Localizing the SDGs: A managerial perspective

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Why this study

- Sustainability is gaining public attention – but a consistent theory of government’s sustainability is still missing
- Pivotal role of LGs for the implementation of SDGs
- Many challenges arise when it comes to integrate SDGs into cities’ strategic planning process and operation
- Growing number of ‘sustainability reporting’ but disclosure in strategic plans is still scarce
- Shortage of empirical studies of how cities are incorporating the sustainable development concept in their strategic plans
The paper

• Type: Explorative
• Research questions:
  • Is sustainability part of the agenda of politicians and public managers? How is sustainability integrated into cities’ planning documents?
  • What is the level of disclosure on sustainability?
• Methodology: qualitative
Why Italy?

- The Italian National Strategy for Sustainable Development;
- BES project;
- UrBES project
Our proposition

• Managerial capacity of LG’s decision-makers plays an important role for institutionalizing the concept of sustainability as a reform value or guiding principle into organizational routines (Wang et al., 2002)

• Strategic planning offers to LG’s decision-makers the opportunity to critically think how sustainability and sustainable development challenge existing assumptions regarding their strategy (Zeemering, 2018)

• The inclusion of sustainability metrics into strategic plans is also a significant progress for a local government to both communicate how metrics are used to craft the strategy and if plans are making progress
Integration of SDGs into city strategic plans: A conceptual framework

- Establish consensus on sustainability
- Vision statement
- Overarching theme

SDG-based planning
Mapping of current strategies

- Environment analysis
- National and local indicators
- Current performance

National targets
Regional targets
City strategies and targets
Organisational unit targets

- Tracking progress of SDG targets and city strategies
- Comprehensive sustainability measurement system
- Sustainability reporting

Measuring and Control
Setting the Local SDG Agenda

Source: Elaboration of the authors.
Methodology

- Analysis of strategic plans of all 110 capital cities of Italian provinces
- Focus on the dimensions of the formal strategy and on what is explicitly accounted by documents
- Identification of 19 cities that potentially used the sustainable development concept in their plans

Keywords for the textual research: sustainable development, sustainable development goals, SDG(s), BES
Assessment criteria

**Political vision**
Is sustainability a declared value in the vision?

**Gap analysis**
Is sustainability mentioned in the context analysis? How? Is SWOT analysis used?

**Identification of the relevant SDG goals and targets**
Is there an explicit link in the formulation of the strategic objectives to the SDGs?

**Setting the local SDG agenda**
Are there targets for strategic objectives?

**Measurement and control**
Are performance indicators linked to sustainability? Are results measured through sustainability indicators?
Findings: information disclosed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>City</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political vision - Sustainability as part of the Vision Statement</strong></td>
<td>Explicit link between the overall political vision and sustainable development</td>
<td>Milan, Modena, Naples, Palermo</td>
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<td><strong>Gap analysis - Analysis of current performance through sustainability indicators</strong></td>
<td>The positioning of the city according to a ranking of sustainable cities project is mentioned</td>
<td>Genoa</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A demoscopic survey with reference to quality of life and well-being has been realized</td>
<td>Bologna</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A selection of BES indicators is used for the analysis of the context</td>
<td>Ferrara, Livorno, Modena, Naples, Palermo, Parma, Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identification of the relevant SDG goals and targets - Alignment between SDGs and strategic objectives</strong></td>
<td>Alignment remains at the level of Mayoral political goals</td>
<td>Rome</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strategic objectives are related to one or more SDGs</td>
<td>Bologna (<em>), Ferrara (<strong>), Parma (</strong></em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Setting the local SDG agenda, measuring and control - Use of outcome indicators to measure sustainable goals</strong></td>
<td>For each strategic goal, description of actions, and disclosure of outcome indicators (BES and statistical data) are reported on an historical basis</td>
<td>Bologna, Ferrara, Parma (***)</td>
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<td><strong>Quantitative targets disclosure</strong></td>
<td>(*) All strategic goals have been formally linked to SDGs.</td>
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<td>(**) 17 out of 26 strategic goals have been formally linked to SDGs.</td>
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<td>(***) One experimental strategic area only, no data reported.</td>
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Conclusions

RQ1 – RQ2

• The focus on sustainable development in LG’s strategic plans is in its initial stage
• Few cities have started to disclose sustainable development goals in their strategic plans
• Governance mechanisms across government tiers might play an important role in localizing the SDGs