Introduction

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Economists and environmentalists have been advocating changes to the contemporary way of living to preserve the planet since the 18th century, however, increased attention towards environmental issues started during the 1960s when Kenneth Boulding (1966) published an article on growing ecological problems. Contemporary living conditions came to the centre of the attention of economists, environmentalists, and sociologists with debates on the impact of consumerism on the environment, for example (Trentmann, 2016; Wright & Nyberg, 2015; Krstić & Krstić, 2017; Coghlan, 2009; Corrigan, 1997; Ewen & Ewen, 1992; Calder, 1990). Some critical authors argued that human civilisation is based on anthropocentric and liberal values that promote a philosophy according to which humans have the right to excessively exploit natural resources and that humans have the freedom to act as they wish when it comes to using the ecosystem (Krstić, 2018). Instead, humans should rely on mutual dependency and use the ecosystem in a way that preserves its sustainability, however, since this is still not the way humans treat the environment some authors asked whether neoliberal economic paradigm is inherent to environmental degradation and thus, whether capitalism is fundamentally unable to achieve environmental protection and more balanced use of ecosystems (Wright & Nyberg, 2015; Krstić, 2018; Krstić et al, 2018; Fleming & Jones, 2013; Ireland & Pillary, 2013; Sheehy, 2014).

However, the term often used in these debates is sustainability and there is a sense that sustainability depicts environmental protection whilst the term is often understood to have four pillars, social, human, economic, and environmental. As such, the term encompasses numerous policies and initiatives and can be considered as a broad term that describes policies centred on the preservation and improvement of a certain resource. All of these pillars are discussed independently and introduced into various policies and in the past decade, there has been lots of debate about what can be understood as human sustainability, such as policies on health, education, nutrition, knowledge, skills, and all policies that improve the life of humans and their sustainability on Earth. For example, in the UK, the health care system is free at the point of service, and this has been a much-debated public issue after the Brexit referendum where opponents of leaving the EU have advocated that National Health Service (NHS) is at risk because of a potential trade deal with the US, where universally available healthcare is not a norm but remains in the domain of those who can afford it (de Lew et al, 1992; Chaplain, 2019;

Boffey, 2020). There has also been a debate, which fits into this pillar, on economic wellbeing for everyone with some countries debating the introduction of basic income for everyone, and the benefits system. The World Bank (2020) published a report analysing the benefit of this system and pilot programmes that are in place in several countries, for example in Finland, which shows that the debate is moving towards trying to find ways of making economies sustainable by providing an income for everyone. Many organisations are also involved in these debates by engaging in anti-slavery statements and guaranteeing fair trade and fair treatment of suppliers. The latter came as a result of increased attention of consumers and the media on corporate conduct, which happened because of several major scandals where bad corporate governance brought to bankruptcies of corporations, and this left many employees without pensionable contributions, thus corporate governance going directly again human sustainability.[1] These scandals instigated a major debate on corporate conduct and this caused a proliferation of academic research into corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Social sustainability, on the other hand, is focused on the preservation of social capital that keeps society running, and these debates are focused on communities, cultures, and globalisation. Some of the heavily debated issues are what kind of world will future generations inherit, and this is linked not only to environmental sustainability, but also capitalist policies that many see as exploitative, such as zero-hour contracts in some countries and precarious employment in general. For example, in the UK, the Government introduced the zero-hour contracts or casual contracts, and according to the definition of the Government, these contracts are meant to be used for "a 'piece work' or 'on call' work, for example for interpreters. This means: they are on call to work when you need them, you do not have to give them work, they do not have to do work when asked" (UK Government, n.d.). These contracts have been attracting criticism for the exploitation and causing insecurity and precarious situation for

[1] For example, Enron was a US publicly held company that went bankrupt due to its corruptive activities, which ended with thousands losing their jobs and pension funds. When the scandal was about to be discovered the management engaged in destroying documents to cover it up, and eventually 16 former executives of the company were imprisoned (Silverstein, 2013). On the other hand, WorldCom was a large US company that acquired many other companies in its expansion while the management did not put sufficient efforts into merging newly acquired companies. Its founder also burdened the company with high loans to save it, and that sent the company to bankruptcy. Failed management and merging of the business empire also led to four billion USD debts in expenses that were not allocated properly, phoney accounting entries to make it look as if the company was more profitable than it was, failure to send bills on time and claim liability against clients who were not paying, etc. Therefore, the company eventually filed for bankruptcy leaving many unemployed and without pension funds (Moberg & Romar, 2003; 2006). Tyco was also a large US company that was engaged with accountancy frauds, false bonuses paid to management and similar activities that eventually led to trial against two senior executives who were charged 600 million USD that they had to give back to the company, which meant personal bankruptcy for them as well as a prison sentence (USA Today, 2005; Tyco Fraud Centre, 2006).

workers (Koumenta & Williams, 2018; Wood & Burchell, 2014; Cardoso et al, 2014). The UK Government has also implemented a strategy on sustainability and published several policy documents outlining how this strategy will work. For example, 'Securing the Future' policy document focuses on the UK Government's sustainable development strategy (2005) and outlines that the Government will involve people, lead by example and deliver their goals centred on letting people make a difference locally in their communities and globally. The strategy thus has several elements, namely, "helping people to make better choices; "One planet economy": sustainable consumption and production; Confronting the greatest threat: climate change and energy; A future without regrets: protecting our natural resources and enhancing the environment; From local to global: creating sustainable communities and a fairer world; Ensuring it happens" (p. 5) and the lengthy document explains in details how all of these elements will be put in place. Whilst this document was released in 2011[2] and is still on the Government's website and part of the strategy, the UK Government has also issued a strategy to implement UN's sustainable goals centred on ending poverty and inequality (UK Government, 2019), thus committing to focus on human and social sustainability as part of their wider sustainable plan.

The fact the UK still has a policy of zero-hour contracts which are criticised as neoliberal and precarious whilst claiming commitment to sustainability shows that the current sustainable policies are still incompatible with the way largely capitalist countries operate, i.e. in particular because separate economic strategies often focus on continuous economic growth. For example, the UK's Industrial Strategy focuses on "improving productivity while keeping employment high", and thus outlines that "we can earn more – raising living standards, providing funds to support our public services and improving the quality of life for all our citizens" (UK Government, 2017, p. 6). The document is heavily focused on increasing production and growth whilst also, in some places, promising clean growth. Arguably, these strategies have been put in place by different British Governments, who come of different political perspectives and different parties and we have not done a detailed analysis of these policies, however, general reading of policies clearly shows that the focus is on some sort of environmental protection whilst continuing economic growth and capitalist orientation, which many see as contradictory to the sustainability of the environment (Wright & Nyberg, 2015;

[2] See here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-the-future-delivering-uk-sustainable-development-strategy

Krstić, 2018; Krstić et al, 2018; Fleming and Jones, 2013; Ireland and Pillary, 2013; Sheehy, 2014). The industrial strategy also states that the focus will be on people and improving their standards of living, however, zero-hour contracts and precarious contracts remain in place, thus again raising the question whether the neoliberal and capitalist economy is inherently unsustainable.

The United Nations, for example, identified social sustainability as part of their sustainable development goals. In that, the UN identified the following issues as part of their sustainability agenda, no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry infrastructure and innovation, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace and justice, and partnership for goals (United Nations, n.d.). In line with these goals, the United Nations also introduced *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Document* (United Nations, n.d. a), which outlines goals for achieving sustainability, and the preamble focused in particular on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, thus calling for joint action in tackling sustainability. However, what is central to this document is that it places particular emphasis on social sustainability and the social pillar of sustainability particularly addresses social and economic improvements that protect the environment but also support equality (Diesendorf, 2000). The latter is the case with the United Nations and the 2030 Agenda, which outlines a determination to work together in partnership to support people and the planet and ensure prosperity and peace.

Economic sustainability is focused on maintaining capital and improving conditions for living, and this is the most contested area of the sustainability debate, as some authors see the current policies as neoliberal and contributing to the problem rather than solving anything. For example, in the field of CSR, some authors argue that CSR is a neoliberal initiative and a smokescreen that blocks changes in the society (Fleming and Jones, 2013; Ireland and Pillary, 2013; Sheehy, 2014), thus opening a question whether businesses can ever be sustainable. In business terms, economic sustainability is linked to the efficient use of assets and keeping businesses profitable whilst also helping communities (Munro, 2020), which is contested by authors and activists on the political Left who see corporations as a problem and ask for a fundamental change to the way society operates. Besides, environmental activists and advocates also argue that ecological and social pillars of sustainability undoubtedly suffer

because of economic sustainability. This is because many organisations do not follow the so-called new economy model according to which businesses will be inclusive of all elements of sustainability because they follow the neoliberal model of doing business. This means that corporations are criticized for greenwashing and introducing CSR policies that do not contribute towards sustainability but are used for public relations purposes (Benn et al, 2006; Alves, 2009; Aggarwal1 & Kadyan; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

Finally, environmental sustainability is centred on improving human lives (and is thus linked with human sustainability) through the preservation of land, air, water, minerals, and all-natural resources. This means that all four pillars of sustainability are intertwined and need to be tackled in harmony. This pillar has been most visible in the public sphere recently, in part because of visibility of environmental activists such as Greta Thunberg or Extinction Rebellion, both of which have warned about the preservation of Earth and its resources, which is again linked to other pillars of sustainability, such as social and economic as without responsible business policies sustainability of the environment cannot be achieved, and without sustainable social policies, humankind also cannot sustain itself. Sustainability is often seen as humanity's goal towards a more harmonious use of natural resources and environmental protection is, thus at the heart of this view (Radivojević et al, 2018).

However, what is often missed in debates on sustainability is a contribution from women's studies, ecofeminism in particular, and also the role of the media in fostering sustainability. In the case of ecofeminism and women's studies, ecofeminists operate under an assumption that the Earth and women are "violated and degraded resulting in damage that if often irreparable, yet only a small proportion of humans have engaged their consciousness with this crisis" (Spretnak, 1990, p. 2). Besides, the feminist movement has been historically interested in the environmental protection (Carson, 1962; d'Eaubonne, 1974) and women still make up the majority of the members of environmental and animal's rights protection movements (Puleo, 2017) whilst women politicians have historically been very likely to put environmental protection at the heart of their policies (Dimitropolous, 2018; Buzov, 2007). At the heart of ecofeminism is an argument that environmental degradation and women's oppression are grounded in patriarchal order when both women and nature are dominated like property (Adams, 2007; Holy, 2007; Geiger Zeman & Holy, 2014; Besthorn & Pearson McMillen, 2002; Warren, 2000; Emel, 1995; Salleh, 1992). This view is linked with human and social capital pillars that speak of the preservation of humanity through equality and social policies. In other

words, it is possible to argue that organisations and society as a whole cannot be sustainable if women are oppressed because the society then relies on the contribution from only one group of its members and ignores the others. Nevertheless, given that patriarchy is historically linked with masculinity whereas femininity has always been linked to nature, this resulted with a situation that the majority of women are interested in the environment and likely to run policies that preserve it, thus bringing the issue of equality at the heart of the sustainability debate. But, even though sustainability has historically been a woman's issue and throughout the history, women joined movements for environmental protection (Buzov, 2007), the majority of research and voices we nowadays hear about sustainability are male, which goes in line with other research showing that once woman's topic comes to the agenda then it is men who are involved and women get pushed away (Topić, 2018). Besides, there is hardly any research discussing women's communities and women's initiatives on fostering sustainable living.

When it comes to the media, most studies debate the issue of sustainable communication on social media and the sustainability of social media companies (Krombholz et al, 2012; Reilly & Weirup, 2012). Besides, some works discuss the role of the media in pressuring businesses to disclose sustainability information (Cuadrado-Ballesteros et al, 2014), media representation of some sustainability issues (Lockie, 2006), and media representation and activism in regards to CSR. In the case of the latter, the media are seen as a significant player in pushing the CSR agenda. Media – and especially business media - increased interest on CSR (Buhr & Grafström, 2006; Tench et al, 2007; Ihlen, 2008; Grayson, 2009; Grafström & Windell, 2011). This happened because the first decade of the 21st century has been labelled as a corporate irresponsibility period. First findings on media and CSR reporting highlighted that the media assign meaning to CSR and contribute to the enforcement of CSR as debate drivers. For example, Buhr and Grafström (2006) analysed the *Financial Times* coverage of CSR between 1988 and 2003 and found that the newspapers attempted to contribute to "shaping the meaning of a new management concept" (p. 1). The analysis showed how the concept of CSR evolved from a concept related to the creation of jobs and charitable contributions, which would belong to Friedman's (1962; 1970) understanding of CSR to the responsibility that companies have towards society. However, corporate scandals contributed to both an increase and a negative tone of future coverage. For example, in the period of 2006/2007, major news media in Britain reported their CSR while at the same time expressing pressure on British companies to perform better in terms of their social commitment, however, CSR remained driven by internal rather than external factors (Gulyas, 2009). In other words, it was media organisations themselves

that enforced CSR, and not the external factors that forced them to do so. This can also be because of a desire for higher financial performance as results from Zyglidopoulos, Georgiadis, Carroll and Siegel (2011) confirmed. It has been acknowledged, however, that the media set an agenda on business and this is because people learn about companies from the media, with which media become drivers of corporate reputation (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Staw & Epstein, 2000). Tench, Bowd and Jones, on the other hand, argued that media see organisations that enforce CSR through five characteristics, or "conformist, cynic, realist, optimist, and strategic idealist" (Tench et al, 2007, p. 355). Among media professionals, it seems they see CSR mostly through obligation, or something that companies have to do. But, a majority of practising journalists agreed that CSR should include donations and community development (ibid). These findings were confirmed in a study by Grafström and Windell (2011) that showed financial newspapers see CSR as soft regulation and as something that should go beyond the law; and human resources where CSR is seen as a tool to ensure better working conditions and as a means to promote the employer to their employees.

Topić and Tench (2018) and Topić (2020) also found that media show excessive interest in CSR. In these studies, analysing the debate on sugar, the findings showed that the media express interest on this matter of their initiative and that they show bias in reporting and framing, thus failing media social responsibility expectation as well as expectations in regards to the role of the media in the society. These studies also found that NGO sets an agenda on sugar and thus questioned whether the nature of sourcing stories is changing in the media, which seems to be turning against businesses and the corporate agenda (Topić, 2020; Topić & Tench, 2018). Besides, Meijer and Kleinnijenhuis (2006) analysed the issue of corporate reputation while Brickey (2008) analysed corporate governance scandals in the media. Meijer and Kleinnijenhuis (2006) found that the media do have an agenda and that this agenda has an effect because news on corporate reputation stimulated change of opinion among the public and Wang (2007) has, however, analysed CSR in the media and found that "when the participants were not primed with CSR, the negatively framed news report did not influence participants' judgments" (p. 139).

The Approach of this Book

Against the backdrop above, this book is looking at various sustainable policies, gender and sustainability, and media and sustainability. The book came as a result of collaboration with the Retail Institute (Leeds Business School) and participation in several events and conferences

attended by both academics and members of the Retail Institute who are predominantly working in retail and packaging industries. The practitioners, similar to findings in one of the chapters in the book (see below) expressed frustration with the lack of knowledge of the media and consumers on sustainability issues and the involvement of emotions, often fostered by the media. Therefore, we decided to put a book together that goes beyond environmental protection and looks at sustainability in more details. The book is predominantly focused on human and social sustainability and this focus is carried into sections of the book that discuss sustainable policies, media and gender. This focus was taken to move away from merely discussing environmental protection but to shift the focus on the effect sustainable policies have on people and society. As such, chapters in this book discuss human and social sustainability as well as economic sustainability, thus focusing on three pillars of sustainability to add to the ongoing debate on sustainability by providing information and new knowledge on less publicly visible pillars of sustainability.

In the first section of the book, the two chapters discuss changes to the education system and focus on human and social sustainability whilst linking this debate with economic development. Milos Krstić, in the first chapter, looks at changes Universities in Europe are implementing to be more sustainable and to ensure employability of students and knowledge transfer warning that many Universities express no willingness to engage with these policies, and thus bringing a question whether Universities are sustainable. On the other hand, Léon Consearo discusses the shortage of skills and apprenticeship scheme in the UK by analysing a shortage of skills and what is needed for the economy to be sustainable. The following two chapters focus on sustainable corporate policies concerning corporate accounting. In that, Fiona Robertson analyses integrated reporting by conducting an extensive literature review on this new field of interest, which is meant to ensure transparency and accountability whilst Nuha Ceesay, Moade Shubita and Fiona Robertson then applied this literature review in an analysis of FTSE100 companies in the period of five years to explore to what extent companies use integrated reporting and report on sustainability. Finally, for this, section, Ben Mitchell looks at consumers and businesses views on packaging and plastic, which is a hotly debated issue around the world. In his analysis of consumers and businesses, Mitchell found that businesses express frustration by emotional arguments surrounding plastic, which are pushing towards more environmentally unfriendly packaging whilst consumers show understanding of the issue of plastic in oceans but showed low level of understanding of packaging, thus proving that sustainability as an issue cannot be debated or resolved single-handedly but by incorporating

all four pillars of sustainability and by engaging in knowledge exchange and meaningful debate.

In the subsequent section, gender and sustainability are discussed. The chapter by Mirela Holy, Marija Geiger Zeman and Zdenko Zeman look at a sustainable initiative started by a woman who has spent her life advocating for sustainability, thus directly addressing the research gap on women's initiatives on sustainability and showing how women initiate and lead sustainable projects. In the subsequent chapter, Batya Weinbaum reflects on her life-long commitment to sustainability and feminism and outlines changes that women's communities she founded went through with the change of generations, thus also addressing a gap on discussing women's initiatives on sustainability but also showing the impact new generations, who nominally support initiatives, actually have on the movement. Mirela Polić, in the next chapter, discusses the position of older women in the work market and discusses whether society and economy can be truly sustainable if they rely on the contribution of only one part of its workforce. This chapter, therefore, looks at how patriarchy affects women and consequentially society as a whole, thus showing that patriarchal systems are not sustainable if the human element is not taken into consideration. Finally, for this section, Laura Garry discusses initiatives towards the Northern Powerhouse, which is an initiative by the UK Government to more equally redistribute wealth across England. However, as Garry finds through her analysis of various policy documents, women have been left out of this initiative and thus this again opens up a question whether society can be sustainable if the human element is not taken into consideration. Whilst Garry does not explicitly discuss feminist theory, this chapter opens up a question of how capitalism treats women and whether women's equality is possible without a structural change.

Finally, in the last section, four chapters discuss media and social media, and their impact on sustainability debate. In the first chapter, Aaron McKinnon analysed the coverage of French and the US media on plastic pollution and the analysis shows how media in two different countries frame the issue differently, e.g. as a cultural issue in the US as opposed to the French approach where journalists focus on legislation and politics of the issue of plastic pollution. Since two countries have different political and economic systems, they also have different approaches to the issue of pollution and the environmental protection, and this chapter illustrates how humans can drive sustainability debate, and this shows that UN's call for global collaboration in tackling sustainability is needed. This is especially relevant since consumers

show a lack of knowledge on the issue whilst businesses express resentment of the public argument. In the next three chapters, Tauheed Ramjaun, Filip Šikić and Gemma Bridge discuss the role of social media in sustainability debate, thus showing the role of consumers and the general public in engaging with these debates (Ramjaun and Bridge) as well as the corporate approach towards green marketing and its application on social media (Šikić). These chapters illustrate the role of social media in fostering sustainability debates and the way consumers and companies adapt to social media, thus showing the interconnectedness of human, social and economic sustainability, that will go along the lines of environmental sustainability, which is in the mind of consumer/public (as these chapters also illustrate) the most recognisable part of the sustainability debate.

The book does not aim to provide definite answers or claim to generalise what sustainability means and how to move forward. However, we believe that book opens up some interesting and less explored debates, which can contribute towards more meaningful, in-depth and more effective policies on sustainability in the future. This particularly applies to the gender chapters, which offers some very original contributions including the first interview with someone living in a globally-recognised eco-village, the reflection of one 2nd wave feminist who has spent her life founding women's communities, as well as contributions from younger feminists who recognised issues in their societies and inherent women's inequality.

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