



DOI 10.2478/pesd-2018-0013

PESD, VOL. 12, no. 1, 2018

ROLES OF ACTORS IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Petrică Nițoiaia¹, Gabriel Camară²

Key words: sustainable development, actors, classification, cooperation.

Abstract. This paper was realised because a lack of a comprehensible classification of the actors (and their roles) in the sustainable development in literature and legislation and to create a classification which includes all the possible players involved the sustainable development (public, private and voluntary sectors). We used qualitative methods: analysing scientific literature concerning the subject; defining the terminology used; determining the importance of each type of player; analysing the relations between each type of actors; establishing a classification based on literature.

1. Introductory elements

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission for Environment and Development, 1987). Upon all other aspects sustainable development is about people, about us. It is about people actively building or protecting the world in which they (would) like to live, but considering that all the people have a place in it and managing resources in order for them to be available for the future generations also. This is done regarding the three aspects of sustainability: environmental, social and economic (Gorica K., Kripa D., Zenelaj E., 2012).

One of the best ways to promote sustainable development is by actually doing it. The people and institutions that can promote sustainable development are here called *actors*. In order to better understand the relationships between these actors we need to group them. The simplest way of grouping them is by sectors of

¹ University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” of Iași, Faculty of Geography and Geology
petricanitoaia@yahoo.ro

² University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” of Iași, Faculty of Geography and Geology,
gabriel.camara@uaic.ro

ownership, therefore public, private and the voluntary sector. The strengths of this classification are the easy identification of a role of an actor and it offers visibility to all the sectors of ownership. The weaknesses of this classification consist in the difficulty of identifying the actors, it doesn't show how other actors can influence the public sector and it doesn't consider the cooperation between different actors and the vertical structure of modern economy. Other possibilities were: the classical economic sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary) or a division of actor into political, economic, ecologic or social. Therefore, besides the principal task of identifying roles of actors, the viability of the chosen classification will be also determined in this paper.

The public sector is the part of the economy which provides basic government services while the private sector is the part of a country's economy which is not controlled by the state and it's main purpose is to bring profit to the individuals or companies. Although sometimes mentioned in the public sector category, the third sector is called voluntary sector and has a very important role in promoting sustainable development; the example of Ireland can be used to show the importance of the voluntary sector, because the sector's contribution to the country's GDB is between 4% and 8%, and the sector employed in 2010 over 10% of the active population; this is in line with other developed countries (Nolan P., Kelleher S., 2010).

2. The actors that can promote sustainable development.

2.1. The public sector

The public sector is characterized by the public services, which are offered by the government. By doing this the government becomes responsible for the social and economic development of a country, region or locality (Gorica K., Kripa D., Zenelaj E., 2012). Almost every decision taken by the central government of a country (or organization, such as U.S. or E.U.), concerns the problem of sustainable development. Because those decisions are taken at a macro-level it becomes the task of the local government to ensure that their region is on a path toward sustainable development. The role of the government is so important because the services it offers have a direct impact on the environment. The most likely services to do so are: energy related services (electricity, gas and oil), education, environmental protection, law enforcement, transportation, housing, planning, waste management and water related services. In the developed countries, such as U.S.A. and Canada the government is the largest employer, the largest landowner, the largest energy consumer and it has the largest impact on the environment (Bell. 2002 cited by Young S. T., Dhanda K. K., 2013). While in the developing countries the role of the government is even bigger the largest significance is encountered in socialist countries in which the government controls

all or the majority of businesses and services (examples include countries such as the former communist republics Romania, Poland, U.S.S.R. and the actual socialist countries, namely North Korea). This aspect shows the importance of governments in the problem of sustainable development.

Young S. T., and Dhanda K. K., (2013) identify 4 roles of the government in addressing sustainable development: 1- policy development, 2- regulation, 3- facilitation and 4- internal sustainable management. Furthermore the ways in which governments can promote sustainable development are the following: by establishing and enforcing laws, managing natural resources and other state-owned properties, by providing vision and strategy to incorporate sustainability in public policy, by allocating funds for conservation and development, redistributing resources between groups in society, providing examples such as improving the environmental performance of public acquisitions, facilitating sustainable development (ex. taxing waste and pollution), acting as a green fiscal authority and by advancing innovation; this short list was made based on the works of Elliott J. A., (2006) and Young S. T., Dhanda K. K., (2013).

From a geographic perspective the role in promoting sustainable development of a government is determined by the size of the region that a specific government exercises authority upon. Therefore we will have different ways of addressing sustainable development according to specific levels of authority (see *Error! Reference source not found.*). “Much of the work on sustainability has been accomplished at the local level” (Young S. T., Dhanda K. K., 2013). Redclift M., (1996), also emphasizes that firstly sustainability should be achieved at a local level before considering a global one. An important strategy concerning local authorities is offered by Agenda 21 which emphasizes on reducing the chemical and radioactive waste, improving healthcare, developing sustainable farming and reducing poverty.

From an economic point of view a government’s role in promoting sustainable development is also determined by its involvement in specific problems of this aspect (especially at a national level). From a touristic point a view a great importance is placed on the laws on the use and renovation of heritage sites and tourist attractions and laws concerning nature protection especially in the vicinity of important touristic areas (Gorica K., Kripa D., Zenelaj E., 2012). The actions of a directly involved government are seen through the process making of laws and regulations, providing necessary infrastructure and offering a safe and stable business environment. An indirect involvement of governments can take the form of providing support to the private sector and by providing incentives to the private sector to develop in a certain area.

Among the most important actors that have to be reminded of are U.N. and E.U which are supporting and promoting sustainable development. Important

documents and steps regarding sustainable development at an international level are: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (which states that the parties should promote sustainable development), Our Common Future project, programs and strategies like Europe 2020 and Agenda 21.

Lastly, the city of Warsaw offers a good example of promoting sustainable development by publishing an *Integrated Sustainability Report*³ (for 2013 and 2014). As they emphasize in the second report, it comprises details about the quality of life in the city, impact of the city on the environment, financial data, economic activity and effectiveness of public services. The second report is bigger as volume and it brings new details such as the city-inhabitant dialogue and the satisfaction level of the inhabitants.

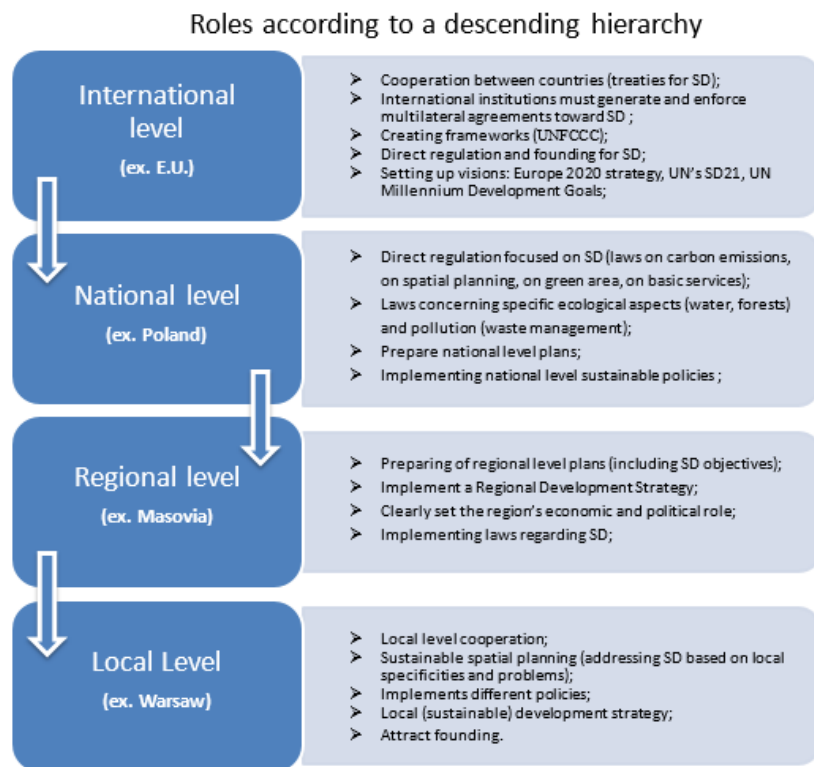


Figure 1. Examples different roles of governance level authorities in promoting sustainable development (source: own elaboration based on literature).

³ Available at: <https://infrastruktura.um.warszawa.pl/zr-wnowa-one-raportowanie/warsaw-sustainable-report-2014>.

2.2. The private sector

Both small companies and international corporations are nowadays engaged to commit sustainability. “But, beneath the public relations happy face, executives and managers are perplexed. The majority of them have a genuine desire to work in an ethical and sustainable manner, yet, when they engage with their stakeholders for that purpose, they often encounter a world of hardball politics, full of hostile activists, self-interested elites, and unpredictable attacks” (Boutilier R., 2009).

Their importance toward promoting and implementing sustainable development is crucial, both of small firms and especially of international players. This is proved by the vast literature analyzing how businesses (in general) affect especially the environment, and trying to offer solutions for developing sustainability (for example: *Development of Smart and Sustainable Economy in the European Union*, Derlukiewicz N., 2014). Among the methods to do so, we count: determining which of the goods and services are produced in an environmental-friendly and sustainable way, by developing new technologies and building sustainability strategies. In order to address the problem of sustainability there is the need of collaborative stakeholder and partnership of government and businesses (involving NGO’s and local communities) to build a solid foundation of policies and strategies (Keijzers G., 2005).

One of the good examples of promoting sustainable development by the private sector comes from the international retailer IKEA. They are offered as an example on the IISD⁴ site for actively fight against child labor, minimizing the impact on environment, providing a transparency policy to the customers and for actively collaborating with organisations such as Greenpeace and UNICEF.

2.3. The voluntary sector

The components of the voluntary sector are very diverse, of which we note: N.G.O.’s, charity organizations, community benefit organizations and religious organizations. The NGO’s are nongovernmental organizations including: *private voluntary organizations*, *civil society organizations* and *nonprofit organizations*. Although their history is short (the term being defined after World War II) they raised to global importance actors in the second half of the last century. Among the ways through which they gained international attention was organizing large-scale protests (Greenpeace), lobbying and direct actions.

Interestingly Young S. T., Dhanda K. K., (2013) identify 4 roles of NGO’s: social development, sustainable community development, sustainable development and sustainable consumption. From the sustainable development point of view the

⁴ IISD: International Institute for Sustainable Development. Business and Sustainable Development, 2013. More about the IKEA topic at: <https://www.iisd.org/business/viewcasestudy.aspx?id=119>.

NGO's are addressing large corporations, not only governments, focused on environmental and social impacts. The NGO's are sometimes described as *global-watchdogs*⁵, showing that corporations are not dominating the world (Boutillier R., 2009). As the same authors describe, there are reasons for business to collaborate with NGO's because this brings: credibility, marketing opportunities, expertise and innovation and networks but can alter the image of the NGO in case of failure. Furthermore, local knowledge of NGO's can serve as bridges between locals and project authorities, they can bring new approaches and they are becoming key players in the sustainability process (Rogers P. P., Jalal F. K., Boyd A. J., 2008).

Positive example regarding the role of NGO's in promoting sustainable development come from fighting hunger (example of Bangladesh: Hassan A., Forhad A., 2013; E.U., local governments and NGO's cooperations-*Changing the world... locally*, 2008) or by the existence of the International Institute for Sustainable Development with the goal to promote human development and sustainable development through innovative research, communication and partnerships⁶.

Greenpeace, which was mentioned above, although it directly addresses the problem of sustainable development and especially of nature protection it also offers a very bad example through activism not supported by a strong scientifically background. Examples include opposing to the adoption of golden rice⁷ or damaging UNESCO sites such as the Nazca lines in Peru.

3. Other aspects.

Partnerships

Unfortunately the sectorial classification didn't bring sufficient details about the problem of partnerships, which can be public-private partnerships (PPP's), partnerships between NGO's and companies or between NGO's and states with a lot of forms and definitions based on different levels of authority, etc. Fortunately the literature analyzing partnerships and their role in sustainable development is rich and a lot of examples of cooperation toward sustainability can be found in *Changing the world... locally - 25 success stories of development cooperation at local level* (European Commission, 2008).

⁵Being able to bring serious damage to the image of companies, in their fight for sustainable developments. A recent case is given by Nestle. Because of pressure from NGO'S they admitted forced labour in their supply chain (more details at <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/nov/24/nestle-admits-forced-labour-in-seafood-supply-chain>).

⁶Source and more details: <http://www.iisd.org/> and <http://annualreport2015.iisd.org/>.

⁷More information at <https://www.prageru.com/courses/environmental-science/why-i-left-greenpeace>, in which one of the founders of Greenpeace explains why he left the organisation.

Local communities, individuals

Public participation is essential for sustainable development. It requires access to information and equal rights for all social categories (Rogers P. P., Jalal F. K., Boyd and A. J., 2008). This because local communities can directly involve in sustainable development issues by demanding and using food, fuel, water and shelter that are environmental-friendly, taking care of the ecosystem and by shaping social norms and education towards environmental protection (Elliott J. A., 2006). An example of cooperation between NGO's and local government with financial support from EU is the *Sanjog*, project developed in India and Bangladesh between 2006 and 2009 with the goal to prevent child and women trafficking, by strengthening vulnerable communities.

The role of planners

There are opinions arguing that sustainable development is the vision suitable for a new planning agenda. As the concept is being publically embraced, the planners should also implement these concepts in their work (Brebbia C.A., Beriatos E., (2011) bringing together older ideas such as creating more livable environments, place-based economy and responsible regionalism with a bigger focus on “understanding the relationships within the continuum from state mandates (and incentives), to plans, to regulations, to standards, to outcomes” (Berke P., Manta M., 1999).

Education, science, culture

Education, culture and science are drivers of sustainability and especially education is important from two perspectives, to promote sustainable development and to be largely accessible to children and adults around the world. Therefore education and culture should construct the vision of sustainable development, seen through the efforts of integrating the sustainable development theory in practical applications, in education. This can be done through interdisciplinary teaching by integrating the sustainability concepts in science classes (Zenelaj E., 2013), by promoting these ideas through art and by continuing the scientific research in all domains regarding sustainability. An example toward supporting education as a key part of sustainable development comes from the EU which involves not only within the boundaries of the member states but also in poorer parts of the world such as Zimbabwe by investing (10.67 million euros, the project ended in 2008) in the country's educational system (renovating schools, training teachers, provide advices on hygiene, etc.).

Conclusions

Defining the role of a single actor in promoting sustainable development may be a complicated task. The simplest conclusion of this paper is that when talking about sustainable development a word should always be used: cooperation. Therefore the proposed classification system of actors fails the test of accuracy, because it doesn't consider the many types of cooperation and other mixed types of institutions with unclear definitions. In review, the international organizations (E.U., U.N.) have the task to address the problem of sustainability and provide a framework and laws which will then be applied to specific needs of country-level governments. Despite these, the most important aspect lies at a local and regional level where these policies have to be applied, hence the task of planners to adapt their work to new ideas and the task of local communities and governance to be conscious about the fact that global sustainability starts from a local level.

References

- European Commission**, 2008. *Changing the world... locally - 25 success stories of development cooperation at local level*. s.l.:European Commission.
2013. **IISD**. *International Institute for Sustainable Development. Business and Sustainable Development*. [Online], available at: https://www.iisd.org/business/viewcasestudy.aspx?id=119_ [Accessed 8 1 2016].
- Berke P., Manta M.**, 1999. *Planning for Sustainable Development: Measuring Progress in Plans*. s.l.:Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Berlie S. L.**, 2010. *Alliances for Sustainable Development. Business and NGO Partnerships*. s.l.:PALGRAVE MCMILLAN.
- Boutilier R.**, 2009. *Stakeholder politics. Social Capital, Sustainable Development, and the Corporation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derlukiewicz N.**, 2014. Development of Smart and Sustainable Economy in the European Union. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 3(4), pp. 151-162.
- Brebbia C.A., Beriatos E.** (ed.), 2011. *5th International Conference on Sustainable Development and Planning. Sustainable Development and Planning V*. s.l.:WIT Press.
- Elliott J. A.**, 2006. *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*. 3 ed. s.l.:Routledge.
- European Commission**, 1997. *The EU compendium of spatial planning systems and policies*. Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of the European Commissions.
- Gorica K., Kripa D., Zenelaj E.**, 2012. The Role of Local Government in Sustainable Development. *Acta Universitatis Danubius ŒCONOMICA*, 8(2), pp. 139-155.
- Hassan A., Forhad A.**, 2013. The role of NGO'S in sustainable development in Bangladesh. *Persent environment and sustainable development*, 7(2), pp. 59-72.
- IISD**, 2012. *Solutions for Improved Human Well-Being, 2011-2012 Annual Report*, s.l.: International Institute for Sustainable Development.
- Keijzers G.**, 2005. *Business, Government and Sustainable Development*. s.l.:Routledge.

-
- Nolan P., Kelleher S.**, 2010. *Steering your Non-profit Organisation through the Storm*. Dublin: 2into3.
- Redclift M.**, 1996. *Wasted. Counting the costs of global consumption*. London: Earthscan.
- Rogers P. P., Jalal F. K., Boyd A. J.**, 2008. *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*. s.l.:Earthscan.
- World Commission for Environment and Development**, 1987. *Our Common Future. The Brundtland Report*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Young S. T., Dhanda K. K.**, 2013. *Sustainability, Essentials for Business*. s.l.:SAGE Publications.
- Zenelaj E.**, 2013. Education For Sustainable Development. *European Journal of Sustainable Development* , 2(4), pp. 227-232.