

# GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - THE NEW PARADIGM

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**Abstract:** Good governance and sustainable development are key to consolidating a sustainable and efficient future. Based on the challenges they have faced over time, both the European Union and the UN have implemented the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, hoping for a full integration of the proposed objectives into public policy. This study has a theoretical approach focusing on the gradual historical evolution of these two concepts underlying once more their importance for the new social reality.

**Keywords:** good governance; sustainable development, citizens, multi-level governance

## 1. Introduction

Approaching the concept of good governance in terms of sustainable development implies important connotations, materialized in concrete directions of action, which should ensure the deployment of sustainable development objectives. This cannot be done without a clearly established strategy based on a set of public policies that outlines these goals, which the European Commission considers to be its flagship ambitions. Without a holistic, even government-wide approach, these goals will not be able to be fulfilled, so the current vision must include timely references to the concept of good governance, so as to succeed in charting the optimal path to consolidating sustainable development in terms of coordinating strategic, digital, industrial and environmental efforts in order to be achieved for a "strong social Europe for fair transitions" [1].

## 2. The Specifics of Sustainable Development in the New Social Reality

In 1986, the United Nations established the World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland. The purpose of this commission was to persuade countries to agree on implementing the concept of sustainable development, which requires the ability to guide public policies in this area of activity in line with UN goals on strengthening resilience and preparing humanity for the coming transition period. Later known as the "Brundtland Commission", it formulated the best-known definition of sustainable development, namely "Sustainable development is the one that seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [2].

"Our Common Future" Report has become a global agenda for change and has come at a time when the United

Nations General Assembly has realized that there is a serious threat to the environment and natural resources, because of many climate threats that had not been dealt with appropriately. The organization wanted to promote the idea of a united international community, with common goals and objectives that identify sustainability issues around the world and come up with solutions to these emerging challenges, generating ambitious programs of good governance to ensure the achievement of its goals in terms of sustainable development.

### 2.1. Sustainable development strategies

#### 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 United Nations Agenda is a plan of action for the people, the planet and their prosperity.

Negotiations for this plan lasted more than 2 years, and were completed in 2015. This plan includes 17 new sustainable development goals, also called global goals. There are three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental development. Thus, an ambitious agenda has been set, which must be implemented in the next 15 years. The main objectives are: to eradicate poverty in all its forms, to achieve gender equality, and to protect the planet by taking specific actions [3].

#### Paris Agreement and the European Green Pact

Sustainable development is part of the European project, and the European Treaties underline once again its social, economic and environmental dimensions.

The European Union is one of the most active global promoters of the concept of sustainable development.

The Treaty on European Union, signed in 1992 in Maastricht, mentions the development of Europe as a balanced and competitive growth of the economy, with a

stable market, aiming at a low unemployment rate, social progress, protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. The European Union has also been the cornerstone of all major global sustainable development agreements, as confirmed by the Paris Agreement, signed in 2015 by representatives of 195 countries, which addresses climate change and regulates certain measures, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, with a focus on keeping global warming under control [4].

One of the important policies proposed by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, just 2 weeks after taking office in 2019, is the European Green Pact, also known as the European Green Deal, which is a series of flagship policy initiatives, which aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. It contains many ambitious targets and measures for both citizens and companies to enjoy. The target for 2030 is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by up to 55% compared to 1990 levels. The plan also includes deployment measures to be taken by each Member State and a number of sanctions for those who fail to put them into practice [5].

## 2.2. Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy 2030

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the document that is the basis of Romania's 2030 strategy, respectively the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Based on its 17 objectives for a better future for next generations, the strategy is structured on the three pillars of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental. Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 came as a natural consequence of the evolution of Romanian society and takes into account the challenges facing both our country and the states around the globe. The strategy aims to implement the 2030 Agenda at national and international level, Romania being a member of the European Union and a member state of the United Nations, thus assuming a regional role in promoting the achievement of the 17 objectives, aiming to become a model and leader of good practices in the Eastern European region [6].

Through this ambitious strategy, Romania has established its national framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 objectives, aiming at the full connection of Romania to a new philosophy of development, specific to the states of the European Union, and by 2030 to close the gap and get as close as possible to the average level of EU countries in terms of sustainable development indicators. To do this, there have been set up two year periods for the strategy, 2020 and 2030.

For the year 2030, the Romanian Government has assumed the following targets [6]:

- Eradicating extreme poverty for all citizens;
- Eradicating malnutrition and reducing the rate of obesity among the population;

- Doubling the importance of agriculture in Romania's GDP;
- Complete digitization of the health system;
- Reducing infant mortality;
- Education should be focused on the needs of the student;
- Increasing the level of financial education among citizens;
- Decreasing income inequality between the sexes;
- Elimination of all forms of domestic violence and trafficking in human beings;
- Connecting at least 90% of all households in the country to the water and sewerage network;
- Improving road safety by modernizing infrastructure.

## 3. The Dimensions of Good Governance

Good governance is susceptible to several dimensions, especially due to the evolution of the concept over time, given that it is not a novelty in the field. Whenever we refer to a pre-established or innovative procedure, through which decisions are made, we refer to good governance, implicitly we make an x-ray of the best techniques or methods by which we can report this institution, which always demonstrates its importance and dynamism in in the field of public policy and beyond. The concept itself has a wide applicability, even now in terms of international relations strongly influenced by the conflict in Ukraine, the issue of good governance and its metamorphosis imposed by the new social realities is discussed. Whether we are talking about local government, national, regional, international, or corporate governance, we notice different perceptions and fine similarities or discrepancies, depending on the specifics of the field on which a specific research is carried out.

We cannot talk about good governance without referring to citizens, to the principle of subsidiarity, to the application of the law as close as possible to the citizens, an aspect that also involves the principle of proportionality and identifying the right unit of measure for each situation. Nationals everywhere should have access to social services dedicated to each category with specific problems. Moreover the need for the active involvement of citizens in the act of governing should not be left behind, thus being able to influence the public policies that will be adopted and ultimately contributing by their involvement to raising the quality of life standards.

Plato's conception of good governance is edifying, as he had the incredible intuition to mention this concept in his dialogues, emphasizing that the act of governing does not necessarily imply a course of action in accordance with positive law, but the act of governing represents, more precisely, in the Platonic conception, the art of leading. Therefore, we cannot reduce good governance *stricto sensu* to power and its exercise, although these notions are included in its valences, finding mutual influences or even productive conditions

between the sub-terms that make up the concept of good governance.

Without government we cannot speak of good governance, but good governance is not reduced to government, it is a polymorphic concept susceptible of many meanings, dimensions and valences. Further on, depending on the level at which we report good governance, as we have shown above (local, national, regional, national, international, corporate), we can talk about other institutional actors within the governance process thus extending the list to NGOs, associations, foundations, research institutions, religious institutions, those that make up civil society.

#### 4. Principles of Good Governance and Multi-Level Governance

In 2001, the European Commission published the White Paper on European Governance, identifying five principles that should form the basis of this concept in the European Union: opening and making transparent the work of decision-making bodies, involving all society members in decision-making process establishing the responsibility that policy makers must assume, as well as promoting efficiency and coherence in public policy-making [7].

- Responsibility - both the government and the institutions of central and local public administration must take responsibility for the actions they take or not, as they have to understand that following the democratic electoral process in which they were elected or following the exam they took up, they must have clear objectives and must be aware of their responsibility for implementing European Union policies at local, regional or national level.

- Participation - this principle reveals the importance of the active participation of all sectors of society in the decision-making process. Bodies endowed with this type of decision-making power must consider the distribution of information on measures that may influence the smooth running of the community, so that all interested parties have the opportunity to express their opinion freely. Improved participation has the potential to build greater confidence in the final result of public administration, the main goal being a perfect collaboration between government, civil society and non-governmental organizations.

- Transparency - the third principle of good governance mentioned in the White Paper draws attention to the need for public institutions to work in an open, transparent manner. They must communicate effectively every decision that the European Union, through its institutions, decides on. Transparency is a principle that is truly applicable only in countries with a democratic form of government, where the decision-making process can be scrutinized by civil society. For this principle to be applied, producing the desired effect of reducing the scourge of corruption, there should be an active partnership between public administration

representatives, who should make information accessible for representatives of non-governmental organizations and interested citizens, and the latter should have the necessary framework to analyze, propose changes or even criticize the information brought to them by the authorities.

- Coherence - The public policies, objectives and measures to be taken must be easy to understand. Decisions taken at regional and local level must also be in line with a broader set of principles.

- Efficiency - Public policies need to be effective, with a set of clear objectives, with an assessment of the potential impact in the future and, where possible, with an assessment of the impact that a similar policy has had in the past. This principle works where public policy implementation processes and the institutions that implement them use their resources to produce the results that citizens expect. Efficiency means improving the quality standard that public services deliver to people, by technologicalizing and automating certain processes, reducing bureaucracy and institutional restructuring, so as to eliminate overlapping burdens in the work of civil servants [7].

Whether we are talking about the local, regional or national level, each form of governance shares a common goal: to provide concrete results and actions in order to improve the lives of the citizens of the community over whom they have decision-making power. These forms of governance should set a strong example of cooperation, promoting social cohesion and innovation through the exchange of information and good practice to create truly sustainable economies. That is the purpose of multilevel government.

The European Union has gradually evolved from a “top-down” governance model to a more inclusive model, involving more social and economic partners in the policy-making process. This level of multilevel governance strengthens the European Union's goals: a Europe focused on the needs of its citizens, a sustainable economic growth, underlying the importance sustainable development concept and the crucial role of the Union in promoting this type of public policy making.

The Treaty of Lisbon was signed in 2007, entered into force on 1 December 2009 and has been ratified by all Member States of the European Union. This written agreement categorically enshrines territorial dimension and cohesion in the process of European integration, laying the foundations for multi-level governance mechanisms at the level of the Community bloc.

Decision-making policy in the European Union has been designed in such a way that concentrating decisions at a single level of power should be avoided, policy-making at the most appropriate level must be guaranteed, and decisions can be taken even by Member States when a possible intervention of the European Union institutions is not required. Therefore, the implementation of multi-level governance is based on respecting the principle of subsidiarity [8].

## 5. The Fourth Dimension of Sustainable Development - Good Governance

A sustainable society is considered to be economically stable, with well-defined environmental policies, socially responsible citizens and participatory, stable and effective governance.

In this context, the Sustainable Society Foundation of the Netherlands has been developing the Society for Sustainable Development Index (SSI) for more than a decade, which is intended to be a comprehensive method for measuring and closely monitoring sustainability progress in the 154 states analyzed. In order to do this, there are 21 indicators grouped into 3 dimensions of well-being, namely: social welfare, ecological well-being and economic well-being.

The social welfare dimension includes meeting basic needs (sufficient food, sufficient drinking water and general hygiene and sanitation), personal development and health needs (the right to education, a healthy life and gender equality) and living in a balanced society (equitable income distribution, population growth and good government). [9]

The ecological welfare dimension analyzes natural resources (biodiversity, renewable water sources and consumption of natural resources). Climate and energy are also analyzed (total energy consumption, energy savings achieved, the percentage of greenhouse gases and whether or not renewable energy sources exist). In order to implement the ambitious environmental policies pursued, there should be a close cooperation is needed between the governments of the EU Member States, the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission.

The economic welfare dimension analyzes the effort made by countries towards the transition to green societies (organic farming) and the state of the economy (the gross domestic product of the analyzed country, the percentage of employed people, as well as public debt).

Since the beginning of the development of SSI, a gradual increase in sustainability has been observed, and the 2018 report confirms that social and economic well-being is difficult to combine with ecological well-being in most of the countries analyzed. [9]

In addition to what the literature considers to be the three pillars that underlie the foundation of sustainable development concept as well as the three dimensions that are traditionally analyzed when we refer to it, lately we can discuss about a fourth dimension of sustainable development - good governance. The implementation of strategies at international level (Agenda 2030), regional (European Green Pact) or national (National Strategy for Sustainable Development) requires a multi-level, transparent governance, oriented towards the active participation of society in order to strengthen the power of public institutions and last but not least to create a space for dialogue and consensus between different forms of governance and civil society.

In order to support the importance of good governance and its definition as a fourth dimension of sustainable development, we will complete the theoretical study in this article with a quantitative research, conducted in the form of a questionnaire, which will be published in a future paper.

## 6. Conclusions

Given the evolution of the concept of sustainable development, its new social demands and the need to address this concept in relation to good governance, there is a new paradigm that has an international value through a set of programmatic measures taken by the UN and the EU, which will have to be materialized and adapted to the national specifics through a set of public policies carefully configured by the strategy of good governance. All states are acutely aware of the need for a change in human behavior towards protecting the planet, which implies a change in strategic behavior in line with the new challenges, which, once fulfilled, promise a revival and a successful economic recovery of the states participating in the deployment of this new paradigm. Therefore we need an active involvement of citizens, a rule of law in which the rights and freedoms of citizens are guaranteed, a redesign of national, European, international priorities, which once fulfilled will gradually allow the exit from the crisis acutely felt by all citizens but especially by the planet itself.

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