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## Building a governance for Sustainable Development in Italy: means (indicators), mechanisms and the role of territories

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### KEYWORDS

Sustainable Development  
Agenda 2030  
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SDGs measures

### INTRODUCTION

Several initiatives are being promoted by public authorities at international, European, national, regional and local level to introduce Agenda 2030 into policy-making in order to translate international goals and targets for sustainable development into their respective territorial contexts.

The paper intends to critically analyse the mechanisms adopted by Italy for addressing the sustainability of public policies all along the policy cycle and across different levels of government. In particular, the paper focusses on the approach adopted and on tools developed by the Ministry for Environment and Energy Security (MASE) for the periodical review of the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS).

The Italian approach is read as an exemplificative application of the evolution of the UN sustainability Agendas (from Agenda 21 to the 2030 Agenda passing through the Millennium Development Goals) in the incremental acknowledgement of localisation as a main driver of implementation and achievement of sustainability goals. The added value of the integrated and participative approach to public policies adopted in Italy is discussed, with particular reference to its ability to properly consider and address at the same time the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The approach in fact, considers policy integration as the main lever to enact the three dimensions of sustainability and make them coexist into national and territorial sustainability frameworks, while supporting the effectiveness of multilevel governance. Policy processes are thus expected to be able to identify and enable linkages across scales of policy and planning, across policies as well as among different territorial stakeholders, respecting and enhancing territorial specificities while promoting shared knowledge and institutional settings.



## METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts a qualitative approach, introducing political and strategical documents that inspired the NSDS, in order to frame the main challenges in implementing 2030 Agenda at territorial level to create a multilevel system able to promote institutional collaboration and policy coherence at different scales.

The article aims to analyze critically the process followed by the MASE – national authority for sustainable development in Italy - to define the NSDS. To this aim, this article intends to:

1. explain the complete mechanism of public sustainability policies in Italy by focusing on the thematic competences of all the actors involved (public/non-public, institutional/non-institutional from the local to the national level);
2. identify the Italian national focus and the initiatives proposed by MASE for the periodic review of the ENDE, placing value on the integrated and participatory focus of public policies capable of capturing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

Following a qualitative approach, the Authors, who participated in the revision process of the NSDS followed: una ricostruzione critica dei documenti di riferimento of the objectives the Authors, who participated in the revision process of the NSDS, achieved:

- a critical review of the NSDS documents in particular relating to multilevel governance, to the selection process of national indicators for sustainable development and to policy coherence approach;
- the several steps to achieve at NSDS and the administrative and territorial governance tools adopted at national level were presented and each actions/implementation tools promoted by MASE to the regions and metropolitan cities are linked to a steps of a generic policy cycle;
- A critical reconstruction of the selection process of national indicators for sustainable development is presented also by the support of the results of two Italian regions, Piedmont and Puglia, in the framework of a JRC project;
- A critical reconstruction of the policy coherence matrix as an inclusive and participatory soft governance tool for the systematization of the NSDS coherently to the main policy and programming documents.

Finally, the conclusions looking the future work perspective regarding the process of territorialization of sustainability actions.

## RESULTS

Achieved results and critical pending issues are presented in order to open to further discussion and reflections.

The paper argues how the main limits in localising SDGs still remain in reinforcing Sustainable Development governance, selecting shared indicators, ensuring data availability at local level and municipalities engagement. In fact, the process of territorialisation and involvement of civil society is “incremental” and there are still numerous needs emerging from the territories which have to be addressed, including:

- to define a clear institutional governance;
- to support the internal capacity building processes of each administration to manage complexity which inherits SD;
- to strengthen collaborative, interinstitutional environments for producing common understanding of shared problems and potential solutions;



- to encourage the coherence of policies, plans and programs among sectors and territories, operationalising the multilevel and multisectoral approach based on PCSD;
- to find further indicators for tracking and assessing the enacted transformational process within the Vectors for sustainability (qualitative and quantitative indicators and measures) as well as soft mechanisms based on voluntary compliance;
- to improve the relations between local forums and national SD forum, with bottom-up mechanisms that will allow to introduce points of attention from the “grassroots” to the national level.

To satisfy these needs emerging from territories, the paper argues how further working issues should be considered, focussing on the integration of local driven actions (i.e. Internal areas, Green communities, Unions of municipalities, River Contracts) into the wider sustainability frameworks, and on the convergence of different programmes and funding schemes, increasing policy coherence towards the SDGs and providing shared measures and tools for easing their assessment.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The paper discusses on the territorialised approach to implement national strategies for sustainable development focusing on Italian experiences. The Italian approach has been presented as an exemplificative application of the evolution from the Millennium Development Goal to the SDG Agenda that reflects the process of territorialisation of the sustainability objectives. The critical analysis of the NSDS revision process shows the long path taken by Italy in defining sustainability objectives achievable at the different levels of territorial government (national, regional and metropolitan/local level) taking into account territorial specificities.

The paper presents how Italian experiences has been taken in charge main institutional and scientific recommendation (OCSE, 2021a; Steiner, 2017; Biggeri, 2021; Ciambra *et al.*, 2023; Smoke *et al.*, 2016; McGuinn *et al.*, 2017) in the developing of NSDS. The results is a critical analysis of the process of transforming the SDGs into reality at the local level by multilevel governance mechanism, policy coherence, participative approach. The paper undelights that the main limits in the territorialised SDG is represented to the selection of commune indicators, data availability at local level and to assess the best administrative issue able to implement sustainability choices to achieve sustainability aims.

To the numerous and different objectives correspond several and different needs which are expressions of specific sensitivity in order to achieve the main principle of Agenda 2030 “leaving anyone behind”. This aspect, in Italy, has been implemented through the mechanism of civil society participation in the NSDS by National Forum for Sustainable Development (FORUM SD) able to identify in principle what that Eising and Kohler-Koch (1999) called as “functional interests” of all the actors involved.

The needs expressed by the various actors has been collected by a complex mechanism of participation and listening that has given the dimension to sustainability showing what Boas, Biermann and Kanie (2016) have defined as the “multidimensionality” of sustainability aims.