

Sustainable is ...

Sustainable means that condition of environmental, social and economic development that ensures that the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable is ... a pair of shoes, a detergent, an air conditioner, a mineral water, a food, a drink, even a domestic gas or electricity supply, and a large number of other everyday objects, goods and services, at least to give credence to the companies' advertising promises. I only hear about the sustainability of the new variety of peaches reserved for separated parents, a new entry in Italian television propaganda in which, as usual, suggestive elements prevail over informative ones. But, in reality, when can one talk in a way that is correct and not misleading for citizens/customers, about sustainability/sustainability?

The definition adopted in the environmental and economic sciences is that of the 'condition of a development capable of ensuring the satisfaction of the needs of the present generation without compromising the possibility of future generations to realise their own', a concept introduced at the first UN conference on the environment in 1972, reiterated over the years and recently (2015) taken up again, again by the UN, in the launch of the programme for sustainable development contained in the 2030 Agenda (to which I will devote an in-depth study, shortly).

Of course, the term sustainability, which derives from the Latin *sustinere* and which means to support, defend, favour, preserve and/or take care of, can be used in many other contexts, but I have no doubt in my mind that, in advertising, it is mainly (if not exclusively) aimed at soliciting environmental virtues and merits, the protection and care of nature and ecosystems, what today's most erudite define as 'green marketing' techniques.

It follows that it is not so much generic sustainability that is of interest today, but, to be more precise, environmental sustainability. And adding the reference to the environment entails vague consequences, especially if we link it to the word development. Sustainable development is therefore, first and foremost, development that respects environmental sustainability.

But the environment can only develop within a broad framework of protection and safeguards in which the social and economic conditions of the community must also be taken into account. 'Economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection must go hand in hand' has been affirmed for decades in the EU and reiterated on every occasion by Pope Francis himself.

The Treccani encyclopaedia records that the concept of sustainability, compared to its earliest versions, has undergone "a profound evolution which, starting from a vision centred primarily on ecological aspects, has moved towards a more global meaning, taking into account not only the environmental dimension, but also the economic and social dimensions. The three aspects were, however,

considered in a synergetic and systemic relationship and, combined to varying degrees, were used to arrive at a definition of progress and well-being that went somewhat beyond the traditional GDP-based measures of wealth and economic growth'.

And it is with the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda that the most correct definition becomes: 'Sustainable means that condition of environmental, social and economic development that ensures that the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

These are conditions that must coexist and whose presence, true, concrete and verifiable, is the only one that can guarantee that the use of the terms sustainable/sustainable is legitimate and does not encroach on greenwashing.

Can a good produced with the use of fossil fuels, or with the use of child labour, or which represents only a marginal part of the company's activity, while the rest is pollution and exploitation of the workforce, be qualified as sustainable? This is exactly what happens (not always, actually).

I will try to answer these and other doubts in my next posts because the topic is as broad as it is delicate.

Giuseppe d'Ippolito