The Cluster approach for a Sustainable Blue Growth in the Mediterranean

InnoBlueGrowth

Capitalization report for recommendations

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Context of the report

While reflecting on the contents of the mid-term conference for the Interreg Med Blue Growth Community, the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR – partner to the InnoBlueGrowth project – has elaborated a briefing report to share with all participants on the different dimensions of sustainability. Even if this document was not foreseen in the project’s deliverables, the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR thought important to still share it as such.

Bearing in mind the cross-cutting nature of sustainability, the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR proposed that the participants reflect on the matter, in application to their respective sectors or field of expertise, to explore the ways of ensuring sustainability and tackling its challenges in the development of the blue economy.

The document therefore aims primarily to give a short overview of the dimensions of sustainability but also hopes to be remembered for any future contents and innovation elaboration in the context of Interreg Med, especially given the importance sustainability has been acquiring in our world, whether it be in terms of public or private lives.
The Three Dimensions of Sustainability: Economic, Social and Environmental

A holistic review

Introduction

In 1987, the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report, first defined the term “sustainable development” to preserve our environment, in a global and long-term manner, from further man-maid degradation, while meeting human populations’ basic needs.1 Even before then, there was an increasing acknowledgement that “sustainable solutions can be achieved through integrating their social, economic and environmental dimensions.”2 In 2014, this notion was reaffirmed at the first United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-1), going further and expressing the need for the next sustainable development agenda to address these three key dimensions in a “coherent, holistic, comprehensive and balanced manner.”3

Although this terminology was largely accepted by the international community, like Pearce et al. (1989) observed: “it fits nicely into political sound-bites compared with its predecessor’s “eco-development”, it is something to which everyone can agree, like motherhood and apple pie”, the broad scope of the three pillars of sustainable development made it difficult to give a single, transversal and comprehensive definition. This paper will try to gather all common theories with the intention to put forward an all-inclusive definition of sustainability.

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3 Ibid.
I. Different approaches to sustainability

Before defining each dimension of sustainability, it is important to note that the definition depends largely on the subjectivity of each sector that deals with it. In that sense, each stakeholder will have a different approach on sustainability and on how to translate the integration of the three pillars in its implementation.

Primarily, one must bear in mind that the three pillars were first introduced by the international institutions, mainly the World Bank and the United Nations. Then, it was adopted by businesses, followed by the other actors. Edwin ZACCAI, Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development Studies in Brussels, describes the different perception of stakeholders to sustainable development, questioning the predominant position of the pillars. He argues that whereas the European Union added the environmental pillar to the already existing social and economic pillars (following the Lisbon Strategy), International organizations tend to have a broader look at sustainability, including all dimensions equally in their endeavours or simply focussing on the environmental one. On the other hand, for academics, the meaning would be closer to sole “development,” targeting inequality, poverty and even fair trade. Businesses, on their part, view sustainability as multiple challenges of social responsibility.4

In the end, the author states that all literacy work concurs that “the root, the core business (of sustainable development) is indeed the environment” and in that sense even though the three dimensions should be equal in terms of indicators and implementation, it would seem more appropriate to evaluate the economic and social dimensions around environmental objectives.5

II. The Three Dimensions of sustainability

1. Environmental Sustainability

The definition of “environmental sustainability” has reached a simple consensus among stakeholders. Could it be for scholars, businesses or international organisations, this pillar tends to preserve our natural resource base over time and thus to limit our use of resources. In that sense, we observe an overall acknowledgement that the current business-as-usual can simply not continue in that direction if we want to “assure a healthy legacy for our future generations and ensure inter-generational equity.”6 As “the resources of the planet are not limitless and (...) resource constraints cannot always be addressed by technology.”7 For this, “sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage

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5 ZACCAI, op.cit., p.48
7 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, A framework and tools, 2015, 33 p.
consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire.\textsuperscript{8}

Besides, environmental sustainability means \textit{investing in the “natural capital,”} giving priority to maintaining ecological processes, environmental patrimony, protecting and renewing natural resources over other expenses (see Annex I - UNEP).\textsuperscript{9} The United Nations ensure that such investments would serve as a strong safety net in case of “social, economic, political and environmental shocks and disruptive changes”

\textit{Implication of the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR}

Environmental Sustainability is one of the key incentives of the CPMR-IMC’s work. Through its Working Group on Water and Energy, the organization wants to protect our natural resources and find renewable and sustainable ways for energy production.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, with its implication in the Interreg Med project PANACEA, the Intermediterranean Commission shows its commitment to protecting the Mediterranean’s biodiversity, building a community of nature conservation agents.\textsuperscript{11}

2. Social Sustainability

As stated in the introduction, sustainable development aims at meeting the needs of the population, yet, “perceived needs are socially and culturally determined”, thereby making social sustainability an essential dimension of sustainability.\textsuperscript{12} Contrarily to the environmental pillar, the social one doesn’t reach a consensus in its definition, the main reason for this being the subjective, \textit{immaterial and bipolar} aspect of the “social” as it can be both individual and collective.\textsuperscript{13} The “social” can include very distinct elements, from \textit{employability} (economical) to the \textit{participation mode} (institutional) and plainly the \textit{people} without whom, sustainable development would not be achievable, providing that they become true ‘owners’ of the concept.\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, a common definition must consider three essential elements mentioned by all actors: \textit{quality of life}, the \textit{alleviation of poverty} and \textit{inclusion} (see Annex I). In that sense, most concur that sustainable development should provide the better possible quality of life to the human population with access to fundamental services, opportunities, education, health, security and basic level of social and environmental protection – which entails social and economic gains as well as conservation of valuable natural environment – this, equally shared amongst all classes, genders, the poor, the vulnerable, the

\textsuperscript{8} Our Common Future, \textit{op.cit.} Part I., Chapter 2: Towards Sustainable Development
\textsuperscript{11} Interreg Mediterranean, “Biodiversity Protection,” visited 15\textsuperscript{th} November 2018.
\textsuperscript{12} Our Common Future, \textit{op.cit.}, Part I., Chapter 2: “Towards Sustainable Development.”
\textsuperscript{13} LEHTONEN Markku, in \textit{Ecological Economy}, published by Elsevier, “The environmental-social interface of sustainable development: capabilities, social capital, institutions” 1\textsuperscript{st} June 2004.
\textsuperscript{14} ZACCAI, \textit{op.cit.}, p.52 and REDCLIFT, \textit{op.cit.}
marginalized, from developed or developing countries as "a world to which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes."\textsuperscript{15}

**Implication of the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR**

The CPMR-IMC participates actively in encouraging social sustainability through its Working Group on Economic and Social Cohesion. Indeed, its main actions include supporting training, mobility, integration and employment access for young people in the Mediterranean and fostering North-South as well as South-South cooperation in an inclusive purpose.\textsuperscript{16} The CPMR-IMC is also at the forefront of the PLATFORMA coalition, working to increase decentralised international cooperation and mutual learning for sustainable development.\textsuperscript{17}

3. Economic Sustainability

While social sustainability focusses on fulfilling immaterial needs, economical sustainability tends to answer the material needs of human beings through economic prosperity.\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, in many literature work, this dimension is often reduced solely to the "state of technology" of the system.\textsuperscript{19} Nevertheless, economic sustainability has a much bigger scope. In that perspective, in fact, it means to create a constant and full growth of economic indicators and especially, "the capacity to generate incomes and employment in order to sustain the populations."\textsuperscript{20} Of course, sustainability requires maintaining the economic output potential, this, only providing that "the content of growth reflects the broad principles of sustainability and non-exploitation of others."\textsuperscript{21}

In addition, economic sustainability stresses the need to preserve current and future levels of production and consumption, linking it strongly to the environmental dimension. Bartelmus \textit{et al.} (1987), adds that "sustainable development maintains a particular level of income by conserving the sources of that income, the stock of produced and natural capital."\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, Barbier \textit{et al.} (1987) defines economic sustainable development as "directly concerned with increasing the material standard of living of the poor at the 'grassroots' level, which can be quantitatively measured in terms of increased food, real income, educational services, health-care, sanitation and water supply, emergency stocks of food and cash [...] in general terms the primary objective is reducing the

\textsuperscript{15} REDCLIFT, \textit{op.cit.}; SOGESID, \textit{op.cit.} and quote from Our Common Future, \textit{op.cit.} “Intro: From One Earth to One World”


\textsuperscript{17} PLATFORMA, Local & Regional International Action, visited 15\textsuperscript{th} November 2018.

\textsuperscript{18} Swiss Confederation, Federal Office for Spatial Development, \textit{Understanding Sustainability, the Three Dimension Model}, visited between the 8th and 14th of November 2018.


\textsuperscript{20} SOGESID, \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{21} Swiss Confederation, \textit{op.cit.} and Our Common Future, \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{22} REDCLIFT, \textit{op.cit.}
absolute poverty of the world’s poor through providing lasting and secure livelihoods.23 This time interconnecting the social and economic dimension (see all interconnexion in Annex I).

Implication of the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR

As part of its Working Group on Economic and Social Cohesion, the CPMR-IMC aims at supporting and promoting initiatives for a sustainable, inclusive and smart socio-economic development in the Mediterranean.24 Hands-on, the IMC is a key partner in the InnoBlueGrowth project, an integrating approach between all stakeholders of the Mediterranean to foster a sustainable socio-economic development of the basin through innovative investments in the Blue Economy.25 Blue Growth is also a key objective of its Working Group on Transport and Integrated Maritime Policy.26

III. The interdependency of the three dimensions

![Diagram of the three dimensions of sustainable development: Environment, Social, Economic.]

Figure 1: Relationships between the three dimensions of Sustainable development

Source: Macaulay Honors College at https://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/akurry/files/2011/12/SDspheres.jpg

In the end, trying to define the three dimensions of sustainability separately has proven challenging when it is difficult to alleviate the obvious connexion between all the pillars (see Annex I). In that sense, it is impossible to define environmental sustainability without mentioning the natural capital or the people.

23 Ibid.
24 Working Group “Economic and Social Cohesion”, op.cit.
social sustainability without introducing *environmental protection* and *economic gain* and finally economic sustainability without acknowledging *standards of living, poverty and natural resources*.

In fact, Lehtonen (2004) states that “the key challenges of sustainable development reside at the interfaces—synergies and trade-offs—between its various dimensions[,] (…) between the often-conflicting objectives of economic and social development, and environmental protection.”

In consequence, sustainable development requires a cross-sector and integrated management. Similarly, policies as well as public and private stakeholders cannot act “one-dimensionally or in isolation” and must be committed to find joint solutions for sustainable development.

On a more practical level, taking the model of the UN for the implementation of sustainable development as an example, we observe that the Sustainable Development Goals where not treated in isolation but in a way to transcend sectors and interact with the other objectives (see Figure 2 below).

![Interrelated Sustainable Development Goals](image)

**Figure 2: Interrelated Sustainable Development Goals**

Moreover, the United Nations made sure to integrate the three dimensions of sustainability to a different extent into the SDGs, in order to effectively meet their multi-dimensional targets. In Figure 3, we can see the share of each dimension of sustainability divided between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals’ specific targets. The lower part of the graph sorts out the means of implementation (MOI) allocated per goal and the share of dedicated dimension’s resources.

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27 LEHTONEN, op.cit.
29 Swiss Confederation, op. cit.
30 Csaba Körösi, for A Planet for Life, *Negotiating a common future – what we have learned from the SDGs*, 2015, visited between the 8th and 14th of November 2018.
Figure 3: Share of the three dimensions of sustainability within each SDG and targets

Besides, even though each pillars’ objectives are very distinct, and their relevance might change depending on context, it is important to maintain a balance and to consider “three hierarchically equal, mutually interacting dimensions,” also called the ‘triple bottom line’ for businesses or the ‘win-win-win’ approach.31 Indeed, if one dimension were to take priority above the others this could lead to conflicts and degradation on the weaker pillar.32

Conclusion:

In conclusion, one can remark that the broadly accepted and core definition of sustainable development remains the one given by the Brundtland Report in 1987, of a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”33, completed by the tripartite dimensions, which came shortly after – at the Rio Convention of 1992.34

Finally, sustainability would be holistically - but non-exhaustively (see Annex I) – described as a long-term integrated approach that tends to satisfy all human beings’ needs, material or immaterial, present and future, and alleviates poverty through increasing economic opportunities while safeguarding our planet’s environment and finite natural resources in an inclusive and equitable way.

31 LEHTONEN, op. cit.
32 ZACCAI, op. cit., p.50
33 Our common future, op. cit.
34 LEHTONEN, op. cit.
### Annexe I. The Interlinkage between the three pillars of Sustainability according to different sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Common Future</strong></td>
<td>High levels of productive activity</td>
<td>Widespread Poverty</td>
<td>Endanger environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing productive potential</td>
<td>Equitable opportunities for all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State of technology</td>
<td>Social organization on resources</td>
<td>ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNESCAP</strong></td>
<td>Technology cannot address resource constraints</td>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Ecological sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNEP</strong></td>
<td>Economic functioning</td>
<td>Human well-being - social functioning</td>
<td>responsible management of the planet's finite resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic capital</td>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>Natural capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Swiss Confederation</strong></td>
<td>Economic output potential</td>
<td>Social cohesion</td>
<td>Reducing consumption of the environment and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural change in economic system</td>
<td>Structural change in social system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEHTONEN: Bioeconomy model</strong></td>
<td>Economic activities</td>
<td>At the service of Human existence</td>
<td>Safeguarding biophysical systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEBRATU</td>
<td>Sustainable economic growth</td>
<td>Social equitability</td>
<td>Environmental improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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