Sustainable initiatives focused on social responsibility and regional development: a study of the leader of the petrochemical industry

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Abstract

The present work will investigate the issue of environmental responsibility actions in the ABC Paulista region, of a leading company in the petrochemical sector. In this context, the problem has been to see how the leading company in the domestic petrochemical industry conducts itself relative to the concept of sustainability and what the consequences of these initiatives in the ABC Paulista are. Thus, the objectives are to identify these consequences and practices with regard to regional development in areas where the leader of the national petrochemical company has significant performance, with highlights on economic, social and environmental impacts. The present investigation is justified by the fact that the company is among the world leaders in the production of biopolymers. The methodology used was qualitative descriptive because this methodological procedure makes it possible to observe and analyze the facts relating to social responsibility initiatives undertaken by the company under study without manipulating them, in establishing correlations on perception of other stakeholders before the actions addressed in this research. Therefore, the results obtained indicate that environmental responsibility initiatives taken by the company satisfy the paradigm of Sustainability and Social Responsibility, in the promotion of regional development in its geographic area.

Keywords: Sustainability. Social Responsibility. Regional Development.
Preliminary

The business sector finds itself immersed in concerns that trespass economic context due to the changes proposed by the existing patterns of consumption and a range of factors that demonstrate that companies cannot direct any concerns exclusively for obtaining profit.

In this sense, business organizations have taken actions and initiatives related to sustainable development, in the execution of their activities, even if by means of pressure from legislation and government regulations or the market itself.

Considering this aspect, one must understand the concept of sustainability, which is identified as the man's ability of interaction with the natural resources available on the planet, the preservation of the environment, and conscious use of the resources present in order not to compromise future generations.

In order for policies and practices of corporate sustainability to take place, it is essential that the criteria related to social responsibility - ecological prudence and economic efficiency - be met. These criteria should buttress ethical and sustainable strategies and practices of eco-efficiency and social responsibility. Perhaps this is the biggest challenge posed to the contemporary business environment: to coherently establish the proximity between its economic growth, environmental protection and social equity. In this scenario, we see the need for reflecting, disseminating and proposing ideas and practices that enable the achievement of the reality of corporate sustainability.

It is therefore necessary to establish how the leading company in the domestic petrochemical industry conducts its initiatives related to the concept of sustainability and what the consequences of these initiatives are in the region of ABC Paulista.

According to Almeida (2002), to be considered sustainable, a business organization should organize its actions and decisions based on eco-efficiency, perspective of increased production, improving the quality of their products, resulting in the generation of a smaller amount of pollution and reducing the use of natural resources.

The company that brings together in its actions the principles of sustainability seeks to present itself as socially responsible, admitting being inserted in a social environment it influences and is simultaneously influenced by human actions.

Vine (2003) argues that a large number of business organizations concluded that the reduced financial cost, in relation to environmental investments and administration of social conflicts, may generate higher spending, if there is no respect for human rights and the environment as well. The choice of the company not to comply with the environmental and social dimensions may negatively affect the image that the public has about the business organization, bringing difficulties in promoting the renewal of contracts and the implementation of new projects.

Accordingly, the objectives of this article are:
- Identify innovation initiatives related to the concept of sustainability and adopted by the company Braskem;
- Identify Social Responsibility practices, related to the concept of sustainability and adopted by Braskem and their effects in relation to regional development, in the ABC Paulista region.
The present investigation is justified by the fact that the company is among the world leaders in the production of biopolymers. These are identified as polymeric materials, classified in structural terms as polysaccharides, polyesters or polyamides. The basic raw material for its manufacturing process is a renewable source of carbon, consisting of a carbohydrate derived from large-scale commercial plantations such as sugar cane, corn, potato, wheat and sugar beet, vegetable oil extracted from soybeans, sunflower, palm or other oleaginous plants (BRASKEM, 2012).

This article is therefore based on the qualitative descriptive research as this methodological procedure makes it possible to observe and analyze the facts relating to social and environmental responsibility initiatives undertaken by the company under study. Without manipulating them, correlations are established on perception of stakeholders representing the community, in the figure of a director of a public school, towards the actions addressed in this research. Therefore, using descriptive methodology it could be seen with some precision the relationship and connection of data collected, regarding the implementation of social and environmental actions taken by the company.

**Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development has two key points to Philippi (2001): the concept of needs in which the need of the poor should be given higher priority, and the concept of the revision of the existing notion of boundaries between technology and social organization imposed on the environment, because it reduces the chances of adequate care for present and future needs. Therefore, if on the one hand sustainable development tries to give more attention to the poor, on the other there are, when it comes to the environment, unmet needs, aimed, for example, at economic development. Therefore, it can be asserted from an economic standpoint that its attention stems from demands and not necessities, thus further weakening the concept.

Satisfying human needs and aspirations is the major objective of development. In developing countries, the basic needs of many people - food, clothing, shelter, jobs - are not being met. Beyond these basic needs, people also legitimately aspire to a better quality of life. In order to achieve sustainable development, it is necessary that everyone had their basic needs met and to be given an opportunity to realize their aspirations to a better life (PHILIPPI, 2001, p. 304).

Thus, immersed in an environment built by industrial, scientific and technological revolutions, corporate actions begin to be questioned due to their being organized exclusively on a constant, even exaggerated quest for increased profits, being represented as a stereotype of business organizations in a society, causing negative interference in their image, taking companies to new ways of thinking and acting.

It is essential to search for new methods to collaborate not only for business, but also for building a sustainable society. It appears that investments in corporate sustainability are beyond an ethical and selfless posture, a way of indirectly contributing to the sustainability of business, eventually bringing benefits to the business activity itself.
Thus, it can be seen that a society is sustainable "to meet the criteria of social relevance, ecological prudence and economic viability, i.e., the three pillars of sustainable development" (SACHS, 2002, p. 35th). It is within this context that business organizations should incorporate policies and practices of corporate sustainability into their actions, in order to strategically integrate to its business economic, social and environmental dimension of sustainable development.

The importance of the reorganization of actions aimed at corporate sustainability starts to have greater visibility in the 1990s, with the formation of various entities focused on the topic. In 1992, the WBCSD - World Business Council for Sustainable Development, was founded, and soon after, in 1997, the CEBDS - Brazilian Business Council for Sustainable Development, and in 1998 the Ethos Institute of Businesses and Social Responsibility.

Upon observing these circumstances, it should be understood that sustainability comprises a set of strategic actions of a company, so that the natural resources are used to satisfy the needs of the present without compromising the meeting of the needs of future generations, and they are not only part of government policy, but also integrate such concept into its culture, with transparency of its actions and value creation in its stakeholders.

Based on this aspect, it is essential to address the issues that underlie sustainable development, because the ratio of its concept is subject to a demand for present needs that will not compromise the future, with balance and compromise between the environmental, economic and social responsibilities, involving stakeholders in planning and actions for a future less careless world. Thus, the rational use of existing resources can safeguard them for the future.

It is understood, therefore, that the objectives of any business organization aim at obtaining the highest possible return on the capital invested. For this to happen, companies make use of any tools available that always keep them ahead of their competitors in obtaining higher margins and market share. However, given the changes in the global context, in addition to economic and structural factors, other circumstances are part of the set of corporate responsibility, being identified as the natural environment and social issues.

Considering this aspect, in order for companies to collaborate towards achieving the aspirations of sustainability, it is necessary to change the organization of their production processes before emerging needs so that they become ecologically sustainable organizations. In this sense, it is necessary to carry out the construction of production systems that do not cause negative impacts and contribute to the recovery of degraded areas or offer products and services that contribute to improving the environmental performance of consumers and customers of an industry (CORAL, 2002).

It appears, therefore, that transformation has been a part of human nature since time immemorial, as we have used our skills and knowledge to improve the quality of life. The challenge is to reconcile development with sustainability, conserving natural resources and preventing disasters arising from urban growth. With demographic and industrial expansion, sustainability began to have more immediate importance.

Thus, the expanded vision of sustainability emphasizes the correlation between society and business and establishes five interdependent dimensions that result from the actions of companies.
Sustainable initiatives focused on social responsibility and regional development

1st Economic - What the organization needs to be financially viable.
2nd Social - The organization must be individually and collectively fair.
3rd Environmental - Being environmentally friendly, from facilities and processes, to the product delivered to the consumer, while paying attention to informing the customer on the disposal once a product has been used.
4th Cultural - Encourage changing old habits, transforming the behavior into a more conscious attitude towards the preservation of life in its broadest sense.
5th Space - The organization must be a balanced transformer, positively influencing the surrounding community and society (SACHS, 1993).

Therefore, sustainable development will be guided by the enterprises, through the markets, i.e. the basic challenge for the first half of the twenty-first century is to organize resistance markets by the standard of sustainable development (ELKINGTON, 2001). It appears, though, that the industries and companies are not isolated, without incentives by markets, governments and consumers, in general, to provide permanently sustainable actions.

Regional Development

The concept of development has been in discussion for a long time, subject to numerous controversies among researchers internationally.

Sen (2003) argues that development is not restricted to the increase in indicators such as GDP (Gross Domestic Product) or any other indicative index of national income, from industrialization or even technological aspects, but related to increased freedom of people and access to a better quality of life.

Since the 1990s, a set of experiences has been observed related to local or regional development, the result of decentralization of power concentrated in the hands of the state (nation); such experiences provoke great interest of researchers refocusing discussions on the conceptual bases of development, specifically regarding the performance of local economic agents and their organizational skills (JACOBI, 1999; FISCHER, 2002; TAPIA, 2005).

Given this scenario, Llorens (2001) and Dowbor (2009) lecture that the conjunction of economic, social and environmental dimensions is the product of the current which argues that policies related to the dimensions previously mentioned can not be considered in isolation as they are members of a broader policy development and need to be understood as strategic in the case of strategic investments so that they retain their effectiveness.

To Buarque (2006), there are three pillars that drive regional development, characterized as governance, society and the distribution of corporate assets. In this scenario, it is implied to sustainable regional development that the governance assumes a regulatory role in relation to public management and economic efficiency, proportionately, provided that investments are of higher quality and better applied.

Regarding the organization of society, it is necessary to put emphasis on mobilization, cooperation and coordination of various local subjects as a means of achieving better quality of life indices through constant examination of the efficiency of public management.
With regard to the distribution of social assets, its bond must consist mainly in relation to the active knowledge attained through schooling and increased technological capacity. So, its biggest dilemma is the integration of social, environmental and economic issues (BUARQUE, 2006).

Given this aspect, it is clear that corporate strategy should have the following as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable regional development: increased quality of life converging towards social equity, efficiency and economic growth, in the perspective of environmental conservation.

Soon, the consequences of changes generated by the man and his intense search for survival, determined paradigms that originated the concept of sustainable development which should be conducted in a timely and comprehensive manner within businesses, taking into account the environment, the economy and the society.

Social Responsibility

The basis of the relationship between business and society is put into a social contract that evolves in accordance with social changes and their expectations, because in this contract the society legitimizes the existence of a company. This legitimacy derives from the recognition (by the society) of activities and corporate bonds, and in the establishment of legal limits for the operation of a business organization. Thus, society has the right to modify its expectations according to historical needs as a tool in its favor, leading companies to reorganize production processes to meet the expectations of the communities with which they dialogue.

Thus, the contemporary context induces firms to adopt management models aimed at the sustainability paradigm. In this context, corporate social responsibility emerges as a suitable alternative to reach the objectives set for achieving corporate sustainability. It is understood that being socially responsible is based on the premise that economic growth - represented by the generation of wealth of a nation - contributes beyond what companies offer to the society.

In this perspective, corporate social responsibility is related to social performance of the company, passing through all organizational levels (from strategy to operation), which gives the company a more humane and altruistic character. By adopting this perspective, the organization seeks to contribute to the presentation of social benefits within a community (ALESSIO, 2008).

Thus, for the achievement of corporate social responsibility it is necessary that the companies adopt a multi-stakeholder strategic positioning, which takes into account, throughout all of its business activity, the interests and needs of all publics affected by the development of business activities. That said, it requires companies to build a consciousness focused on beyond economic issues, so it is necessary to break paradigms.

In this context, social responsibility can be defined as the commitment that a company should have with the society, outlined through actions that affect it positively, acting proactively and consistently, with regard to its specific role in the society, including its accountability. Thus, the business organization assumes obligations of moral character, beyond legal requirements, even if they are not directly linked to its activi-
ties, though they may contribute to the sustainable development of communities (ASHLEY, 2002).

George and Jones (2005) presented a synthesis of social responsibility as a way in which managers and employees of a company should see their duties, feeling obliged to make decisions that protect, strengthen and promote the well-being of all interested parties integrating this complex web and the society in general.

The authors also explain the existence of four fundamental approaches to social responsibility:

- Obstructionist approach - low social responsibility: in this approach, managers choose not to be socially responsible. It operates in the opposite direction of what is established as social responsibility, as they have few ethical concerns and do everything possible in order not to disclose their behavior to the public;

- Defensive Approach - medium social responsibility: indicates that the behavior of management is obedient to the law and nothing else, which may generate some unethical behavior;

- Accomodative Approach - medium social responsibility: it is performed by organizations working in accordance with ethical and legal parameters, generating conflicts with different stakeholders if necessary;

- Proactive approach - high social responsibility: in this approach, organizations work in active mode, being socially responsible. They become aware of the needs of stakeholders, using company resources to satisfy them.

In 2008, Dahlsrud published a study to analyze a set of 37 definitions of corporate social responsibility, based on five dimensions that can be seen in Table 1, organizing the basis of all conceptions of social responsibility, which are:

Dahlsrud (2008) concluded that of the five dimensions, the ones appearing more frequently in citations in research on the subject are:

- 88% the stakeholders and the social dimensions;
- 86% economic dimension;
- 80% the size of volunteer force;
- 59% the environmental dimension.

His studies contradict the vox populi, i.e. what has been a consensus on social responsibility, since it is common to associate CSR with adoption of environmentally appropriate behavior (green attitude), which appears in last position in Dahlsrud’s analysis. Another frequent association relates to the philanthropic behavior of volunteers, yet it occupies the third position.
Table 1 – The five dimensions of CSR, its scope and iconic expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Emblematic expressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>“A cleaner environment”; &quot;Hosting environment&quot;; &quot;Environmental concerns in their business operations&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Relationship between businesses and society</td>
<td>“Contribute to a better society”; &quot;Integrate social concerns in their business operations&quot;; &quot;Consider the full spectrum of their impact on communities&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Socioeconomic or financial aspects, including the description of social responsibility in terms of a business operation</td>
<td>&quot;Contribute to economic development&quot;; &quot;Preserve profit generation&quot;; &quot;Business operations.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>Stakeholders or groups of stakeholders</td>
<td>&quot;Interaction with their stakeholders&quot;; &quot;How organizations interact with their employees, suppliers, customers and communities&quot;; &quot;Deal with the company's stakeholders&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>Actions not prescribed by law.</td>
<td>&quot;Based on ethical values&quot;; &quot;Beyond legal obligations&quot;; &quot;Voluntarily&quot;.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Dahlsrud, 2008.

The characterization of the company

Braskem is a company belonging to the Brazilian petrochemical industry, formed through the stock takeover of COPENE Petrochemical Northeast by the Odebrecht/Mariani consortium and the integration of the companies controlled by the two groups, aiming to strengthen the entry of Brazil into the domestic petrochemical industry.

The choice of name Braskem was made by the meeting of bras prefixes, widespread in the foreign market to identify a Brazilian company, kem from chemical, that is, chemistry in order to indicate the industry sector of the respective company.

The company was founded on August 16, 2002, designated as a world-class Brazilian petrochemical enterprise and considered a leader in the thermoplastic resins sector in Latin America, in which it is the first Brazilian business organization to integrate, in its production processes, the manufacture of first, second and third generation of petrochemicals. It develops its work in adopting a business model, which focuses on value creation for its shareholders by having bases on its market leadership, economies of scale and technological autonomy.
The petrochemical chain is constituted by producers of first, second and third generation, based on the phase of transformation of various raw materials and petrochemical feedstocks. It is represented by the transformation of by-products derived from the refining of crude oil, mainly naphtha or natural gas, into multipurpose consumer and industrial goods.

In this sense, it is clear that in Brazil naphtha is considered the most important raw material in the petrochemical chain, followed by natural gas. It can also be stated that Petrobras is virtually the only company producing naphtha and natural gas in Brazil, satisfying a fraction of domestic demand with domestic production and imports. In 2002, its monopoly was broken and from then on the petrochemical plants began to import on their own, to complement their needs.

The naphtha and / or gas go through, in principle, a process called cracking, which produces a number of basic petrochemicals such as ethylene, propylene and aromatics. The type of raw material used has different yields and different product mix.

The company's manufacturing process takes place, according to the sources of research, in partnership with research institutes, which has brought significant results, with Braskem represented in 50 patent applications during 2012, totalling 573 patents already registered in Brazil and abroad.

The company also emphasizes its concern in the development of innovative products of higher quality that are also more competitive. The pipeline of innovation in 2012, arising from its polymers and vinyls businesses, reached $ 826 million and led to the registration of 20 new products.

Results

In compliance with specific objectives, we sought to analyze the interview with a community representative.

Community representative
Sustainable actions

It is known that when it comes to sustainability, companies must meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations, so the enterprises that organize their production activities in the area of sustainability should be guided concurrently on three pillars: environmental, budget, and social.

Thus, according to the above mentioned respondent, it is possible to identify the following circumstances:

With regard to data collected through the interview, it is noted that the school has been working on a project related to sustainability, as directed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, identified as a crosscutting theme. A crosscutting topic involves contemporary social concerns related to human social actions in their different interactions and proposes the organization of interdisciplinary studies, so that the learner
builds critical awareness about the issues surrounding him. Accordingly, they start from the premise that their sustainable actions should be reflected, for example, in building a school garden and other actions, not very clarifying in the context of sustainability, such as how to build a sustainable home.

Regarding the company’s participation in projects of this sphere, the interviewee noted that the action was centered on recyclable clothes and organization of the parade. Thus, taking into account the three dimensions (economic, environmental and social), we can affirm that this action envisages only two dimensions: ecological and social. Thus, with regard to the ecological dimension, reuse through recycling of used clothes while customizing them, decreases the disposal of such material into the environment and revisits its use, contributing to minimize the discarding impacts. With regard to the social dimension, it values its qualities related to creativity as it implements innovations in reused clothing, broadening its experiences in the context of sustainability.

Although it is possible to identify the school’s criticism of that company’s action, as through the interviewee’s account it can be inferred that this action ought to be administered and controlled by the school as a result or reflection of teachers’ work, the company participates in initiatives of environmental education.

The respondent also cites other partners in organization of actions that propose building consciousness focused on sustainability, such as the "Water Project", by the Clan of Arts. However, the respondent did not identify the connection of this project with the one developed by the company in question.

In this report, the interviewee described the existence of other partnerships, such as with the Civil Defense, which provides guidelines for to the community on how to give first aid.

Thus, in the space represented by a community school, emphasis was given to actions that dialogue with the development of public awareness through sustainability.

Social responsibility actions

In this part of the interview, one realizes that the company studied seeks to operate promoting practice of sports among community members, represented by the students of the school in which the information was collected. Therefore, the respondent reports that after the participation of students in sports activities promoted by Braskem, some students had a poor academic performance. However, the company helps the school to intervene in such situations making it possible to track the students’ improvement in activities performed.

This social action, together with the promotion of sports, contributes to affirming that the company performs social responsibility, within the social context, as they understand that these interventions work together to build a better society.

We can also observe another action, the construction and maintenance of the Museum of the Person, teaching how to safeguard the history of the community members, in order to build the sense of community in the environment where those involved interact.
So, there is consistence with the paradigm of CSR, related to ethical behavior adopted by an enterprise in the society, going beyond the legal responsibilities in promoting higher quality of life in the local community.

Regional development

Before the pillars of regional development, at this point of the interview the approach relates to social mobility, focused on social organization, since the conditions related to the neighborhood infrastructure showed a significant improvement after the intervention of Braskem. This in turn contributed to the improvement of articulation, mobilization and cooperation among the members of the receiving community. It has been reflected in attracting businesses to the community, creating jobs, and organizing the local economy.

When it comes to governance however, with emphasis on issues aimed at improving neighborhood infrastructure, the report indicates that the company takes on a role and responsibility of public management regarding provisions of better structural conditions in the community.

In relation to the second respondent, we could not observe further issues related to regional development proposed by the company under analysis, as he describes all aspects of the community, without focusing on the contributions made by Braskem.

Concluding Considerations

Upon completion of this work, some considerations are drawn: review of goals, verification of the hypothesis, and presentation of new perspectives.

The results obtained and presented in this thesis may bring contribution to the studies related to sustainable social responsibility initiatives of companies within the petrochemical industry, because their production processes have significant impacts on the environment.

With regard to the environmental dimension, the “Forest Factory” project taking place in the city of Santo André-SP, is made up of actions seeking dialogue with the building of environmental awareness through the promotion of urban reforestation. It promotes planting of native species and, naturally, the construction of values that support environmental education. Furthermore, in relation to the environmental dimension, the Eco-Fashion Project, developed in Santo André-SP also has this concern, aiming to capacitate community members to promote the reuse of their clothes, by the means of customization techniques, decreasing their respective disposal.

Regarding the economic dimension, there was the inauguration of the Screening Center of Recyclable Materials in partnership with the City of Mauá, which required a significant investment by the company under study. Its goals are centered on work organization of collectors, as it presents a system of recyclable materials that streamline their work, in which the system facilitates handling of the material collected. Its role is therefore to contribute to the transition from the informal to the formal economy, to formalize and streamline the work of scavengers, seeking to increase their in-
come and achieve better quality of life. Regarding the opening of Screening Center of Recyclable Materials, it aims to contribute to improving the quality of life of the collectors involved, in the organization of its production processes, and formalization of their work through the organization of cooperatives.

With regard to the social dimension, the reported projects highlight the building of educational values, especially with regard to environmental education, emphasizing the creative potential of those involved and the understanding of the environment-oriented initiatives.

The company emphasizes the stimulus given to the children of the community in which it operates, in the ABC Paulista region and in partnership with other institutions, to engage in sports practice, since they are the bases that make up social responsibility. The environmental dimension is formed with the base on the construction of the respect for the environment, by encouraging environmental awareness and conservation of natural resources and promotion of a cleaner environment.

The social dimension is related to the fact of seeking to interact with members of the community in which it is inserted, together with other institutions, to promote sports practice for children and adolescents who are enrolled in a local school. This action and the one carried out in partnership with the Museum of the Person aiming to rescue the history of the community members, contribute to the promotion of social relations around Braskem’s facilities and indicate ethical behavior of the company before the community in which it operates, resembling the times when the Petroquimica União and later Quattor, coordinated the Petrochemical complex of Capuava.

The actions taken by the company seek to interact with regional development, based on pillars designated by governance, organization of society and the distribution of social assets. Regarding governance, partnerships with local government for the inauguration of Screening Center of Mauá and the “Forest Factory” project in partnership with the city of Santo André, are initiatives within the framework of regional governance, yet we can observe that it is the company itself who is seeking to take control of the management of the process by establishing dialogue with other actors in the territory.

With regard to the relationship with the society, the company studied promotes the community mobilization through programs such as: Recycling Project, EcoFashion Community, Braskem Sport Project, so that those involved achieve quality indicators.

Regarding the distribution of social assets, the projects described about socio-environmental responsibility channel relevant knowledge to the community benefited, dialoguing with the conception of a consciousness that they can be economically active, socially responsible and therefore active participants in the community of which they are part.

Therefore, initiatives for environmental responsibility presented by the company studied and confronted with other interviewd sources seek to fit into the basic concepts of Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility, as well as address the issue of regional development.

It is worth noting, according to Coral (2002), that for the effective implementation of this approach, it is necessary to modify the organization of production processes, an aspect that could not be assessed due to the methodological limitations of the present study. In the context of social responsibility, as highlighted by Ashley (2002), it
is essential that a firm’s commitment to the society be based on actions impacting the community. The sources consulted highlight the attention given to the dialogue between the company and the community, particularly to the issues inherent to coexistence and physical proximity with industrial facilities.

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