



1st International Conference 'Economic Scientific Research - Theoretical, Empirical and Practical Approaches', ESPERA 2013

Considerations regarding the role of indicators used in the analysis and assessment of sustainable development in the E.U

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Abstract

This paper aims to capture the role of the analysis and assessment indicators of sustainable development of EU Member States during the last years. Based on the EU sustainable development indicators and not only it is shown how they can be used in the assessment of the three major dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. Nowadays the concern to not limit options for future generation' has become a priority for most governments around the world and not just Europe. The aim of this paper is the enhancement of the sustainability assessment framework by selecting the sustainable development indicators according to each country characteristics. The paper discusses several models of sustainable development analysis and identifies different indicators that were chosen to explain sustainability. With the aid of a thorough literature review and data analysis we provide arguments regarding the existence of a general model of social, economic and environmental indicators which may be applied in every country and if such model could be appropriate.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of ESPERA 2013

Keywords: sustainable development, Sustainable Development Indicators, governance, European Union;

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1. Introduction

In the last years it has been paid more attention to the concept of sustainable development (SD), we refer to governments or to the responsibility of individuals *to meet their needs without compromising future generation's situation*. Also in the analysis of the literature, the SD concept became more popular, an increasing number of specialists chose to refer to this topic.

Sustainable development as a process was and it is subject to monitoring and measurement through some selected indicators based on the goals to be achieved. Out of the need to establish a reference and analysis frame, at governmental level, strategies have been developed for SD. The orientation towards sustainable development has not achieved only at the macro level, but also at the micro level, a growing number of companies supporting the concept and making annual reports by highlighting to what extent their activity supports or contributes to sustainable development. This concern for SD is encountered even in the case of individuals; they are becoming more concerned with the harmonious blending of economic development with environmental and social dimensions.

In the theoretical and practical approaches of sustainable development concept does not exist yet a scientific or policy clear consensus of defining the indicators of a SD model analysis, steps in this direction were made mostly by international bodies and institutions. Thus, the measurement of progress towards sustainable development was done by evaluating the objectives of sustainable development strategies.

2. Aspects of sustainable development in the European Union

Since 1987, when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) has developed and published the document "Our Common Future", known as the Brundtland Report, and continuing to date numerous institutions that support and monitor sustainable development at global, national or regional level, have been set up. The United Nations (UN), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat, are the most important institutions for monitoring SD.

In Europe, assessing progress towards sustainable development, in each country of EU and in the EU as a whole, is achieved through some sustainable development indicators (SDIs). In a report published by Eurostat every two years it is monitored the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) with the help of over 100 indicators, of which twelve are key indicators. The indicators used by Eurostat are divided into 10 themes, as follows: *socio-economic development, sustainable consumption and production, social inclusion, demographic changes, public health, climate change and energy, sustainable transport, natural resources, global partnership and good governance*.

This report does not aim to give an absolute assessment of whether the EU is sustainable, as there is no political or scientific consensus on what this state of sustainability would be, or on the optimal levels for many of the indicators presented here. (Eurostat, 2011) Therefore, it aims to assess whether the EU as a whole, and if Member States is heading towards sustainable development.

According to Eurostat, in the last five years it can be observed a major fluctuation for the EU-27 key indicators. Regarding the growth rate of real GDP per capita (see Fig.1), on the whole EU we find that in 2008 it drops, and as a response to the economic crisis, in 2009 dropped sharply by 4.9%. After the recession period it is observed a positive moderate growth in two years, by 1.7% in 2010 and 1.4% in 2011, and as a result of the economic slowdown in the euro area, in 2012, is recorded a decrease of 0.7%. For the Member States, in terms of "*socio-economic development*", the highest declines in 2009, of real GDP per capita occurred in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and also these are the countries that registered the largest increase in 2011 and moderate increase in 2012. Greece and Spain are the only Member States of the EU that have decreased during the last five years; Spain decrease is much lower than that of Greece.

Regarding the evolution of the theme "*social inclusion*", it is noted that the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU during the period 2008 - 2009 was reduced by approximately 2 million, then continued to increase until 2011 and also a growth is estimated for 2012.

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