

TOWARDS OUR COMMON FUTURE: COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE MEDITERRANEAN AND SLOVENIA

Abstract

This paper assesses three sustainable development strategies – the European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy in its revised version, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development and Slovenia's Development Strategy – according to the level of sustainability these strategies provide. Deriving from three diverse sustainable development regimes, selected strategies are scrutinised for the presence of the five general principles of effective sustainable development strategies promoted by the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Building on George and Kirkpatrick's (2006) framework for analysis, we concentrate on principles of strategic planning and sustainable development, and a coordinated set of measures to ensure their implementation. The results reveal that the major differences between the assessed strategies are present in the sophistication of the theoretical bases and the integration of three main pillars of sustainable development (i.e. environmental, economic and social). In general, the assessed strategies reflect a high degree of inclusiveness of a variety of interests. However, there is a common weakness among them in terms of implementation, be it in the provision of adequate resources, the guarantee of adequate implementing capacity of the institutions designated for implementation or the precise definition of the institutional framework responsible for the implementation of the strategy.

Keywords: sustainable development, sustainability assessment, European Union Sustainable Development Strategy, Slovenia's Development Strategy, Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, sustainable development principles, Slovenia.

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development has become a catchphrase in political and bureaucratic discourse in the past two decades, despite – or rather because of – the absence of any consensus regarding its explicit meaning. Its genealogy and the power-related nature of its definitions (see Richardson, 2004) make it a tool for frequent misuse, primarily in politico-administrative language. As an indication of this, a former World Bank official identified 72 relevant definitions of sustainable development (Rogers *et al.*, 2008, p. 22), thus adding weight to the argument (see Drhová, 2011; Rogers *et al.*, 2008) that sustainable development entails a polity-specific definition of values and principles for achieving a sustainable society on a long-term basis. Determination of sustainable development is therefore seen as being subject to judgement based on prevailing values and ethical norms in a given time and space (Holmberg and Sandbrook, 1992, p. 23). The lack of consensus regarding the state of the world's ecosystems and the role of humanity should be understood in the same light.

The origins of this plethora of definitions are frequently traced to the much-criticised lack of clarity and broad strategic framework of the concept of sustainable development formulated in the Brundtland report titled *Our Common Future* (see United Nations, 1987), which failed to become a definitive guideline for policymaking (Drhová, 2011) and opened the door for power-related criticism (Richardson, 2004). At the same time, it has to be noted that there is no universal path or societal structure for a sustainable society (Becker *et al.*, 1997), which allows different regimes¹ to take up different but equally successful paths. In addition, despite notable differences in the determination of paths to a sustainable society, all paths tackle the challenge of management of the material conditions of societal reproduction and the character of their transformation. Hence, Drhová (2011, p. 87) argued that sustainable development should be understood more as the way to achieve a sustainable society than as a target state.

Sustainable development strategies are in effect visions of 'a way to achieve a sustainable society' since they present a 'coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and actions to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives in a balanced and integrative manner' (Meadowcroft, 2007, p. 154). By analyzing them we hope to reveal the actual level of normative commitment of individual communities and regimes to a sustainable future and should also indicate whether these strategies truly have the character of a sustainable development strategy – i.e. whether they adhere to a set of principles of strategic planning and sustainable development and a coordinated set of measures to ensure their implementation, as is set out in the Agenda 21 and post Agenda 21 documents.

1 In this paper we employ a generic understanding of the term 'regime'. We understand sustainable development regimes as a set of rules and cultural, political and social norms that regulate the operation of sustainable development in the polity.

Since sustainable development regimes are not bound to a single level (i.e. the state level) and may in fact be overlapping,² the pivotal aim of this paper is to examine the efforts of selected sustainable development regimes individuals may be impacted by in the Slovenian context. Disregarding the potential existence of Local Agenda 21s, we focus on the state level as well as on levels beyond the state (international and supranational), assess the efforts of three sustainable development regime levels – supranational (the European Union), regional (the Mediterranean region) and national (Slovenia) – and their vision for the future and ways of attaining it. With this assessment of existing strategic planning mechanisms based on George and Kirkpatrick's (2006) framework for analysis, we identify the areas that should be improved by policymakers in order for the analysed sustainable development regimes to comply with existing sustainable development principles. As a result, this study provides information for all relevant stakeholders from different levels on the areas in which improvements are needed.

In section 2 we continue with a general framing of sustainable development and a brief evolutionary screening of key events and documents that determine the field on a global level. Section 3 sets forth the very extensive research framework and data utilised for this study, while in section 4 we provide detailed results of the sustainability assessment of each of the three analysed strategies. The concluding section provides a brief comparative discussion of common and diverse aspects of selected strategies as well as tentative suggestions for future drafters.

2. Framing sustainable development

Sustainable development increasingly pervades the everyday life of global population despite having been coined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources a quarter of a century ago (Seema, 2010). Notwithstanding the wide-spread belief that the concept of sustainable development represents one of the most ancient ideas in human heritage, its current understanding of the way of reconciling the needs of development with protection of the environment certainly represents something new (Voigt, 2009, p. 12).

Sustainable development is no longer about integrating environmental considerations into the economic development process, but about a development process of a qualitatively different nature that represents an epistemic shift to a new paradigm since not only economic and ecological systems need to be addressed (Jensen, 2007, p. 511). This paradigm shift is a consequence of greater awareness of environmental degradation, poverty, social disruptions and humanitarian crises through the Club of

2 Citizens and residents of any locality may carry a burden of, or enjoy the fruits of, several sustainable development regimes at the same time. For example, in addition to local, sub-state/regional and national sustainable development regimes, regional and supranational regimes across state borders may be in operation (e.g. the Mediterranean region, the European Union (EU)).

Rome and the Stockholm Declaration that no longer regarded development solely in terms of gross national product but as a policy aimed at better living conditions for all (Voigt, 2009, p. 13). The World Conservation Strategy from 1980 is one of the first international documents to explicitly deal with development and environmental limits (Voigt, 2009, p. 14); however, via the Brundtland Report sustainable development became a broad policy objective and gave the impetus to install the sustainable development concept in all documents of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (Blewitt, 2008, p. 15). While some earlier approaches to sustainable development were oriented to ecology as well as its utilisation and expressed the relevance of environmental protection for the socio-economic interests and needs of developing countries, it is the Brundtland Report that has had the most far-reaching implications for the overall transformation of policy and law based on the sustainable development concept (Voigt, 2009, p. 15). The Rio Declaration (Agenda 21) introduced a new approach with a central focus on the Brundtland Report and the mainstreaming of environmental protection into developmental progress.

According to Agenda 21, governments should adopt National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) to improve or restructure the decision-making process in order to integrate socio-economic and environmental considerations and ensure a broader range of public participation (UN, 1992, chapter 2). To reinforce the trend of preparing proper sustainable development strategies, international organisations and clubs of states have taken up ownership of sustainable development and are actively exploring new and better indicators to measure progress and drafting new guidelines to foster it (Voigt, 2009, p. 19). For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee established a set of principles and the United Nation's (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs drew up similar principles, which are designed to provide countries with in-depth information on possible approaches to and methodologies for achieving a sustainable society (George and Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 147). The pivotal document on the global level nevertheless remains Agenda 21 and represents a basis for various supranational, supranational-regional, national and local sustainable development strategies (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002; Haughton and Counsell, 2004; Baker *et al.*, 2005).

During the last two decades contemporary regional sustainable development strategies were also prepared as long-term approaches to integrating the economic, social and environmental policies of different states with shared characteristics, challenges and vulnerabilities (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002, pp. 70–72). Examples of regional supranational sustainable development strategies are the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS). Focused on issues and priorities of a regional nature, these strategies are essentially independently linked to the NSDSs of countries from the Mediterranean region and/or member states of the EU (Hoballah, 2006; Pallemmaerts and Azmanova, 2006). However, this regional planning could also be understood as an additional connect-

ing potential between national, regional and subnational planning systems (Pridham and Konstandakopoulos, 2005).

Overall, a variety of approaches have been used to assess this diverse set of sustainable development strategies (OECD, 2005; UNDESA, 2005). Individual states as well as clubs of states have also conducted more or less formalised assessment exercises, some periodically and some with the support of external experts. However, most of these assessment exercises have refrained from establishing clear benchmarks against which shortcomings may be judged and progress monitored (George and Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 147). As a result, this paper rests on the assessment methodology proposed by George and Kirkpatrick (2006), which avoids the above-mentioned criticisms and scrutinises selected strategies for the incorporation of sustainable development principles. Selected assessment criteria have been designed to provide an overall assessment of a particular principle and to deliver useful information for the policymakers responsible for strategy improvements and incremental revision of existing documents.

3. Method and data

A sustainability assessment as an integrative concept (Gibson, 2006) demands a holistic approach. In this paper we employed the frequently verified assessment methodology of George and Kirkpatrick (2006) to evaluate strategic planning processes of three sustainable development strategies³/regimes. Our scrutiny focuses on sustainable development strategies that serve as standardised artefacts (Wolff, 2004, p. 284) and that can be legitimately used to make assumptions about the intentions and ideas of their creators and the sustainable development regime they represent.

The basic principles of effective sustainable development strategies concentrate on 'principles for strategic planning and sustainable development, and a coordinated set of measures to ensure their implementation' (George and Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 146). The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the OECD identified five general principles of effective sustainable development strategies at the national level: a) integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives; b) participation and consensus; c) country ownership and coordinated policy process; d) comprehensive and coordinated policy process; and e) targeting, resourcing and monitoring. The first two principles are regarded as sustainable development principles, while the other three are more general principles of strategic planning and management (George and Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 148). These categories also provide a useful tool for assessing long-term strategies on the subnational level. In accordance with these five general principles, four assessment criteria were devised (see Table 1).

3 Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development: A Framework for Environmental Sustainability and Shared Prosperity; The EU Sustainable Development Strategy and Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy; and Slovenia's Development Strategy.

Table 1: Criteria for assessment of strategic planning mechanisms against sustainable development principles

A. Integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives

Criterion A1 integration

Strategic planning in the country is based on a comprehensive and integrated analysis of economic, social, and environmental issues, which clarifies links between the three spheres, resolves conflicts between them where practicable, and negotiates appropriate trade-offs where conflicts remain.

Criterion A2 social and poverty issues

Strategic planning in the country integrates poverty eradication, gender issues, and the short-term and long-term needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups into economic policy.

Criterion A3 environmental and resource issues

Strategic planning in the country integrates the maintenance of sustainable levels of resource use and the control of pollution to maintain a healthy environment in economic policy.

Criterion A4 international commitments

Measures are in place to ensure compliance with international agreements which the country has entered into, on environmental and social issues.

B. Participation and consensus

Criterion B1 involvement of stakeholders

The country's processes of strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and review include the participation of stakeholders, including government, decentralized authorities, elected bodies, non-governmental and private sector institutions, and marginalized groups.

Criterion B2 transparency and accountability

The management of the country's strategic planning processes is transparent, with accountability for decisions made.

Criterion B3 communication and public awareness

Measures are taken to increase public awareness of sustainable development, to communicate relevant information, and to encourage the development of stakeholder involvement in the strategic planning process.

Criterion B4 long-term vision and consensus

The country's strategic planning processes are based on a long-term vision for the country's development, which is consistent with the country's capabilities, allows for short-term and medium-term necessities, and has wide political and stakeholder support.

C. Country ownership and commitment

Criterion C1 high-level government commitment

The process of formulating and implementing the national strategy is led by government, with evidence of high-level commitment.

Criterion C2 broad-based political support

The country's strategic planning process has broad-based political support.

Criterion C3 responsibilities for implementation

Responsibility for implementing strategies is clearly assigned to bodies with the appropriate authority.

Criterion C4 coordination with donors

The country's strategic planning process is coordinated with donor programmes.

D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process

Criterion D1 build on existing processes

The national strategy for sustainable development is based on existing strategic planning processes in the country, with coordination between them, and mechanisms to identify and resolve potential conflicts.

Criterion D2 analysis and information

Strategic planning in the country is based on a comprehensive analysis of the present situation and of forecasted trends and risks, using reliable information on changing environmental, social, and economic conditions.

Criterion D3 realistic goals

The national strategy is based on a realistic analysis of national resources and capacities in the economic, social, and environmental spheres, taking account of external pressures in the three spheres.

Criterion D4 decentralization

The country's strategic planning processes embrace both national and decentralized levels, with two-way iteration between these levels.

E. Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring

Criterion E1 budgetary provision

The sustainable development strategy is integrated into the budget process, such that plans have the financial resources to achieve their objectives.

Criterion E2 capacity for implementation

The sustainable development strategy includes realistic mechanisms to develop the capacity required to implement it.

Criterion E3 targets and indicators

Targets have been defined for key strategic economic, social, and environmental objectives, with indicators through which they can be monitored.

Criterion E4 monitoring and feedback

Systems are in place for monitoring the implementation of strategies and the achievement of their defined objectives, for recording the results, and for reviewing their effectiveness as strategies for sustainable development, with effective mechanisms for feedback and revision within the planning process.

Source: George and Kirkpatrick (2006, p. 149)

Indicators showing the extent to which each criterion has been met are defined as a qualitative coding scheme offering scores for each criterion. The methodology allows for four descriptive assessment scores for analysed sustainable development strategies: A) all requirements of the criterion are fully met; B) all requirements of the criterion are satisfactorily met, although some more improvements are desirable; C) some requirements of the criterion have been satisfactory or fully met, but others have not yet been satisfactory met; and D) few requirements of the criterion have, as yet, been satisfactory met (George and Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 150). In addition to scoring schemes, the acquired results are accompanied by a short supporting text containing the main arguments for each individual score.

4. Results

4.1 Sustainable development in the European Union and the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS)

In December 1999 the Helsinki meeting of the European Council invited the European Commission (EC) to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy for dovetailing policies for economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development (European Council, 1999). The EC issued a consultation paper in 2001 focusing on initial views of the challenges and opportunities for a long-term strategy. After a few months of coherent coordination at different levels, a sustainable development strategy (EU SDS) was prepared and adopted at the European Council meeting in June 2001 in Gothenburg (European Council, 2001). The strategy was based on the principles of coordinated economic, social and environmental development and harmonisation of policies at the supranational, national and local level (European Council, 2001). Under the new strategy, major European policy proposals were to include a sustainable impact assessment, improvement of internal policy coordination by EU institutions between different sectors and development by member states of national sustainability plans and strategies (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002, pp. 71–72).

The strategy document from Gothenburg was just a step on a long journey that requires prolonged actions to fulfil agreed-upon objectives (Bernheim, 2006). In 2005, the European Council asked the EC to propose a 'more comprehensive and more ambitious' strategy (Bernheim, 2006, p. 89). After intensive stocktaking and coordination between the member states, the EC prepared a revised EU SDS in December 2005. The new strategy did not replace the former strategy, but it did expose some of its unclear priorities and sharing of responsibilities, as well as the absence of clear monitoring mechanisms. The EC has also introduced progress reports for reviewing priorities and has encouraged member states to review their national strategies in light of the EU SDS, to enhance mutual learning. Original documents from 2001 and revised documents from 2006 were included in our analysis.

The EU SDS emerged as an ambitious attempt to act as a holistic, long-term sustainable development strategy. It could be understood as a framework strategy, with high potential to encourage member states and local authorities to prepare and implement their own sustainability strategies. Wide-range inclusion of different stakeholders from the preparation process is also foreseen in the strategy's implementation process. The strategy's inclusion of wider international background is evident, as well as coherence with sustainable development regimes from other levels. This is particularly highlighted in the revised document in which closer articulation between the local, national and European levels of governance is stressed as one of the guiding principles (see also Pridham and Konstadakopulos, 2005). Positive features of the assessed strategy also encompass commitment to continuous cooperation between the EU and its member states in the field of policy coordination, periodic assessment and the establishment of measurable indicators for the strategy's evaluation and future decisions; however, these points have proved to be very idealistic in real life.

The revised EU SDS addressed some weaknesses of the original document (e.g. vague priorities, lack of clear monitoring mechanisms). It clarified set objectives, provided clear monitoring mechanisms, emphasised deeper integration of different policies and intensified cooperation with member states for further development and review of indicators (see also Bernheim, 2006). Despite the modifications introduced in the renewed strategy, it still suffers from an absence of clarity. Firstly, it is rarely clear when determining institutional competencies and is ambiguous when elaborating on its translation into relevant policies. In terms of EU policies, the relationship between sustainable development and environmental protection and action to combat climate change is not always clear, let alone the relationship with the Lisbon Strategy, which aims to strengthen innovation and economic growth (see also Schaik *et al.*, 2009). It is unclear whether the EU SDS is considered to be separate and complementary to the Lisbon Strategy, separate and in direct competition with it or an environmental addition to it (see Pallemmaerts, 2006; Schaik *et al.*, 2009). The relationship is therefore à la carte, since the EU SDS is sometimes presented as an 'overarching objective', an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy or even disconnected from it due to the separate temporal and political tracks (Pallemmaerts, 2006, p. 32). Finally, the EU SDS falls within the remit of DG Environment, which should indicate that sustainable development

Table 2: Assessment of the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS)

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
A. Integration and sustainability	B	C	C	B	Strong formal connection between the three sustainability pillars (i.e. environmental, economic and social) is obvious, while additional internal policy coordination between different sectors remains a general commitment of EU institutions (A1). Overall and operational objectives in the sphere of social and poverty issues are presented in with the context of the poverty problem at the global level. Basically, all planned actions for solving these problems depend on EU member states' policies (A2). Climate change and clean energy are identified as one of the key challenges, in light of the measures of EU and UN conventions on climate change (A4). The realisation of objectives for preventing climate change and providing clean energy is highly dependent on EU member states (A3).
B. Participation and consensus	B	C	B	B	A multi-stakeholder approach is employed in the preparation process (B1). Transparency and accountability for decisions made rely on EU member states. The latter also have a key role in targeting communication to the most appropriate level. In the renewed document, the EC has undertaken to prepare a guide to the strategy, including good practices and policies (B2, B3). Besides long-standing commitments to sustainability in the EU, the strategy also emphasises global solidarity and the importance of cooperation with partners outside the EU (B4).
C. Ownership and commitment	B	A	B	D	EU institutions and member states declare full commitment to implementation of the strategy – member states indirectly (through national strategies) and EU institutions through permanent assessment of the situation – and improving internal policy coordination between different sectors (C1, C3). EU SDS is the result of the political commitment and support of all interested actors from different levels (C2). Success of the strategy is primarily dependent on EU and member states' policies and financial inputs (C4).
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	B	B	B	A	EU SDS includes goals from previous/parallel initiatives (e.g. Lisbon Strategy) (D1). The renewed strategy provides for comprehensive analysis of the present situation through progress reports (D2). The EC has undertaken to prepare a set of measurable indicators for realistic implementation of the strategy (D3). Two-way interaction and perpetual coordination between the EU and member states is anticipated (multilevel approach) and essential for successful implementation of the strategy (D4).
E. Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring	C	D	B	B	Financing the implementation of the strategy depends on structural reforms in the field of economy, taxation, energy consumption, etc., and synergy between various community and other co-financing mechanisms (E1). Implementation capacity is dependent on the economic situation. Some deadlines anticipated in the EU SDS of 2001 have already expired (E2). Monitoring of indicators is provided in close cooperation with the EC and member states (E3). Permanent feedback from the latter is essential for monitoring and objective evaluation of implementation of the strategy (E4).

is primarily considered to be an environmental issue within the daily practice of EU policymaking (see also Schaik *et al.*, 2009).

The crucial test for the EU SDS lies in its implementation (Bernheim, 2006, p. 92). Together with the Lisbon Strategy for economic renewal, it has to work towards bringing the concept of sustainability in the EU to life. But its implementation capacity is strongly dependent on the economic situation in EU member states and worldwide. In the revised EU SDS, envisaged financing and economic instruments are mainly packed into reforms of the economy, taxation and energy consumption. Necessary actions are set loosely, with no clear measures or deadlines for their implementation (e.g. 'to promote market transparency and prices that reflect the real economic, social and environmental costs of products and services' (Council of the European Union, 2006, p. 24)). Member states are invited to consider further steps related to policies, and some co-financing mechanisms are only scheduled as an option – but the EC is committed to preparing a roadmap for the reforms in all sectors in the future. Considering the fact that some deadlines anticipated in the original EU SDS have already expired, the ongoing economic crisis in Europe and the consequences that will come from that, it is logical to expect that implementation of the EU SDS remains a great challenge for the EU and its member states.

4.2 Sustainable development in the Mediterranean region and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD)

Three years after Stockholm and the setting up of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), sixteen Mediterranean countries and the European Community adopted the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), which is the first scheme to be adopted as a Regional Seas Programme under the auspices of the UNEP (United Nations, 2011). With the objective of assisting Mediterranean countries to assess and control marine pollution, formulate national environment policies, improve the governments' ability to identify better options for alternative patterns of development and optimise choices for the allocation of resources, the plan became the Action Plan for the Protection of Marine Environment and Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean (MAP Phase II) in 1995 (United Nations, 2011).

The dynamic that led to the revision of MAP also initiated the decision to establish a Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) in Montpellier in 1996 (Mediterranean Action Plan, 2011). The latter presents a forum for dialogue and proposals where the Contracting Parties of the MAP define a sustainable development strategy for the Mediterranean region. MCSD acts as an advisory organ to the MAP and is composed of representatives of the contracting parties as well as civil society actors. After reaching an agreement on a common vision, the MCSD drafted six key challenges to sustainable development that should be addressed in the Mediterranean, making development and environmental protection a top priority (Hoballah, 2006). The preparatory process was designed and presented at the annual MCSD meeting in 2002, and structured as a series of synchronized actions aimed primarily at promoting a participatory and multi-stakeholder approach (Hoballah, 2006, pp. 160-161). Instead of engaging a small team of experts to prepare the regional strategy, the MSSD has been drafted on the basis of strategic integration of representa-

tives from Mediterranean states, local authorities, business groups and environmental NGOs from the national and supranational levels. After a long process of preparation, MCSD prepared the wide-ranging Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) in 2005 (Cantore *et al.*, 2011, p. 1).

The MSSD calls for action to pursue sustainable development goals, taking into account regional idiosyncrasies. According to Hoballah (2006, p. 157), the Mediterranean is a prototypical regional test case due to its common economic, social and environmental context and ubiquitous issues such as coastal urbanisation, rapidly growing tourism, scarcity and contamination of water supply, pollution of coastal waters and loss of biodiversity (see also Koboević *et al.*, 2012). Hence, the gaps between developed and developing countries is well acknowledged, and the necessity to help the transition of some Mediterranean countries in the East Adriatic, the South and the East Mediterranean is well identified (Mediterranean Action Plan, 2005). Overall, the strategy is designed for Mediterranean countries to benefit from the strategy equally by exposing four main objectives: contributing to economic development by enhancing Mediterranean assets; reducing social disparities and improving cultural integration; changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns as well as ensuring sustainable management of natural resources; and improving governance at local, national, and regional levels (Mediterranean Action Plan, 2005).

The first implementation assessment of the MSSD for the period 2005–2010 was done in 2011. The purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the work done and to offer recommendations to the members of MCSD on how to improve and update MSSD indicators for implementation in the future (Cantore *et al.*, 2011). The report exposed some new, emerging priorities that should be included in revised version of the MSSD in the future and suggested actions to improve the implementation of the strategy. For the purpose of overall assessment, the main document from 2005 and the report on assessment of the implementation from 2011 were included in our analysis.⁴

The MSSD is a framework strategy and plays a catalytic role in the further promotion of sustainable development in Mediterranean countries. However, despite its strategic orientations the MSSD is not strictly binding on national governments. It is primarily designed to promote sustainable development in the Mediterranean region, to strengthen the commitment and solidarity between countries and to provide suggestions on the modalities by which countries can incorporate MSSD principles into national strategies. Positive features of the assessed strategy comprise the inclusive approach taken during the preparation process, the (allegedly) active involvement of stakeholders in the implementation process, its consistency with other strategic documents from the regional, supranational and global levels, and its impact on countries

4 For proper use of the selected methodology and better insight into the area, this examination also includes some information from the publication's Plan Blue: observation, analysis and the prospective center responsible for highlighting the environment and development issues in the Mediterranean region ([Online] available at <http://planbleu.org/en/publications>, accessed October 1, 2013).

Table 3: Assessment of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD)

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
A. Integration and sustainability	C	B	A	B	Strong integration of three sustainable development pillars is detected on a normative level. Economic, social and environmental issue indicators strictly relate to seven priorities (A1). Reducing social disparities by improving living standards and gender equality is stated as a major objective. Somewhat neglected areas are the problems and needs of marginalised groups (A2). Requirements for the environment and renewable sources of energy are met and fully operationalised (A3). Improved governance is based on shared responsibility between developed and developing countries. Strategy is inextricably linked with NSDSs and consistent with international agreements, especially in the area of the environment (A4).
B. Participation and consensus	B	D	B	C	A multi-stakeholder approach was employed in the preparation process. Long-term vision is clear and supported by the vision for sustainable development of all Mediterranean countries. Implementation strongly depends on political authorities at the national and local levels that are in charge of transmission and implementing all planned projects (B1, B4). Accountability for decisions is dispersed and dependent on all MCSs members (B2). Stakeholder involvement is provided during the implementation, which in principle provides for education in sustainable development with a participatory approach and public access to information (B3).
C. Ownership and commitment	D	D	D	B	Responsibility for implementation of planned projects and the required political support are the domain of national and local authorities (C1, C2, C3). Different financial initiatives are provided, and long-term measures for the more favourable financial environment in all countries needed to support sustainable development processes in least-favoured rural areas, cities and neighbourhoods (C4).
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	D	D	D	A	The MSSD does not affect policy actions in single countries, and it omits detailed suggestions about how national strategies should be designed and implemented. Situation assessment and continuity of planned actions fall to the national and local authorities and other stakeholders, which means decentralisation <i>per se</i> (D1, D2, D4). How realistic goals are depends on planning processes at the national and local levels, which can vary from country to country. The heterogeneity of Mediterranean countries complicates delivery of an accurate assessment of how realistic the strategy's goals are (D3).
E. Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring	D	D	A	B	The voluntary financial contributions provided by countries are crucial for successful implementation. Capacity for implementation depends heavily on national budgets and realistic plans for sustainability projects (E1, E2). Vague indicators were updated with the first implementation assessment, making them clearer and more quantifiable (E3). Continuous monitoring is anticipated. Two-year monitoring cycles are provided to assess progress in implementation. In-depth assessment is planned for every five years, the first occurring in 2010 as a special assessment for the Third World Summit on Sustainable Development (E4).

that are preparing NSDSs. In a certain way, the MSSD presents a framework for formulation, review or updating of national strategies, and an effective partnership in the efforts towards sustainability. The key structural barrier of the MSSD is its dependence of its success on the implementation of planned actions by national and local governments. The lack of supranational high-level authority and the permanent dependence on voluntary financial contributions also significantly determine the success of the strategy. The actual exercise is *de facto* unimaginable without integration of MSSD principles into specific policies designed and led by national governments or institutions of supranational political authorities (e.g. the EU). Integration of principles of sustainability from different levels strengthens the concept of sustainable development and increases its potential for successful implementation of defined measures and achievement of goals.

4.3 Sustainable development in Slovenia and Slovenia's Development Strategy (SDS)

Deliberations on sustainability in Slovenia date back to the early 1990s, when the government adopted the Starting-Points for Regulating Development Planning in the Republic of Slovenia in 1992 and the Proposal to Regulate Annual and Development Planning in the Republic of Slovenia in 1993 (Radej, 2000, p. 48). The Strategy for Economic Development of Slovenia (SEDS), adopted in 1995 and renewed in 2001 by the Slovenian Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, defined sustainable development as a 'new development paradigm', combining the economic, social and environmental aspects of welfare equality. SEDS also laid the groundwork for Slovenia's National Development Programme for 2002–2006, another important document for sustainable development in Slovenia. In addition to those documents, which gave priority to reducing the economic development gap, the National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP) was prepared in 1999, with objectives and measures for the field of environmental protection and the use of natural resources. NEAP directly highlighted the environmental dimension of sustainable development and addressed Agenda 21.

Based on broad consensus and comprehensive public debate, in June 2005 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted Slovenia's Development Strategy (SDS). The basic idea was to set up a strategy that would establish the principle of sustainability in all development documents in the country (Černe, 2004, p. 95). After the adoption, the government appointed the Reform Committee, a working group of approximately 150 experts, to propose concrete measures for the implementation of the strategy in terms of competitiveness, higher economic growth and employment. The SDS is primarily oriented towards the Lisbon goals, as it mainly exposes economic issues but does not completely neglect the social and environmental component of sustainable development. It emphasises five key development priorities, the fifth of which is oriented towards sustainability (see Šušteršič *et al.*, 2005).

A revision of the SDS was planned with the involvement of the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD). The revision of the strategy started in 2008

with a scenario-building exercise, in order to identify gaps in the current strategy and achieve a consensus about priority measures for the future. In March 2011 the government initiated the renewal of the strategy, with the intention of facilitating the EU 2020 strategy. The dominance of the ‘Lisbon rhetoric’, therefore, remains embedded in the core of Slovenia’s upcoming sustainable development strategy. The Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia prepared the first draft of the renewed SDS in August 2013 (MERS, 2013), but the document is still in the drafting phase. Summary results of the assessment of the SDS are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Assessment of the Slovenia’s Development Strategy (SDS)

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
A. Integration and sustainability	C	C	D	D	Separated development priorities with weak integration (A1). Social and poverty issues are presented separately in the fourth development priority. Principles of solidarity and better social inclusion of vulnerable groups are mentioned (A2). Poorly defined measures for further integration of environmental policy into other sectoral policies and consumer patterns (A3). Strategy is primarily oriented towards the Lisbon goals (A4).
B. Participation and consensus	B	B	D	C	A bottom-up drafting process, with the cooperation of various experts and stakeholders. The strategy’s implementation rests primarily on government and ministries; local authorities and stakeholders are neglected (B1). Responsibility for decision-making is the domain of ministries without provided mechanisms for transparency and communication with the public (B2, B3). Sustainability is addressed as a separate development priority with two-year actions plans (B4).
C. Ownership and commitment	B	B	A	D	Significant government involvement during the preparation and implementation of the strategy (C1). The Reform Committee, a working group of approximately 150 experts, is preparing a proposal of concrete measures to deliver SDS objectives and provides additional political and expert support (C2). Responsibility for implementation is clearly assigned to authorities with appropriate competences (ministries) (C3). Donor programs are completely neglected in the document (C4).
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	B	D	C	D	The SDS is primarily oriented towards the Lisbon Strategy (D1). Suffers from vague and universal formulations. Comprehensive analysis of the current situation is also overlooked; proposed objectives and measures are desirable rather than real (D2, D3). Decentralisation is barely mentioned. Focus is only on the establishment of regions and providing better conditions for the development of the local economy (D4).
E. Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring	D	C	D	B	Lacks budgetary provisions. Does not have a special chapter on financing and implementation of the strategy (E1). Provision of financial resources needed for implementation depends on privatization of state property, tax reform and launching of public-private partnerships (E2). Suffers from vague indicators for all pillars of sustainable development (E3). The Slovenian Development Report (prepared annually by the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (IMAD)) monitors the implementation of the strategy and is a document adopted by the government as a guideline for formulation of national economic and development policies (E4).

In its current form, the SDS of 2005 appears to be a failed attempt to develop a holistic long-term strategic document, as it has proved deficient in a majority of its set goals. The biggest shortcoming is the fragmentation of goals and weak integration of policy sectors across the entire document. Sustainability is superficially presented as a separate development priority with no deeper integration into other sectoral policies. According to the criteria from the qualitative scoring scheme, besides the responsibility of actors for the strategy's implementation, none of the requirements are fully met. This is particularly the case with environmental provisions, natural resource issues, budgetary provisions and the inclusion of local authorities and stakeholders in the implementation process. Some positive features of the strategy are the inclusiveness of its preparation process and in the phase of preparing measures to deliver its objectives.

Slovenia as a case on the state-level reflects more or less a similar image of vagueness as MSSD and EU SDS, especially in terms of non-transparency when it comes to sustainable development. It has manifested a moderate amount of commitment to the provisions of Agenda 21, as it has a tremendous sectoral focus, which is contradictory to Agenda 21's cross-sectoral orientation. However, some important steps forward have been taken, most notably with the creation of the Slovenian Council for Sustainable Development which was set up to adopt guidelines and recommendations for sustainable development in the Republic of Slovenia, assess the documents related to sustainable development and take part in discussions and give suggestions referring to the NEAP and other sectoral strategies based on the principles of sustainable development. Nevertheless, the Council has proved to be more or less inactive.

5. Concluding discussion

It is difficult to compare sustainable development strategies, especially if they represent the vision of a sustainable future at different levels, and to determine the most elaborated and complete strategy among the examined ones, although there are differences between the scores in the qualitative coding scheme. The major differences between the assessed strategies are in the sophistication of the theoretical base and the integration of three main pillars of sustainable development. The MSSD and EU SDS stand out in a positive way – especially the revised EU SDS, which reflects ambitious targets for the key internal and external sustainable development challenges classified under six headings, for which concrete actions are provided. On the other hand, Slovenia's Development Strategy primarily exposes economic issues, with weak integration of the three main pillars of sustainable development, since the social and environmental components are barely mentioned and only the fifth key development priority is reserved for sustainable development, which is otherwise not a cross-cutting issue.

However, a positive feature of all assessed strategies is a 'bottom-up' drafting process with the cooperation of different authorities, experts and stakeholders. Another positive attribute is that on the conceptual level all analysed strategies planned for monitoring procedures, including close cooperation of different authorities and stakeholders from various levels. Some weaknesses that are more or less common to all

assessed strategies are imprecise elaboration of development goals, unreachable objectives of sustainability and vague measures for the objectives' fulfilment. Virtually all evaluated strategies also lack important practical elements, which diminish their importance on the level of implementation. For example, they do not have clear deadlines and financing provisions for planned projects. In some cases deadlines anticipated in assessed strategies have already expired (EU SDS and SDS), while financing of planned projects depends on reforms in the future or on voluntary contributions (e.g. the MSSD). Overall, the assessed strategies suffer from a lack of guaranteed financial resources for successful implementation, or at least from a lack of clear financial planning, which at the core determines their future.

A pivotal deficiency of regional strategies, particularly the MSSD, is that their implementation depends on political authorities at the national and local levels. Those authorities are in essence in charge of transmission and implementation of all planned projects common to member states. In effect, this disperses the accountability for adopted decisions and also, in the case of the EU SDS, imposes a burden of implementation on the national and subnational authorities, whether they like it or not and whether they have the capacity or not. The EC and the MCSD are responsible for monitoring at the supranational/regional level and for preparing progress reports. However, these limited obligations clearly have fallen short of reaching anticipated targets (see Bernheim, 2006; Hoballah, 2006). The implementation of the Slovenian development strategy is the domain of national ministries, while there is a weak connection to subnational levels, with decentralisation barely being mentioned. Given the importance of national and subnational authorities to the implementation of regional/supranational strategies, the missing link to the subnational level presents a serious barrier to effective implementation of the entire set of strategies.

This assessment of strategic planning mechanisms in three sustainable development regimes thus maps the necessary paths to future improvements. In the case of the EU SDS and the MSSD, it is essential to assess realistically the actual implementation capacity of the national and subnational authorities responsible for implementation of planned objectives. In parallel, specific instruments allowing for the implementation of capacity building (e.g. financial and human resources) by national and subnational authorities have to be devised. It is, moreover, necessary to prepare and implement mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation that are based on measurable indicators set to achievable levels, thus taking into account the implementation capabilities of involved actors and the timing with which the planned projects are carried out. In the case of the Slovenian development strategy, significant mainstreaming of the social and environmental component of sustainability is needed, since the current orientation is heavily tilted towards the economic issues set out by the Lisbon Strategy and the EU 2020. Ultimately, therefore, sustainable development in the three assessed regimes has a great deal to do with genuine commitment to its principles, a deep reflection of the current state of the society, and planning for an achievable, long-term-oriented *common future*.

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