

Challenge of value based impact assessments in transitioning to sustainability

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The main challenge is a new decision culture for life of people and ecosystem

Objective is to stimulate thinking and discussion in order to promote, during the transition for sustainability, the development of a value based and result motivated decision-making culture guaranteeing the accomplishment of the completeness of life also via the impact studies. Two fundamental questions emerge in relation with the development and enforcement of the set of sustainability values and value structure.

- ▶ What is the relationship between the economic, social and environmental values that serve as the basis of sustainability.
- ▶ What methodological solutions promote the enforcement of the set of sustainability values in the different impact assessment and decision-making processes.

Well-being versus vitality of living being.

Challenge 1: A central criteria to sustainability is guaranteeing the accomplishment of the fullness of life

In the course of the impact assessment practice, the expert is confronted with the different interpretation of the sustainability criteria, values. The real challenge is caused by the incompatibility between the paradigms of really sustainable development and the currently functioning globalisation of the economy which is increasingly free from real competition. The situation is further aggravated, because current economy is basically profit oriented, while sustainability is based on values.

Cooperative advantages versus comparative advantages

Presumably, the present (global) crisis situation is exactly about how we can replace the view which correlates development with competition and with the place occupied in competition. The essence of competition is relative advantage – whereas that of sustainability is liveable absolute life for all. It is high time to obtain the theoretical need to explore the „cooperative advantages” besides/in stead of „comparative advantages”.

Set of values

By system thinking experts have pointed out that in the restructuring of the current system (e.g., the economy or the government, the public administration) and the processes in the direction of sustainability, the presumed or actual set of values held by the actors including the decision-makers plays a key role.

Core value of sustainability

In respect of sustainable development, the primary aspect is guaranteeing the conditions of life. Guaranteeing the conditions of life means that the framework conditions to the accomplishment of complete life must be ensured both in development as well as in sustenance. Life of full value is applicable to all humans and communities. In this approach, the central value is the human person, and all living things that serve the completeness of human life are considered a value (note: metaphysically speaking, it means extra being for the human being). This statement must be supplemented with three important comments.

- ▶ First: the values are qualities of things to be found on Earth, which make the life of human beings better accomplished.
- ▶ Second: the experienced reality of 'it is' does not always 'has to be' a moral value for the acting human being.
- ▶ Third: not only human beings have self-value. Nature also has self-value but human beings fulfill an outstanding role in the world. Man due to its capabilities is able to enrich the world of nature and prevent its destruction.

As a consequence of the above argumentation, I propose that the lives (the vitality of living being) of individuals and communities should be placed in the focal point of development, management.

Challenge 2: The role of impact studies in enforcing the central values of sustainability

On reviewing the impact assessment studies carried out in Hungary and the neighbouring countries, in particular SEA (strategic environmental assessment), the endeavour to identify and enforce the core values of sustainability is quite apparent. Our experiences show that the assessment aspects have been identified in an extremely high number in a number of groups (e.g., the SEA of "New Hungary" Rural Development Programme applied 32, while another SEA applied almost 20 evaluation criteria). Instead of the large number of criteria difficult to overview we recommend the exploration and adoption and systematic application of the sustainability core value as explained in the above point.

Strategic Assessment Methodological Scheme

The staff of Respect Company prepared for the SEAs of the 13 development programmes elaborated for the period between 2007-2013 a so-called Strategic Assessment Methodological Scheme (SAMS), which gives the opportunity for the strategic assessment of the different social and policy interventions from environmental and sustainability perspectives.

The SAMS combines three models fundamental from the perspective of the environmental and other policies and programming:

- ▶ The DPSIR model,
- ▶ The three-pillar model of sustainable development,
- ▶ The model of output-result-effect indicators.

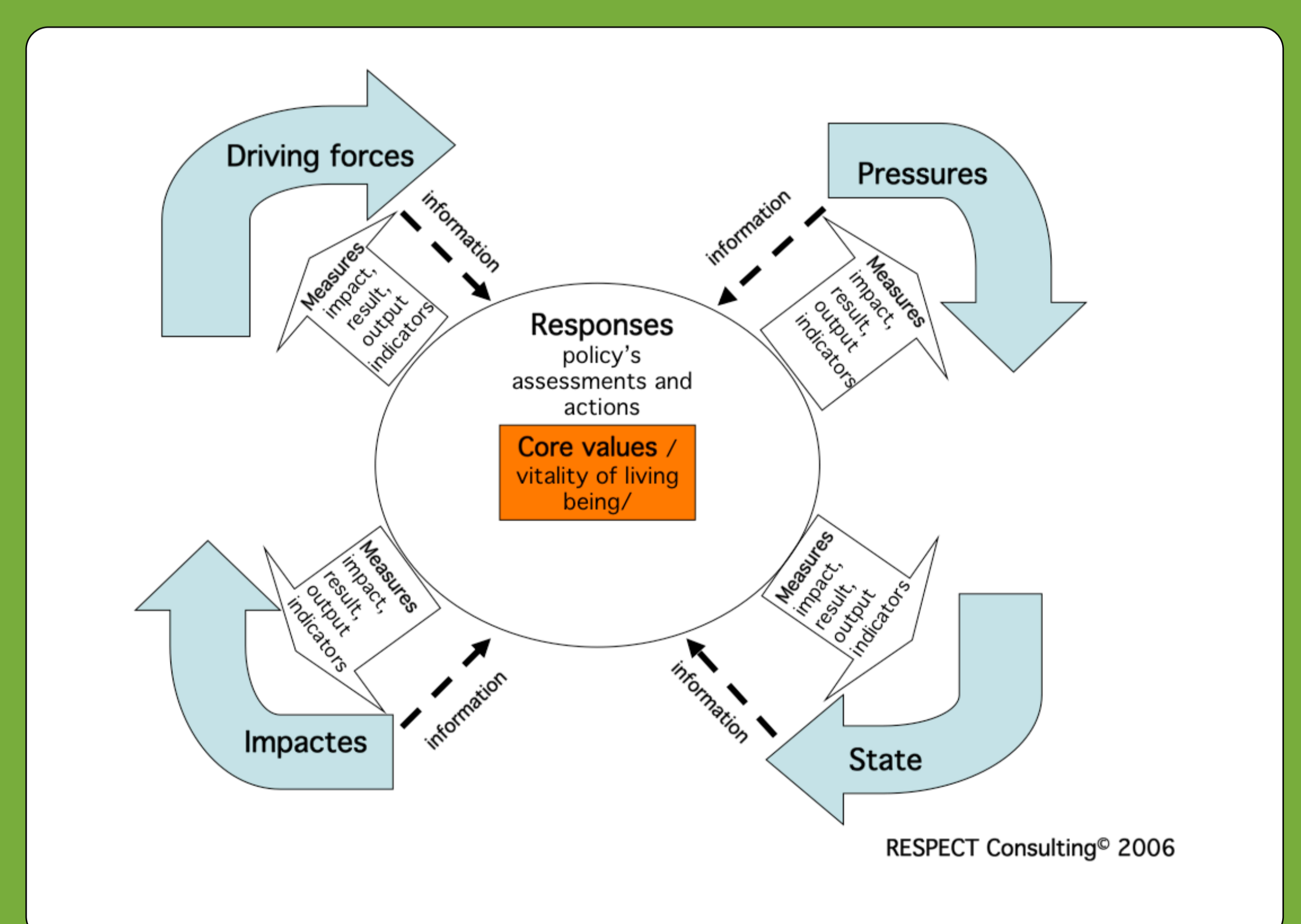
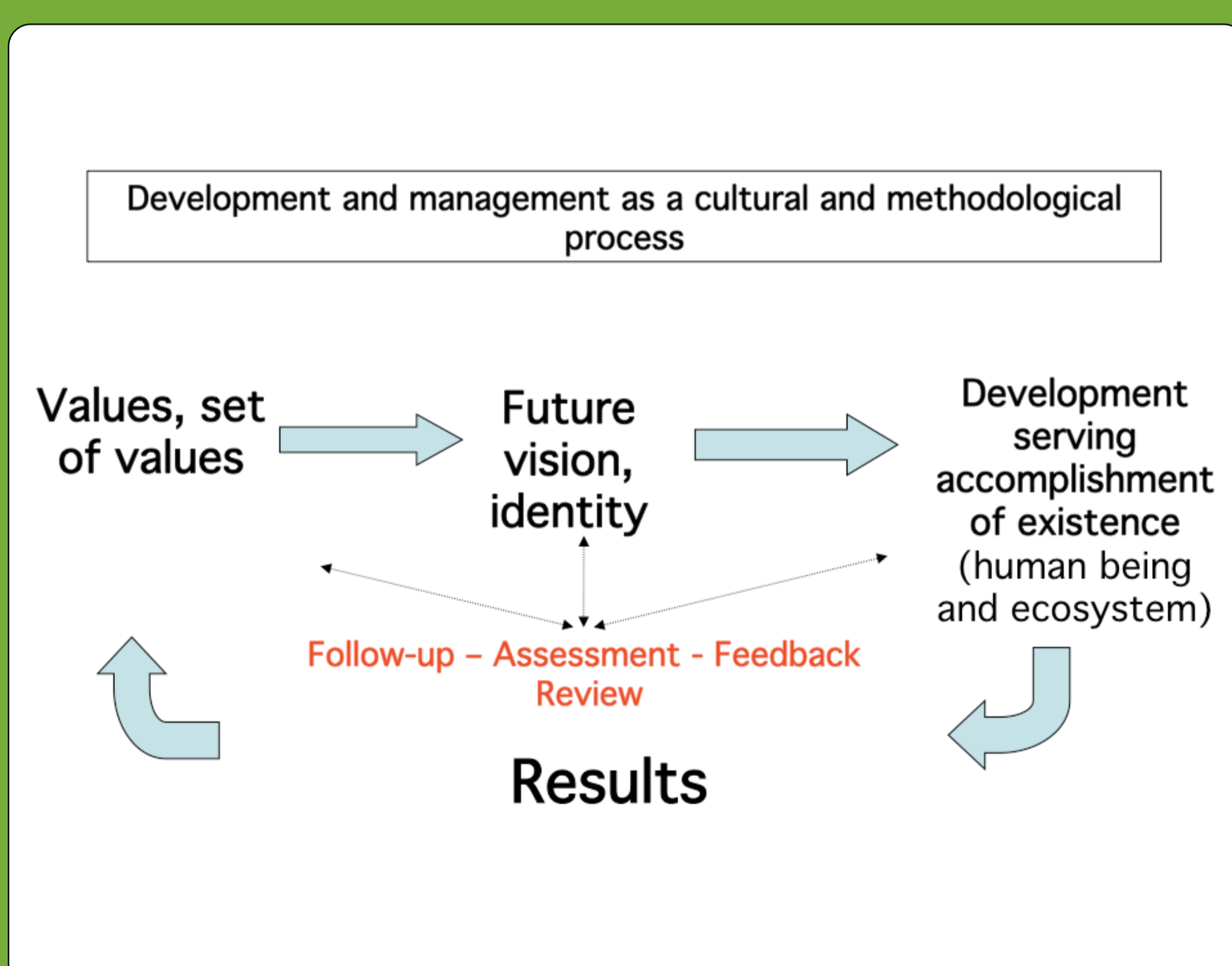
In the outer circle of the model, we find those terminological areas which should promote the description of the environmental and/or sustainability problems and the definition of the types of interventions.

In the inner circle of the SAMS model we find the different policy responses, by which we understand the complexity of all those social interventions which result in changes in any of the presented terminological areas. These include the priorities and interventions worded in the operational programmes. The planned interventions can be categorised into categories A,B,C and D, in the function of their target areas, depending on what level they treat the problem in question (for example: the programmes for the elimination of damages fall into category C interventions, as they aim at directly changing the environmental status).

The SAMS model can be very well applied in analysing the impacts of the different plans, programmes and policies. The nature of the planned objectives and priorities can be identified very well with one of the intervention types and offers the investigation of the interventions in their correlations.

The interventions defined within the framework of the responses can be evaluated on the basis of the sustainability principles and set of values. In this case, the question is the following: the implementation of which sustainability principle is supported by the given intervention and if it supports it at all?

I recommend that the assessments focusing on the core value of vitality of living being to be introduced in the impact assessment practice.



Framework of information focusing on the core values of sustainability (example)

The application of the proposed approach can only lead to success if they have up-to-date information on the actual quality of life of humans, species, ecosystems and that of the landscape as the space for living. This information can be stored and served through different databases and collected and assessed in the course of monitoring and follow-up measures. These are extremely important base data for impact assessment studies, which are often not available because of the incompatibility of the different database structures or due to lack of data.

To offer a solution for these potential problems, a project was launched in Hungary in 2009 titled Cadastration of Cultural Landscape Heritage for the Implementation of the European Landscape Convention in Hungary and the Development of a Landscape Character Assessment Methodology, which creates the foundations for the online contact and the cooperation of database administrators of a schematic database containing all landscape values, as a result of which a broad scale institutional and web2 technology based public participation and service focused information flow can be implemented.

One of the objectives of the project is to serve as an example for other information collection and service cooperation arrangements on the state of human life and ecosystems and the quality of vitality of living beings.