularities that prevail in the world of stable social objects. Systems theory assumes that an organization is a system striving for equilibrium, which can be controlled.

The concept invented by Burrell and Morgan is only one proposal in terms of the structure and interrelationship of paradigms, but due to its readability it can be considered very useful in management science. Several decades have passed since the emergence of this division, and quite a few new paradigms have emerged, but they mostly fit into the scheme of objectivity/subjectivity and regulation/change set by the two researchers. The number of sub-disciplines that fall within the broad family of management sciences makes the whole discipline “overlap” with other areas, so in order to organize, paradigmaticism can be helpful. Individual researchers make a paradigm choice, so they have a reference point, move on “proven” research ground, while taking an interdisciplinary approach.

5. SOCIAL PARADIGM IN THE CE

The popularity of the term paradigm is accompanied by a significant departure from its original meaning. According to Thomas Kuhn, science does not develop as a result of adding new elements to an already existing theory, but as a result of changing methodological conditions, i.e. replacing one paradigm with another. The author calls this scientific revolutions. According to Kuhn, “with a change of paradigm there are usually at the same time significant transformations of the criteria determining legitimate problems and solutions” (Kuhn, 1962). Kuhn initially doubted whether any of the social sciences had

reached a paradigm at all. However, the author already made some "concessions" to the social sciences in the second edition of his book. In the case of the natural sciences, when there is a change in methodological conditions in a given community of researchers, one can speak of the birth of a new paradigm. In the case of the social sciences, it is difficult to point to a unified paradigm, especially given the "external criteria", i.e., not derived from institutional science, one of which is the pluralism of value systems (Kuhn, 1970).

The aforementioned tendency to base research on quantitative methods in the management sciences may be evidence that much of the scientific community seeks to give its work the rigor of testability and reproducibility. As a result, management is still dominated by a neo-positivist approach that has not caught on as much in other social sciences. It is mainly concerned with the assumption that the researcher is dealing with a stable reality, and that he himself maintains his independence. According to the neopositivist approach, the researcher has the task of discovering the regularities governing this reality, and then formulating a general theory to explain it. It should be noted that these requirements are very difficult to meet in the case of non-natural sciences. Much of the scientific community bases its research on formulating hypotheses and then empirically testing them (Duberley, Johnson, 2003). This attitude assumes that the object of research must be "protected" from the subjectivity of the researcher (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, Symon, 2006). Researchers based on the positivist approach use quantitative methods, and part of their effort is to select an appropriate research sample, analyze the collected empirical data, and finally – to conclude the acceptance or rejection of a hypothesis. According to Lukasz Sułkowski and Regina Gansiniec-Lenart, the use of the neopositivist canon limits the development of management knowledge, because this approach limits inquiry and raising additional questions, limiting itself to proving hypotheses (Sułkowski, Gansiniec-Lenart, 2021).

As for the choice of methods, a more complete analysis of social phenomena is possible through qualitative research, which, as mentioned, in the field of management sciences is also gaining some popularity in Poland. Qualitative methods are used in many research paradigms and currents, allowing in-depth reflection on complex social phenomena. Examples of such approaches include critical theory. This approach should be viewed as a response to the assumptions of positivism, primarily its basic thesis, such as the fixity and immutability of the objects under study, as well as the objectivity of the researcher. Critical theory assumes that truth is not the main goal to be pursued for management science. (Duberley, Johnson, 2003). Since objective truth does not exist, reality is socially constructed. The approach refers to social constructivism, formulated by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The approach seeks to capture the social world in its variability, resulting from the processes of actors' creation of meanings in the social world (Berger, Luckmann, 1966).

The best-known representative of the critical school is Jürgen Habermas, who argues that positivist assumptions about the objectivity of the researcher result in overlooking many aspects of the reality under study, including ethical issues (Habermas, 1999). According to the German philosopher, in order to obtain knowledge, uninhibited debate is needed, as well as the researcher entering into social relations. In the field of management science, the critical current assumes the impossibility of separating values from facts. What is particularly distinctive about the critical current in management is that it seeks to bring about change in management practice. Excessive objectivity makes it impossible to debate ethical management issues. The results of research conducted in the critical theory current

are not so much to lead to the discovery of universal truths, but to lead to change by showing alternatives.

The critical approach became the focus of many management scholars, which contributed to the emergence of a trend called critical management studies (CMS) (Alvesson, Willmott, 1992). Representatives of this current not only questioned the possibility of objectively presenting the phenomena that are the subject of management, but also focused on revising the approach to the role of enterprises and business in social life. One of the key challenges of management in the light of the representatives of CMS is such a revision of the organizational structure that will allow for more humane forms of management that allow employees to maintain their autonomy. CMS takes into account the perspective of various stakeholders, as well as issues of ethics and responsibility (Unerman, Bennett, 2004). Although CMS dates back to its roots in the early 1990s, it is still based on a very scattered intellectual output, and no coherent concept has been developed in this area. What CMS researchers and theorists have in common is that they emphasize unjust practices related to organizational order, managerial power or profit maximization. The CMS current raises numerous questions in the research world, and is often treated as an ideology rather than a separate paradigm. Indeed, researchers of this current are based on a philosophy that assumes the oppressiveness of certain groups or organizations over other, dominated, individuals or communities. It seems that the critical management approach, and the CMS current in particular, is a developing concept. A particularly interesting direction is the turn of some researchers toward the work of Pierre Bourdieu, in connection with such phenomena as globalization, ecology or the development of new technologies, as manifested in a monograph devoted to the reception of the French philosopher in management science (Robinson, Ernst, Larsen, Thomassen, 2021). Admittedly, according to the analysis conducted by Jost Sieweke, the vast majority of references concern the habitus, the field of research and capital, which can lead to a decontextualized analysis, far removed from Bourdieu's peculiar logic, a growing number of management scientists are adapting the French philosopher's concepts more widely, leading to a better understanding and a more complete adaptation of his concepts (Sieweke, 2014). A particularly important element of Bourdieu's concept is the embedding of science in social contexts. According to the author of the concept of habitus, scholars operating in a given research area adopt the prevailing "rules of the game" and take for granted certain assumptions, so that they tend to refer to the *doxa* that applies to their research field (Bourdieu, 2000). In the case of the management sciences, this peculiar reluctance to challenge certain canons associated with their discipline (such as adaptability to organizational application, researcher objectivity) can have the effect of narrowing the view of the object under study and even slowing the progress of the discipline as a whole (Butler, Sverre, 2012; Meyer, Boxenbaum, 2010). The inclination to go beyond the canons of a discipline depends on many factors, related not only to research interests, but also may have to do with the country or even continent from which the author hails, organizational culture, etc. The ideas of the French philosopher are an inspiration for management researchers and are by no means limited to the concept of "symbolic violence". It is worth noting that researchers from the CMS stream, who focus on showing inequalities in the organization, the oppressiveness of management systems, attempt to go beyond the *doxa* of their discipline, hence the doubts of some scholars in placing them in a particular paradigm.

6. THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

The social factor, the least identified link in the context of sustainable development, needs to be clarified, but also properly identified. Following the assumptions of the umbrella concept, we can consider that the environmental and economic aspects operate in a stable research environment. Assuming that the economic aspects can be studied with the tools belonging to the economic sciences, which use quantitative methods, for a more complete understanding of social issues it is worth using qualitative methods. As for the choice of paradigm, the issue is not clear. Could CMS be such a key? This social engagement may be one of the keys to describing issues relevant to pro-environmental activities. CMS is oriented towards causality, i.e. the possibility of involvement in the problems described, as well as their solutions. If one treats the critical approach not as a negation of certain truths accepted in management, and places the emphasis on involvement or concern, it will be an approach tailored to environmental challenges. In light of recent publications on this approach, CMS should be applied in the context of alternative forms of organization, or modifications to existing structures (Parker, S., Parker, M., 2017).

It is worth referring once again to Habermas, who emphasizes the role of civil society and social movements, the media and political discourses outside traditional political institutions (Habermas, 1999). Placing emphasis on this informal aspect can bring one closer to understanding and more fully describing the role of non-state actors in generating and enforcing pro-environmental rules in the global economy. One of the keys to a more complete study of the CE concept is the identification of factors related to the proper relationship between formal actors and informal stakeholders. This coincides with CMS's postulation that for a critical analysis of corporations operating in a global environment, the role of corporations and their relationship with society is important (Scherer, Palazzo, 2007).

In this context, it is worth referring again to the example of the EU. The rules implemented in the community in the field of CE serve the whole society, not just companies. However, the laws (mainly EU directives) are primarily aimed at businesses, as well as state bodies. Ultimately, their effects are and will be felt by all citizens of the community. However, the content of the EU's CE law, as well as policy documents, is mainly based on environmental and economic research. While the social factor is not completely ignored, it is largely marginal. Meanwhile, in Habermas's discourse theory, communicative action is key, consisting of processes of reaching agreement by defining situations together (Habermas, 1990). This, on the other hand, requires an "ethics of discourse", which entails the need to take a critical approach to past communication and revise what has been taken for granted. As a result, a prerequisite for the success of this process is the inclusion in the discourse of judgments and opinions that have been agreed upon by its participants. All actors should have the opportunity to participate in the discourse and to challenge all claims (Habermas, 2015). Referring to the implementation of CE principles in the EU, it can be noted that the opinion of environmental and economic experts is crucial. The public voice is generally taken into account to a small extent. Of course, it would be very difficult to structure the law-making process in such a way that would take into account the public's demands, especially since a significant part of the voices comes directly from the findings of science, which are indisputable.

However, legal rules in Habermas' conception are of a different nature. Unlike moral principles, which must be universally accepted, legal rules should simply work, so they

may not always be morally perfect. Law is a set of rules by which human beings relate to each other as citizens of a state. Law should reflect the current values and concerns of citizens and be the best that can be achieved at a given time and in a given society. Therefore, important rules must meet the principle of discourse, but not necessarily the principle of universalization. Universalization means that participants accept in a “non-coercive” way the consequences of the norm introduced, and discourse means that norms would be accepted by those concerned if they could participate in practical discourse (Habermas, 2015).

7. CONCLUSIONS

According to Habermas, in order for a norm to be universally valid, not necessarily as a law, it is required to arrive at it through discourse. This brings community participants closer to universalizing certain rules. Such a set of principles and norms can become CE, if the concept of sustainability is taken into account. One way of describing social reality may be to go beyond a view narrowed to a purely scientific perspective, or a seemingly scientific one based on quantitative data. In the context of selecting an appropriate paradigm, some caveats must be made about the proposed CMS trend. With regard to some of the pressing problems of the modern world, it is an appropriate paradigm, by seeking change. However, CMS itself does not seem to have reached the “maturity” by which this current could be treated as a ready-made paradigm. Some of the assumptions can be treated as utopian. It seems that it will be valuable to apply elements of the critical approach, but taking into account other paradigms.

As for the whole concept of CE, based on three elements, while emphasizing the need to “value” social issues, one should not forget that much of the research on the subject must focus on technical issues, including those related to recycling, but also material flows in production and consumption. The challenge, therefore, is not to focus less on the environment and the economy, but to take more account of social issues. Today, it is becoming increasingly common for me to believe that CE research should be transdisciplinary, as this allows researchers to use knowledge more fully, despite the disagreements that still exist (Sauve, Bernard, Sloan, 2016). Umbrella theory captures the dynamics of this research well.

To overcome these misunderstandings and “commonality” of research areas, the opportunity for CE is to treat it holistically, albeit with interdisciplinarity. For this, a stronger “embedding” of the concept in the social sciences, with reference to the management sciences, is needed. This can happen by going beyond neo-positivist methods and heading in a critical direction, which also involves modifying the research itself and shifting the emphasis from quantitative to qualitative. If one were to treat the EU as a “testing ground” where CE principals are implemented, it was valuable to use a critical approach so that members of the community, i.e., citizens of member states, would participate in the discourse. This could prevent environmental laws from being seen as imposed from above. In addition, expanding the discussion and research area to include a critical approach could contribute to modifying the methods of measuring CE indicators.

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