

VALUES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE VS. GLOBAL PROBLEMS AND THREATS

MIKULÁŠ HUBA, Institute of Geography, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava

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Violence in the world, explosive population growth, uneven and unfair distribution of wealth, destruction of the environment and/or the ineffectiveness of supranational political and economic tools and institutions and other problems are more and more achieving global character.

The growth of number, frequency and intensity of global problems and threats is a reality. In the same time it represents a big challenge: How to find a generally acceptable, adequate global solution? The majority of political and intellectual leaders around the world acknowledge concept of sustainable development/sustainable living as the most important tool for protecting the biosphere and how to secure reasonable development for the future.

The development and implementation of the sustainable living concept is driven by the effort to reach – as much as possible – the ideals of humanism and the harmony between man and nature, based on the respect of life.

Values compatible with a sustainable way of living are a set of values, the implementation of which promote the shift towards sustainable future. These values are not completely new. Just the opposite. They create the core of the common heritage of humankind, since the oldest religious cultures.

The submitted study tries to map the recent developments of values compatible with the sustainable way of living problematic from Czech, Slovak and thinkers from abroad perspectives in the wider framework of relevant international activities.

Key words: Human values – Ethics – Ecology – Environment – Sustainable future – Global threats – Problems – Challenges – Alternatives – Processes – Strategies – Events – Quality of life

Introduction. Different authors use to note different groups of global problems. E.g. Novacek recognised these major groups:

1. Violence in the world (beside of wars: terrorism, organized crime, contempt for human rights, militant religious fanaticism, ethnic intolerance).
2. The explosive population growth (mainly in developing regions).
3. The uneven and unfair distribution of wealth (escalating tensions in the developing countries and between the developing and development countries).
4. Destruction of the environment (threats to biodiversity including cultural diversity, deforestation, desertification, water shortages, soil degradation, pollution of atmosphere and climate change).

5. The ineffectiveness of supranational political and economic tools and institutions [12].

The growth of number, frequency and intensity of global problems is a big challenge: how to find generally acceptable, adequate, global solution? According to The United Nations University Millennium Project *State of the Future* [2] the challenge No. one is: „How can sustainable development be achieved for all?“ Why? As authors of mentioned project, which has been based on opinions of about 700 experts from all over the World, said, unsustainable growth may well be the greatest threat to the future of humanity since the danger of nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War.

As Vicenik stated, two fundamental believes of twentieth century thinking are shown to be myths: the growing standard of living, and the „invisible hand“ of the market [18]. They are confronted with the basic question of quality of life: „How are you really doing?“ The quality of live improvement is demanding radical changes in value orientation and thinking.

The world is increasingly aware of the adverse interactions between population and economic growth, on the one had, end environmental quality and natural resources on the other. As a result, the majority of political and intellectual leaders around the world acknowledge sustainable development as the most important goal for uniting humanity and its institutions.

The development and implementation of the sustainable living concept is driven by the effort to reach – as much as possible – the ideals of humanism and the harmony between man and nature, based on the respect of life, as well as the non-living parts of nature.

As Kohak said, the conscious search of long-term sustainable cohabitation of humankind and the Earth – is no longer the hobby of Nature lovers, only. It is the task of humankind and the meaning of our living [9].

Values compatible with a sustainable way of living are a set of values, the implementation of which promote the shift towards sustainable future. These values are not completely new, and are not related to the idea of „social engineering“. Just opposite. They create the core of the common heritage of Mankind, since the oldest religious and cultures until today. It assumes the highest possible degree of diversity of values, and tolerance to them. On the other hand, it does not resignate on certain basic common or integrative principles, acceptable for individual cultures as a „minimum common denominator“ for all cultures and even all inhabitants of the Earth. Sustainable living should not only constitute surviving. It should be living based on harmony and environmentally friendly satisfaction of all needs, as well as on the development of human resources, which would not endanger the protection and restoration of natural resources [3].

One can consider the value orientation of people as the most important but also the most difficult to define from all the basic factors influencing the human development. They influence the functioning of the political, economic as well as legal systems, but usually they change only in the course of long or very long periods of time.

In a simplified way, one can divide value orientation into three groups according

to the attitude of man to nature and the environment: the anthropocentric view (man is superior to living beings and nature], the bio-centric view [it assumes the equality of all living beings] and the Theo-centric view [it assumes the existence of God – the Creator, man is the custodian of entrusted gifts) [13].

Above mentioned is in concordance with the International Environment Forum recognition, that, fortunately, common values run through all the great religious, spiritual and cultural traditions and form the foundation of human rights. For example, global solidarity based on the recognition of the oneness of humanity can place individual decisions within their broader context and create a feeling of responsibility for more spiritual context as a form of service to humanity. This motivation leads to the pursuit of opportunities that result in economic, social and spiritual progress [6].

A more pragmatic derivation of the sustainable living concept is the sustainable development concept.

According to Novacek [11], the scenario of sustainable development starts from the presumption that the whole present philosophy of material growth and welfare is not acceptable from the long-term and global perspective. Contemporary or recent dominant social systems, socialism and capitalism, have in fact the same aim – the generation of a global consume society. Both lead to an ecological crisis in their consequences. New technology, the development of science etc. alone cannot solve the problems, a change of value orientation is necessary. A change from anthropocentrism (man as the centre of events, conqueror, ruler etc.) to ecological humanism, Theo-centrism or bio-centrism is fundamental. The growth of the material standard of living in industrialised countries could and should be substituted by a growth in the quality of life and the development of human personality, above all in the neglected spiritual dimension.

The opinion expressed by the International Environment Forum is similar: „The goals and pursuits of any society are driven by the values that society chooses to prioritise [6]. Values that define humans only as well-endowed animals, that emphasize immediate material well being and gratification, the favour one group at the expense of others, that encourage individualistic, hedonistic self-satisfaction over the family, community or society as a whole, and that focus on the short term over the long term, have pushed civilization in very unsustainable directions. Such values are at the root of the planet's dilemma.“

The Earth Charter. A big challenge, which The Earth Summit 1992 faced to, was the adoption of The Earth Charter as one of the most important expected outputs of the summit. The preparation process was very intensive, accompanied by a widespread discussion, but it did not succeeded, finally. The Earth Charter was substituted by an inconsistent set of 27 sustainable development principles included in the document called Declaration from Rio de Janeiro on Environment and Development (Abr. Rio Declaration).

The global initiative called The Earth Charter tries to continue in the effort to adopt such kind of global document. Motto of this initiative, headed by personalities

like Michail Gorbacov, Maurice F. Strong, Ruub Lubbers, Yolanda Kakabadse and others, is: *Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future*.

The initiators defined The Earth Charter like a statement of fundamental ethical principles and practical guidelines of enduring significance that are widely shared by the people. In like manner to the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, it will serve as an universal code of conduct to guide people and nations towards sustainable future.

The transition to sustainable development requires basic changes in the attitudes, values and behaviour of all people in order to achieve social, economic, and ecological equity and security in the context of limited resources. The Earth Charter process recognized the need for these changes and to integrate the ethical, social, scientific and economic dimensions into a sustainable operating value framework for the 21st century.

The role and significance of The Earth Charter are better understandable in the context of continuing efforts of Mankind to identify the fundamental principles essential to world security. When the UN was established in 1945, its agenda for world security emphasized peace, human rights and socio-economic development, no mention was made of the environment as a common concern. Ecological [environmental] security did not emerge as the fourth major concern until the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972.

In 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development [Bundtland Commission] recommends the creation of a new charter or universal declaration about the environmental protection and sustainable development. In 1995 the international NGO, World Conservation Union [IUCN], presents a draft *International Covenant on Environment and Development* to the UN Congress on Public International Law. Member states must now decide how they want to translate the soft law of Agenda 21 into a hard law sustainable development treaty. Two years later *The Earth Charter Commission* is formed and meets for the first time in March 1997 during the Rio plus 5 Forum. A Benchmark Draft is proposed as a „document in progress“ to stimulate and guide future consultations and to encourage specific contributions.

Principles of (and values for) sustainable living. There do exist many approaches to this topic. They are not identical, but compatible to each other. By the document *Caring for the Earth* [7], if we are speaking about sustainable living, it should to:

- Respect and secure community of life,
- Improve the quality of human life,
- Protect vitality and diversity of the Earth,
- Minimize the exhaustion of non-renewable resources,
- Maintain the development of civilization within the Earth's carrying capacity limitations,
- Change personal attitudes and behaviour,
- Provide community based care for their own environment,
- Create frameworks for integrated development and protection,

– Establish a global alliance.

IEF [6] declared following 18 „commandments“:

1. Respect Earth and all life. Earth, each life form, and all living beings possess intrinsic value and warrant respect independently of their utilitarian value to humanity“.

2. Care for Earth, protecting and restoring the diversity, integrity, and beauty of the planet’s ecosystems. Where there is risk of irreversible or serious damage to the environment, precautionary action must be taken to prevent harm.

3. Live sustainability, promoting and adopting modes of consumption, production and reproduction that respect and safeguard human rights and the regenerative capacities of Earth

4. Establish justice, and defend without discrimination the right of all people to life, liberty, and security of person within an environment adequate for human health and spiritual well being. People have a right to potable water, clean air, uncontaminated soil, and food security.

5. Share equitably the benefits of natural resource use and a healthy environment among the nations, between rich and poor, between males and females, between present and future generations, and internalise all environmental, social and economic costs.

6. Promote social development and financial systems that create and maintain sustainable livelihoods, eradicate poverty, and strengthen local communities.

7. Practice non-violence, recognizing that peace is the wholeness created by harmonious and balanced relationships with oneself, other persons, other life forms, and Earth.

8. Strengthen processes that empower people to participate effectively in decisions making and ensure transparency and accountability in governance and administration in all sectors of society.

9. Reaffirm that Indigenous and Tribal Peoples have a vital role in the care and protection of Mother Earth. They have the right to retain their spirituality, knowledge, lands, territories and resources.

10. Affirm that gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

11. Secure the right to sexual and reproductive health, with special concern for women and girls.

12. Promote the participation of youth as accountable agents of change for local, bioregional and global sustainability.

13. Advance and put to use scientific and other types of knowledge and technologies that promote sustainable living and protect the environmental.

14. Ensure that people throughout their lives have opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, and practical skills needed to build sustainable communities.

15. Treat all creatures with compassion and protect them from cruelty and wanton destruction.

16. Do not do to the environment of others what you do not want done to your environment.

17. Protect and restore places of outstanding ecological, cultural, aesthetic, spiritual, and scientific significance.

18. Cultivate and act with a sense of shared responsibility for the well being of the Earth Community. Every person, institution and government has a duty to advance the indivisible goals of justice for all, sustainability, world peace, and respect and care for the larger community of life.

By the IEF, scientific knowledge by itself is not sufficient. Motivation is important in the use of knowledge. Science cannot reconcile issues of values: both relevant knowledge and appropriate values are needed for effective decision-making [6].

Process of the institutionalisation of the topic. Probably the most important step towards the institutionalisation of the agenda of human values, which are compatible with the sustainable way of living concept, happened in early 1990s. It was interrelated with two formally independent, but in reality closely interlinked processes:

1. The preparation of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, first of all with the preparation of the Earth Charter, document, which was in Rio finally substituted by a less ambitious Rio Declaration, consisted of 27 sustainable development principles.

2. The emerging tradition of Pan-European environment ministerial conferences, fundaments of which were created by the first conference of this type, organised in 1991, and which situated the topic of human values in the centre of interest, equivalent to political and legal issues. Thanks to it, not only to the main initiator of this unprecedented event Josef Vavroušek (former Czechoslovak minister for the environment), but also personalities like president Václav Havel and Prof. Erazim Kohák, became very popular and spread these ideals.

When, in 1992, Josef Vavroušek left his ministerial office, the topic of human values lost its most important protagonist. Ministerial officials, Euro bureaucrats, or officials from the United Nations structures forgot very quickly and easily that somebody wanted to incorporate a concept of human values compatible with sustainable way of living, which is so difficult to express in paragraphs and translate politically and financially, into their conservative, pragmatic and normative agendas.

The consequence was, that this topic did not appear in the official ministerial agenda of the 2nd ministerial conference in Luzern, 1993.

In the same time, Josef Vavroušek returned among non-governmental environmentalists, as an activist and thinker with the great authority. He became responsible for values aspects of the European EcoForum agenda. This resulted in the fact that problems of values, addressed to the Ministers through the Luzern NGO Memorandum, were considered having important, even key status. The above-mentioned part of the Memorandum was based on:

Ten Alternative Sustainable Values (by J. Vavroušek, 1993):

1. Awareness of the innate connection to nature, a respect for life and nature.
2. Balanced emphasis on the individual and collective perspective and the complementarity of competition with cooperation.
3. Emphasis on the qualitative development of human society.
4. Emphasis on the quality of life, deliberate modesty and renunciation, self-denial of superficial things.
5. Balanced symmetry between human rights, freedoms, and responsibilities.
6. Adoption of the precautionary principle.
7. Awareness about human activities with negative impacts.
8. Awareness of the long-term goals and consequences of human activities.
9. Mutual tolerance.
10. Support to participatory democracy.

After Vavroušek's death, these problems remained forgotten, and NGO environmental leaders, following the pragmatic line of their ministerial partners, also seemed to neglect them.

In this situation it was logical, and a bit symbolic, that the initiative to return the topic to real life was taken over by Slovak and Czech environmentalists from the Society for Sustainable Living. The initiative demanded to return issues of human values to the agenda of both non-governmental and ministerial conferences on the environment in Aarhus [1998] and after.

Main reasons for the institutionalisation of the topic of human values for a sustainable future.

1. To reflect the real importance of these issues for individual as well as social behaviour, that which is extremely relevant to solving environmental and/or sustainability issues.

2. To compensate, at least partially, the imbalance between pragmatically and ethically (or values) oriented approaches. The present situation is, that the second of the above-mentioned categories is almost absolutely overshadowed by the first one, and marginalized.

3. To continue in the process which was started during the Dobříš 1st Pan-European environmental ministerial conference in 1991, and in the frame of NGO activities was expressed in an excellent way in the Luzern NGOs' Memorandum in 1993.

4. To attract an important and influential group of NGO activists from all parts of Europe who deal with deep ecology, ethical and values issues, to the „Environment for Europe“ (EfE) process.

5. To commemorate the excellent personality of the EfE process' spiritual father: Josef Vavroušek, who was a big promoter of values issues and their incorporation into the EfE process, which he started in Dobříš.

At the end of June 1998, the 4th Pan-European Conference of Ministers of Environment took place in Aarhus, Denmark. A few days earlier, European non-

governmental environmentalists met there to discuss how to co-ordinate more efficiently multinational activities and how to influence the agenda and the results of the minister's conference. On Monday 22/6/1988, at a plenary session of the Pan-European co-ordination body on environmental non-governmental organizations: European Eco Forum, set up a new issue group (IG) called Values for a Sustainable Future (abbr. Values). The preliminary process, which had been originally started by an initiative from the last EcoForum Strategy meeting before the conference in Aarhus, was finished.

The foundation of the Values IG has been followed by the creation of web page: www.czp.cuni.cz/values, where is possible to find more information in English.

A regular forum of the Values IG meetings are Memorials of Josef and Petra Vavroušeks in the Tatras, but sometimes also wider international events, like the conference: International Co-operation - The Approach to Sustainable Communities, Bratislava, 1999, organised by Academia Istropolitana Bratislava and Society for Sustainable Living, where values related issues represented one of the priorities.

Another relevant international event was 10th Alliance of Northern People (ANPED) General Assembly Meeting (AGM) in Bratislava, March 2000, in the frame of which a special session of Values IG has been organised with the participation of 50 participants from 15 countries and 3 continents, followed by publishing an article in the ANPED *Northern Lights* Newsletter.

A similar session was organised during the regular Olomouc international conference: Towards Sustainable Development, April 2000, organised by Societies for Sustainable Living in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Values related issues in relationship to environmental education were discussed during the 11th ANPED AGM in Minsk (2001) as well as 12th ANPED AGM in Thessaloniki (2003), and are permanently „living“ in the ANPED agenda, mostly in relationship with the topic of production and consumption patterns and were discussed several times on the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), as well as during all the preparation processes before Johannesburg summit, first of all in Prague, at the Visegrad Region Conference called: Visegrad Agenda 21.

Another important event, participants of which expressed a big interest concerning Values issues, was the European EcoForum Strategy Meeting: *Environment for Europe: Decisions Depend on us!* in Bratislava, December, 2002, where majority of participants actively attended a workshop on values in relationship to the education. A special part of the Bratislava Declaration – the final document coming from the strategy meeting – deals with these issues, and they are also highlighted in the NGOs letter to the Ministers prior to the Kiev conference.

The Values Issue Group has also been involved in several other activities.

First of all, in issuing proceedings and other materials from all of the above mentioned events.

Secondly, publishing a representative collection of essays called *The World Perceived by the Heart of Europe*, Society for Sustainable Living, Olomouc, Bratislava 2000.

Co-organizing a conference with international participation: Religious – Environment – Values for a Sustainable Future, Society for Sustainable Living, Liptovsky Jan (Slovakia), 2001.

The following challenges provoked initiators to organise this conference:

1. The beginning of the Millennium, in which many thinkers expect the renaissance of spirituality.
2. Reflection of the importance of environmental risks and hazards, as well as challenges related to the sustainable way of living concept from the side of all relevant religions.
3. Ten years since the Dobříš conference, which stressed the issue of values compatible with the idea of a sustainable way of living and the role of religion in the process of their promotion and implementation.
4. The Slovak Bishops letter on the topic of the environment and sustainable living.
5. Relevant contributions and polemics in media.

The Ecological Ten Commandments is a topic, which was discussed among others during the conference:

1. I am the LORD your God, who created the heaven and earth. Consider: you are my partner in this creation. Therefore, take care of the air, water, soil, plants and animals as though they were your brothers and sisters.
 2. Consider, that I am He who gave you life – I gave you responsibility, freedom and limited sources of the Earth.
 3. You shall not steal the future. Honour your children. By doing so, you enable them to live a long life.
 4. Instil in children a love of nature.
 5. Remember, Mankind can use the technology, but once life is destroyed, it cannot be created again.
 6. Take care, that in your village, in your city, in your country there are groups, which could make an active effort to prevent catastrophes.
 7. Separate yourself from all weapons, which destroy the basic conditions of life.
 8. Use self-discipline even in the small decisions of your life.
 9. Have time in your weekly rush, to enjoy nature during the day of rest (Sabbath) and do not reduce your relation to it to exploitation.
 10. Think about it: you are not the owner of the Earth; you are only its steward.
- (Potsdam Kirsches, 1984 in Kay 1991, p. 61 – 62, and Szollos 2002, p. 23)*

Key words of the conference were: human values, dialogue, tolerance, solidarity, anthropocentrism/ecocentrism, sanctuarity, freedom and responsibility, risks/hazards of the next development, outcomes, and solutions (see more in: Huba (ed.): Religious – Environment – Values for a Sustainable Future, Conference Proceedings, 2002, and www.stuz.sk).

Last, but surely not least, an Essay competitions on the theme: *Sustainable Way of Living* for university students in both the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, used to be organised yearly by the Society for Sustainable Living, the Regional Environmental Center for CEE, Country Office in Bratislava, and the MOSTY (Bridges) Weekly.

All above-mentioned activities have been organised and provided in cooperation with the European EcoForum „Values“ Issue Group.

Several members of Society for Sustainable Living, as well as scientific workers from the Institute of Geography, Slovak Academy of Sciences are involved in the investigation of values issues, partial via academic research projects, dealing with values aspects of the sustainability and quality of life: Spatial and Temporal Aspects of Quality and Sustainability of Life (2003 – 2005) and Regions and their Changes from the Quality and Sustainability viewpoint (Grant No. 2/6042), since 2006.

Many aspects are interlinked: what should be the strategy for the future?

Education and media have a growing impact on, and responsibility for, spreading information and public awareness improvement, as well as on the value orientations of people. Values, attitudes, preferences and expectations influence the character of education, media, church, art and other generators of information, inspiration and public awareness. In the same time, values create the background for consumption and production patterns and conversely, the character of production and consumption influences all the behavioural culture of the population, including its value orientations. Our strategic aim for the future should be to support a good reflection of positive values orientations by public awareness and at the same time to influence, in a positive way, the behaviour of decision-makers, entrepreneurs and opinion-makers via cross-sectoral co-operation.

An example of the American perspective as a contribution to the discussion: Prerequisites for Sustainability with Life Quality [10]

1. Not (unlimited) economic growth but enhanced life quality-non-material values over hedonistic materialism.

2. Recognition of the systemic interrelationship of all crises.

3. A shift more from simple rational to intuitive, from analysis to synthesis, from reductionism (reducing things to the smallest parts) to holism, looking at the organization of the system as a whole... from linear to non-linear thinking. A paradigm shift.

4. An appreciation of all life forms as an interdependent part of a complex ecological web of life-evolving as a process.

5. Globe's resources not expandable through science & technology.

6. Genuine inter-generational & intra-generational concern.

7. Elements affecting life quality: freedom, justice, sexism, racism, personal esteem & fulfilment, health, meaningful employment and participatory democracy; self-management within democratic and participatory political processes.

8. A recognition of the role of the feminist/women's movement in *contributing* to cultural *transformation*: Espousing partnership relationships, network thinking--- all the integrative values most important (and most difficult) for effecting the paradigm shift.

9. A recognition that self-assertive values, competition, expansion and domination are generally associated with men in patriarchal societies: Male-dominant hierarchical thinking exerted at all levels: family, corporate, national and in international relations.

10. Required shift to a different kind of people power more appropriate for the new paradigm, not hierarchical domination over others but networking... one of the central metaphors of systemic thinking and ecological thinking. From competition to cooperation, from expansion to conservation, from quantity to quality, from domination to marital partnership.

11. Recognition of the constraining effect of present economic, social and political institutional structures on the change process and ways changed thinking can foster adaptations.

12. Early-child development: much of the above, but also, a sense of humility, wonderment and awe with respect to Nature. A global view. An aesthetic appreciation for season, setting, climate, and natural materials. A measurement of personal esteem and the non-material values: Skill, artistry, effort, simplicity, and integrity. Revulsion against human discrimination and waste.

Recommendations for the near future

– To continue with all positive activities started yet and to highlight all positive examples/good practices.

– To promote and to facilitate a public debate on ethical values and principles.

– To put values related issues back to the relevant events agenda.

– To develop a set of relevant activities: research, conferences/seminars/workshops, presentations, mass-media activities, competitions etc., with the aim to highlight the importance of the topic.

– To deal with values related issues in relationship with such issues like the environmental awareness, human priorities/preferences/attitudes, and consumption.

– To preserve and increase social, cultural and economic diversity and possibility of lifestyle choices.

– To educate people about the consequences and impacts of their choices.

– To attract disciplines like axiology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, human ecology and others to deal more with these issues.

– To influence teachers, priests, journalists, artists and others to deal more values issues.

– To incorporate sustainability issues into church life - green Sundays, ecological Ten Commandments, youth camps with the ecological orientation..., to interpret the Bible also in the context of environmental issues and sustainable living.

– To implement „ethical impact assessment“.

- To improve transparency, accountability, codes of conduct...
- To establish an Internet conference dealing with values for a sustainable future.

By Josef Vavrousek [17] we do have to come back towards the basic question on the sense of life and search for answers appropriate to dangerous and rapidly changing situation. There are probably only two basic alternatives of future development. The first one is a continuity of existing unsatisfactory and unsustainable trends, which could lead, with a high probability, to chaos and a series of catastrophes of different kinds. There is a real threat that the period of environmental deterioration and of a decay of social structures could be very long, in extreme case could lead to degradation of humankind.

The second alternative is a systematic and quick evolution oriented towards the solution of existing problems and prevention of some new ones.

Conclusion. In conclusion, let me quote from the Bratislava Declaration:

„In the period of increasing tensions between countries and people, we urge a return of human values in the sustainable development agenda... Ethics, like solidarity, equity and sufficiency are essential elements of our concept of sustainability.“

Values for a sustainable future seem to be a potential barrier against growing negative impacts of globalisation related to the growth of global problems and threats.

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Mikuláš Huba (Prof., PhD.)

Institute of Geography, Slovak Academy of Sciences
and Society for Sustainable Living in the Slovak Republic
Štefánikova 49
814 73 Bratislava
SR
e-mail: geoghuba@savba.sk