The Synergies of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Good State and Governance Report in Hungary

Abstract

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The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Transforming our World: Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 in New York. The new global framework for sustainable development containing 17 goals and 169 targets attempts to integrate the social, the economic and the environmental dimensions of sustainability. The national-level indicator framework can complement the international rankings systems and considers the national peculiarities. The annually published Hungarian Good State and Governance Report is a Hungarian national-level government performance evaluation system which monitors governmental effectiveness and measures governmental capabilities on 6 impact areas by 150 selected indicators. The good governance is an advanced tool for supporting sustainable development to which the complex way of thinking out of silos is essential by an increased level of cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders. The paper examines the interlinkages and synergies between the Hungarian national-level government performance evaluation system and the global Sustainable Development Goals. For that reason, the basis of analysis, the Hungarian sustainability frameworks and selected national country performance reports had been overviewed. In case of converging the national-level government performance frameworks, like the Good State and Governance Report and the reporting of SDGs implementation promotes good governance for sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), global governance, Good State and Governance Report, national-level governance performance evaluation,

Points for Practitioners

The Agenda 2030 containing the Sustainable Development Goals is an action plan for sustainable development. It tends to accomplish a new form of governance with close cooperation and collaboration between the public and private institutional bodies. The boundary condition of achieving the defined goals is to establish or keep the coherence between the global and national strategies and their monitoring systems. The role of the public bodies is dual, on hand establishing an encouraging environment for the private stakeholders, on other hand leading good examples during its operation. The appearance and active application of principles of sustainability (meaning environmental, economic and social) in these processes are necessary of improving the living circumstances in long-term. The national-level performance evaluations systems, as the Hungarian Good State and Governance, promote the evidence-based policy making and provide a tool for supporting the strategical thinking of the business sector.

1. Introduction

It took almost a half century since the 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment until The Agenda 2030 was adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations in 2015 (United Nations 2015). It is a global action plan for sustainable development. A result from a long process of negotiations involving public bodies, NGO-s, experts and international organizations, the Sustainable Development Goals and targets were agreed. They are “integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.” (United Nations 2015) The Agenda 2030 builds on the principles of universality, leaving on one behind, interconnectedness and indivisibility, inclusiveness, multi-stakeholder partnership. It provides new possibilities of academic research which can play a trigger point for sustainable governance, setting new initiatives (Salvia et al. 2019; United Nations 2017). It provides the basis of evidence-based framework for sustainable development (Allen, Metternicht, and Wiedmann 2018).

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A measuring framework based on indicators is a useful tool in the evidence-based policy making. As Schönert notes a ranking system can cause a huge publicity and can draw the attention to specific issue. It can also improve the debate process, can provide the possibility to explore the studying effect. However, several disadvantages can be observed: the debate can be just about the place in the ranking, it can cause the re-discussion of the long-term strategies (Schönert 2003). A well-designed, specific ranking is applicable when not only the ranking’s objective and dissemination, but also its methodology are be taken into consideration (Giffinger, Haindlmaier, and Kramar 2010). Beyond these rankings, a normative value system can be observed. The national-level performance frameworks comprehend the international rankings published by international organizations. As they focus more precisely on country-specific issues and problems, their measurement can more precisely adopt to their objectives (Kaiser, 2017). In many cases the international rankings “simplify social phenomena, level unwarranted normative judgements, and selectively diagnose complex problems” (Cooley 2018). As a response for these pitfalls some countries, also introduced a national performance measuring framework.

According to the Magyary Program, which is a Hungarian public administration reform program “A state may be regarded as good if it serves the needs of individuals, communities and businesses in the interest and within the boundaries of the common good, in the best possible way.” (Ministry of Public Administration and Justice 2012). It follows that a state should function by observing and supporting the policy-making concerning with sustainability on condition that it contributes to the improvement of long-term living circumstances. In Hungary, the National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development (NFSTD) was adopted by the Hungarian Parliament in 2013 providing a common root for the strategical thinking on sustainable development. The related monitoring report is biannually published. The Hungarian Statistical Office formulates a report on sustainable development taking into consideration the main dimensions of the Strategy.

Following the international good examples, a national-level government performance evaluation framework is introduced in Hungary. The Good State and Governance Report (Kaiser 2016) is published annually by the National University of Public Administration trying to catch state capacity and governance capabilities. The framework contains a separate Sustainability impact area, emphasizing the importance of sustainable way of thinking, however sustainability also can be detected in the other 5 impact areas. A report with the target audience of policy-makers (of course next to the academic sphere) has its normative stimulus to closely take into consideration the partly adaption of the global SDGs. Nevertheless differences can be observed between the global and national sustainability (Trombitás 2015): e.g. in case of Hungary there is a national initiative to improve the total fertility rate providing the condition of sustaining the size population. Meanwhile the overpopulation is a global problem which can be identified as one of the wicked issues (Rittel and Webber 1973) of our time.

2. Methodology

First of all, the paper reviews the Agenda 2030 with special attention on its governance. On one hand it is a form of global governance and on the other hand it also contains separate, achievable goals for governance itself. Secondly, the former Hungarian benchmarks and monitoring processes on sustainable development are presented as a background of national implementation of the global action plan. Similarly to the Agenda 2030, they uses the complex meaning of sustainability. It reveals the fact, that there are numerous institutions to be built on to improve the Hungarian performance. The indicators of the Hungarian frameworks are compared with the target indicators of the SDGs. Following this, the main elements of the Hungarian performance measurement report on good governance, the Good State and Governance Report is presented in comparison with other similar frameworks, with distinguished focus of the appearance of sustainability in them. The indicators of the different national frameworks are grouped in on the basis of their connectiveness to the 6 impact areas of GSGR. Finally the relations between the indicators of GSGR and the SDGs are examined in order to proclaim their synergies and for future development possibilities. The research lays on the methodological expertise and
sustainability knowledge of experts. An indicator of GSGR is accepted as a proper national tool of measurement if it is appropriate to measure the given phenomena, exclusive identity was not a boundary condition.  

3. Agenda 2030 – the Sustainable Development Goals

The Agenda 2030 states in its vision “We envisage a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. A world in which consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources – from air to land, from rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas – are sustainable. One in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger. One in which development and the application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity and are resilient. One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected.” (United Nations 2015) There was not a homogenous relief in the world after its adoption. The Agenda 2030 was worked out by a long process which involved several consultations among numerous stakeholders (Fukuda-Parr 2016). The Economist called the SDGs as “worse than useless” (The 169 commandments 2015) or according to the Foreign Policy “should stand for Senseless, Dreamy, Garbled” (William Easterly 2015). This new action plan fundamentally differs from the previous global goal-setting framework, from the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Meanwhile the MDG focused mainly on poverty and the aid of underdeveloped countries, the sustainable development is in the focus point of the new Agenda. It contains universal and relevant goals for developed, developing and underdeveloped countries. It integrates the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability. The relating indicators for monitoring its implementation, adopted by the General Assembly (United Nations 2017) in under continuous development, are classified into three main categories:

1. tier: internationally established methodology exists and regular data are available in most of territories where it is relevant (101 indicators belong to this tier)
2. tier: internationally established methodology exists but no regular data are available (84 indicators belong to this tier)
3. tier: no internationally established methodology exists but it is under development (41 indicators belong to this tier) (United Nations 2019)

Numerous cross-cuttings in the monitoring of SDGs can be observed, meaning that the selected target indicators can measure the progress of other areas too.  

The 16th goal of the SDGs, “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”, strongly addresses the issue of governance. However, there are other targets which belongs to governance, e.g. the 11th goal “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”, basically concerns with urban issues, meanwhile the 11.a target “Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning” typically belongs to the field of governance.

3 Authors specially thank Zoltán Mészáros, Pál Bóday for their essential methodological contribution, and the research teams.

4 See more details: (Le Blanc 2015; SDSN 2015)
The theoretical basis of integrative sustainability governance lays among the fundamentals of transition management, metagovernance, experimental governance and network governance/polycentricity (Monkelbaan 2019).

As the sustainable development goals builds on the strong cooperation and participation of the private-public sectors, there is an adequate role of the applied form of governance. Therefore, there is a strong relation between the national and international level. The responsibility of the public sector is double, on one hand it has to encourage and control the private sector for more activities and participation in the implementation, on the other hand it has to create good and followable precedents.

The national governments should pay attention on the integrated policy approach, meaning that the coherence of the policies should be fully taken into consideration during the implementation of the goals. A separate application of one goal, unwillingly can cause such impacts which hinder the pursuit of another goal. (Nilsson, Griggs, and Visbeck 2016) The interlinkages of sectors (e.g. finance, agriculture), societal actors (e.g. private or public agencies) and countries (high, medium and low) also should be regarded during the implementation of SDGs (Stafford-Smith et al. 2017). Mapping the connecting indicators can resolve the understanding the complexity of indicators (Kraak, Ricker, and Engelhardt 2018), the synthesis of different indicator systems also can improve the understanding and interconnectivity of sustainable development goals.

The uniqueness of SDGs reveals the attention to the following major governance challenges (Bowen et al. 2017):

- collective action and decision exceeding in involving multiple stakeholders and diverse sphere of wicked issues
- trade-offs: rooting in the necessary prioritization. Some research indicates that positive and negative correlations also can be found between the SDG indicators (Pradhan et al. 2017).
- accountability: formal monitoring mechanisms and intersectoral implementation of goals

The major international thinktanks (like Bertelsmann) and international organizations (like OECD) worked out their own relating policies (OECD 2016). On yearly basis he European Union also publishes its progress report towards the SDGs (European Union 2018). Several national sustainable frameworks were developed to measure the national progress (Muff, Kapalka, and Dyllick 2017). The SDGCompass can encourage the sustainable strategic thinking of the business sector through a framework consisting of 5 steps (understanding the SDGs, defining priorities, setting goals, integrating and reporting & communicating (GRI, United Nations Global Compact, and WBCSD n.d.). The High-level Political Forum of the United Nations plays the central platform to member states to present their progress on SDGs. In 2019, 50 countries volunteered to carry out a national voluntary review.

4. Framing and monitoring sustainable development in Hungary

On one hand good governance is an advanced tool for supporting sustainable development, on other hand the implementation of principles of sustainable thinking encourages good governance. In 2013, the National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development (NFSTD) was adopted by the Hungarian Parliament providing
a fundamental source of long-term planning and policy-making. NFSTD contains 34 strategic objectives distinguished according to four main national resources (National Council for Sustainable Development 2013):

- human resources: stable population with healthy and skilled individuals living in social cohesion.
- social resources: includes positive values and norms in regard of sustainability, family, trust and maintains the built and cultural heritage of the past.
- natural resources: conservation of biodiversity and supports renewable natural resources.
- economic resources: means the physical development, the strengthening of entrepreneurship and balancing the foreign dependencies and carrying out sustainable budgeting.

The National Council for Sustainable Development biannually prepares a monitoring report on the National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development. The first monitoring report (National Council for Sustainable Development 2015) contained 16 key indicators. According to the latest progress report published in 2017, there is a good correlation between the goals of the NFSTD. 83 goals of the Agenda 2030 are part of the Hungarian NFSTD. However, it emphasizes, that the international developmental policies are out of range, they are categorically belonging to foreign policies. The 16th SDG is evaluated bad or just beyond the average, but improving trends can be observed in Hungary (National Council for Sustainable Development 2017)\(^5\).

The Hungarian Statistical Office biannually publishes the Indicators of Sustainable Development (ISD). The structure of the latest report (KSH 2018) still follows the logic of NFSTD. It contains 103 indicators from which 83 can be considered as real and 21 as context indicators.\(^6\)

\(5\) In 2017, by the next review of the Framework, further analysis will be executed with SDGs.

\(6\) The following report will be available in April 2019, after the closure of the manuscript.

In case of Hungary, the 14th, “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” goal is out of the scope both in ISD and NFSTD. In case of NFSTD the 6th, “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, the 13th “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”, the 15th “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” and the 17th “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” goal are not attached. The indicators of both framework show close relations with the 1st “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, with the 2nd “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” with the 4th “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”; with the 8th “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” and with the 9th “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation” goals.

Hungary presented its Voluntary National Review on SDGs at the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018 prepared through an interministerial coordination mechanism involving non-governmental organizations. The Review reveals the accepted and implemented governmental policies through the lens of the 17 goals. Hungary’s main priorities in case of 16th goal are to “prevent trafficking in human beings, labour exploitation, prostitution coming from children’s homes, counter terrorism and public esteem” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary 2018)

5. The Comparison of National Governance Performance Frameworks

The Hungarian Good State and Governance Report contains 150 separate indicators, grouped into 6 impact areas selected by leading scientists of distinguished disciplines resulting a dominant interdisciplinary approach of measuring government performance. An impact area is divided into 5 main dimensions containing 5 indicators. The selection of all indicators is preceded by a detail analysis of academic and professional experts. Instead of introducing a single composite indicator, the GSGR combines the scoreboard and dashboard functions. The international best practices of national performance frameworks are compared along the 150 indicators of the 6 impact areas (Security and Trust in Government, Public Well-being, Financial Stability and Competitiveness, Sustainability, Democracy, Effective Public Administration) of the Hungarian Good State and Governance Report. There are huge differences in the number of applied indicators, the GSGR belongs to the most jammed group similarly to the Italian one. The real meanings of indicators, what they real intend to measure are the basis of the comparison. Sustainability, emphasizing its importance, became a separate impact area in the Hungarian Report, covers the environmental, economic and social dimensions similarly to SDGs. As a result of the comparison, it can be declared that the impact areas of Public well-being and Sustainability cover the most indicators. In the Polish case, it almost reaches the half of the 101 indicators.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The name of the frameworks</th>
<th>The number of indicators</th>
<th>Security and Trust in Government</th>
<th>Public Well-being</th>
<th>Financial Stability and Competitiveness</th>
<th>Sustainability</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Effective Public Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Il Benessere Equo e Sostenibile in Italia (Italian) (Istat 2017)</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia Performs (State of Virginia, U.S)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
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<td>Findicator (Finish)</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wskaźniki zrównoważonego rozwoju (Polish)</td>
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<td>3.0%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring der Nachhaltigen Entwicklung (MONET – Swiss)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Ireland’s Progress (Irish)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scotland Performs (Scottish)</td>
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<td>12.7%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSI Wales (Welsh)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

7 The online availability of indicators: http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/ScorecardatGlance.cfm (accessed April 2, 2019)
8 The online availability of indicators: http://www.findikaattori.fi/en/indicators (accessed April 2, 2019)
11 The online availability of indicators: http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator (accessed April 2, 2019)
6. Synthesis of Good State Research and SDGs and sustainable development framework in case of Hungary

The SDGs and the indicators of the Good State and Governance Report are compared. It can be claimed as the result of the comparison that every impact area at least in one SDG is attached. In case of Democracy impact area only the 16th goal can be observed. Effective Public Administration and Financial Stability and Competitiveness are attached by 3-3 different goals. 11 goals can be related to the Sustainability impact area, which attempts to describe the sustainability phenomena by the dimension of climate change, natural resource management, energy and water management, environmental stresses and social sustainability. It also happens that the same SDG occur in different impact areas, e.g. the 1st and 8th goal. The GSGR attempts to measure the Hungarian governmental performance, however, the 16th goal is only attached by 3 impact areas. Only the 5th, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” and the 14th, “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” goals are not appear in the Hungarian framework.

![Diagram of impact areas and SDGs]

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13 The online availability of indicators:
7. Conclusions

The adoption of Agenda 2030 provides the possibility to carry out a new form of global governance. The demand of cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders of different spheres on regional national and global level is continuously increasing. The global, national and regional monitoring of the implementation of policies regarding sustainable developments plays a crucial role in improving the general governmental performance and contributes to the final success of the realization of the SDGs. In case of converging the national-level government performance frameworks, like the Good State and Governance Report and the reporting of SDGs implementation promotes these processes. The existence of SDGs, the SDI, the NFSTD, the GSGR and the intersection of these indicator sets provides a solid basis for further development of good governance for sustainable development in Hungary. Notwithstanding it draws attention on SDGs, it gives the possibility to comprehend them in the policy-making process. Further research is needed to bring into light the interlinkages between SDGs and other sectoral strategies which belong to the origins of good governance.

These research findings can encourage the Hungarian political commitments and can provide a feedback to the practitioners and the scientific community. With a national and local governmental engagement, a well-structured and designed strategical framework can be accomplished.

8. References


of-the-rest/ (April 6, 2019).