COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS AT E.U. AND ROMANIAN LEVEL

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Sustainable development aims for a better future for us and future generations. To follow it, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was developed, which proposes, through its 17 objectives, the intervention directions. The 2030 Agenda was adopted by both Romania and the EU. Each objective is represented by a set of indicators. The objective of the paper is the comparative analysis of the most important indicators of sustainable development in EU and Romania. In this paper, the main indicators of sustainable development at EU level were analyzed. Subsequently, the same indicators were investigated in Romania, to perform a comparative analysis. The research used secondary data. Romania's declared objective is to be a regional leader in implementing Sustainable Development goals. Based on the results obtained on data available in 2020, a set of recommendations was developed to reach the proposed target for 2030. Analyzing the sustainable development indicators for EU and Romania against the new EU 2030 Agenda. The paper provides an overview of the Sustainable development of Romania. Its main indicators are compared against the values at EU level, resulting in relevant recommendations that can be implemented to meet the goals of EU 2030 Agenda.

Keywords: EU 2030 agenda, economic growth, sustainability indicators

INTRODUCTION

The official definition of sustainable development was first developed in 1987 through the Brundtland Report. Sustainable development is a way for people to use resources without the planet being left without resources for decades, centuries, or even millennia. This means growing without damaging or harming the environment. The term used by the Brundtland Commission is sustainable development that “meets the needs of the present and also compromises the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987).

Sustainable development is based on three pillars:

1. Environmental sustainability refers to the ecological component that must be found in every initiative by protecting biodiversity;
2. Economic sustainability or sustainable development in economic terms involves methods of economic diversification. These can be, access to services and environmental protection that are necessary to ensure the success and sustainability of development (Ukaga *et al.*, 2019);
3. Socio-political sustainability presupposes, on the one hand, healthy socio-political relations that allow the development of all states, based on partnership and mutual support.

In 2015, at a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, a historic document was adopted: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through its 17 goals, this document seeks to achieve a better future not only for us but also for the next generation. Built on the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – the 2030 Agenda was also adopted by Romania and the European Union. This strategy translates the Agenda to the realities of Romania today.

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The European Union Perspective on Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development in the European Union was introduced into the Strategy for an Enlarged Europe 2006. This strategy was part of a unified and coherent strategic vision with the general objective of continuously improving the quality of life for present and future generations (Freeman, 2010). Its goal was to create sustainable communities capable of managing and using resources efficiently and of exploiting the ecological and social potential of the economy to ensure prosperity, environmental protection, and social cohesion (Hák *et al.*, 2016).

On 22 November 2016, the European Commission published “Next Steps for a Sustainable European Future.” This document presents the European Union’s response to the 2030 Agenda, confirming the need to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into the European policy framework while highlighting the European Commission’s current priorities (Mohieldin, 2017). The document also presents an evaluation of the Union’s current situation and identifies the most relevant concerns regarding sustainability. The European Union declared itself in favor of a sustainable development that will ensure “a life of dignity for all within the Planet’s limits that reconciles economic prosperity and efficiency, peaceful societies, social inclusion, and environmental responsibility.” The EU Council’s conclusions in “A sustainable future for Europe: the EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” adopted on 20 June 2017, represents the political document adopted by the member states of the EU regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The EU response to the 2030 Agenda is to integrate the 17 SDGs into its public policies to support the global effort to build a sustainable future.

The Romanian Perspective on Sustainable Development

In Romania, as a member state of the European Union, in 1997 the National Center for Sustainable Development was created, under the auspices of the Romanian Academy, which over time managed to become the most authorized voice in civil society in the field of developing proposals and strategies for development (Deselnicu *et al.*, 2017). The purpose of the National Center for Sustainable Development is to identify Romania’s sustainable development priorities and achieve them through concrete projects at national and local levels.

To achieve sustainable development in Romania, and, by extension, to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda, together with the European Union’s commitments regarding the 2030 Agenda, this Strategy is built around the citizen and the needs of future generations. Romania’s Sustainable Development Strategy is based on the premise that sustainable development requires a mindset which, once adopted by the citizen, will help create a more equitable society defined by balance and solidarity, and the ability to cope with the changes brought about by current global, regional and national challenges, including a declining population. The state’s concern for its citizens, and the citizens’ respect for public institutions, for their peers, for moral values, and cultural and ethnic diversity will lead to a sustainable society.

The 2030 Agenda includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and an action plan for the next 15 years, to eradicate extreme poverty, combat inequality, injustice and protect the planet by 2030 (Kanie *et al.*, 2017). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their related 169 targets, which are at the heart of the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provide a new policy framework

worldwide towards ending all forms of poverty, fighting inequalities, and tackling climate change while ensuring that no one is left behind (United Nations, 2020).

Comparative Analysis of Sustainable Development Indicators

In this paper, two of the 17 objectives of sustainable development have been chosen:

Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) calls for action on all fronts: adoption of sustainable practices and sustainability reporting by businesses; promotion of sustainable procurement practices and rationalization inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies by policy-makers; environmentally-aware lifestyles of consumers; development of new technologies and production and consumption methods by researchers and scientists and others.

Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) recognizes the importance of sustained economic growth and high levels of economic productivity for the creation of well-paid quality jobs and the achievement of global prosperity. SDG 8 calls for providing opportunities for full and productive employment and decent work for all while eradicating forced labor, human trafficking, and child labor and promoting labor rights and safe and secure working environments.

Every SDG has many indicators of which are analyzed. For this paper there were chosen two representative indicators for each goal. *SGD 12 Responsible consumption and production* – comparatively analyzed indicators: *Energy Productivity* and *Resource productivity, and domestic material consumption*. The values of the indicators in Romania were compared with the average of the European states (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Resource productivity and domestic material consumption - comparison between EU 27 and Romania. Source: Eurostat, 2020

There is a major difference in the level of the average indicator in the 27 EU states and Romania's level. Resource productivity varies greatly from one Member State to another. It depends to a large extent on the structure of national economies and the size and structure of their international trade. Usually, open industrial economies consume more resources because they import large quantities of raw materials, which are then exported as finished products. Service-based economies, on the other hand, tend to generate GDP from activities that consume fewer raw materials, such as financial services, tourism, the arts and recreation, healthcare, and public administration. Therefore, service-based savings appear to be more efficient because they consume

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fewer material resources per euro of production. In the case of Romania, a low and constant level of productivity can be observed (Figure 2):

Figure 2. Energy productivity, comparison between EU 27 and Romania.
Source: Eurostat, 2020

Making progress towards a more resource-efficient economy also means reducing energy consumption at all stages of the energy chain, from production to final consumption. This means providing more services for the same energy input or the same services for lower energy input. This is the indicator that has a constant and positive evolution. Romania follows the ascending trend, achieving, as can be seen, considerable progress from 2003 to 2018, with a faster growth rate than the EU 27 (Figure 3):

Figure 3. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), comparison between EU 27 and Romania. Source: Eurostat, 2020

The transition of young people from education to work is hampered by specific difficulties. As a result, there are relatively low employment rates, a high unemployment rate, and high rates of young people who are not employed and do not

attend any education or training (NEET) program. It can be noticed that Romania has a higher percentage within this indicator than the EU 27 average. According to the data, the percentage is decreasing starting with 2015, when a maximum of 21% of the total population analyzed was reached, although in 2019, the difference between the EU27 and Romania average is 5 percent (Figure 4):

Figure 4. Employment rate, comparison between EU 27 and Romania.

Source: Eurostat

This indicator reached historic highs in 2019, according to data provided by Eurostat (2020). Romania has also reached a historic percentage. The difference between the EU 27 average and Romania is 3%. These results are very important, being a relevant economic indicator for analysis. As in the case of other indicators, there can be observed large differences between countries. Romania has the highest percentage, followed by Sweden (82.6%), while the lowest percentage is held by Greece (59.7%).

RESULTS

In this paper, four very important sustainability indicators were analyzed, related to the two selected objectives. Following the analysis, it was found that Romania is following a positive trend and the continuous improvement of the indicators, as it happens at EU level. A low level of the two indicators related to SGD 12 - Responsible consumption and production - can be observed. The low level of Resource productivity and domestic material consumption represents an effect of the type of Romanian economy, in which the services industry has a much lower share than the European average. In parallel, positive results are observed within SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth.

Recommendations to Reach the Proposed Target for 2030

The following set of recommendations was suggested in order for Romania to reach its proposed target in terms of sustainable development for the year 2030:

- Development of public-private partnership by increasing the number of education classes in the dual system;

- Initiation of basic vocational training programs in correlation with the requirements of the labor market, focusing on young or socially vulnerable segments of the population;
- Elaboration and implementation of a coherent program for the development of tourism, including agrotourism, generator of jobs and considerable income in areas where the employment rate is low;
- Development of the legislative framework for the support of green housing;
- The transition to the circular economy by changing the mentality through education, changing consumer behavior and developing financial mechanisms to support the transition period;
- Reduction of food waste along the entire production-transport-processing-marketing-consumption route, from farm harvesting to final waste disposal;
- Popularization and promotion of sustainable production and consumption models through information campaigns for the general public and efforts to expand these good practices in school and extracurricular educational programs;
- Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and integrate sustainability information into the reporting cycle.

CONCLUSION

In the present paper, following the analysis, it was discovered that Romania makes sustained progress every year on each objective and indicator. It is observed that it follows the EU trend and has real chances to become a regional leader in implementing the 2030 Sustainability Agenda. To become a regional leader in implementing the 2030 Sustainability Agenda, it is necessary to involve all actors in achieving the objectives. The involvement of every citizen is imperative in carrying out this strategy. It takes the formation of critical mass, the moment when these principles will be learned by most citizens, to achieve the change we want. In this way, we can be optimistic about achieving the proposed objectives.

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