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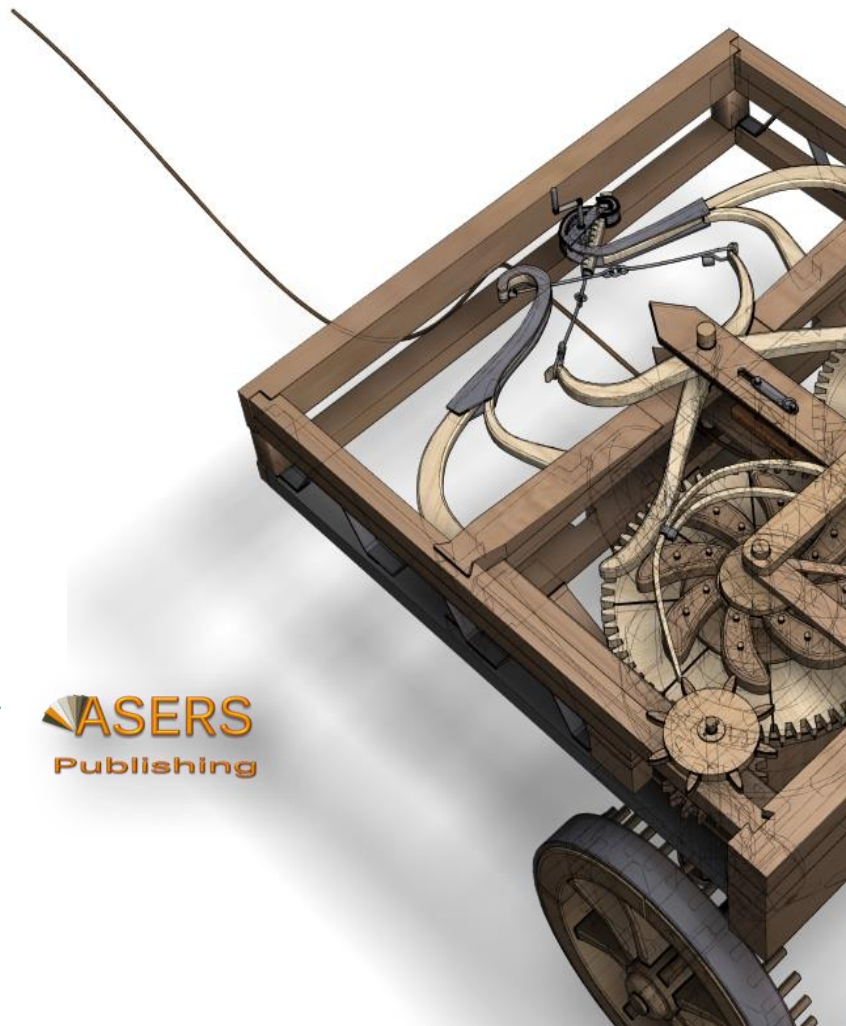
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Putting Cities in the Framework of Sustainable Development; Evolution, Evaluation and Features of SDG 11

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to analyze in first basis, how the International Community, reached the adoption of the SDG's goals, and to discuss the assets and the problems, the omissions of these goals. Then, this text will give emphasis to the inclusiveness, resilience, safety and sustainability of the cities, and will indicate the extent that those goals were well – promoted and protected under the Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, this assignment, will trace the upgrade and integration of these goals into an entrenched and united goal (Goal 11 of Sustainable Development) and the current developments and problems that seem to emerge, mostly regarding the sustainability of the cities. Furthermore, this paper will try to prove the strong linkage between SDG 3 (Good Health – Well Being) and SDG 11.

Keywords: United Nations; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Sustainable Cities; SDG 3.

JEL Classification: Q01; R58.

Introduction

The adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a concrete result of many multilateral conventions, which have enhanced the understanding and the perception of both meanings, the environment and development. SDGs have their roots in the Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs) and they have been adopted by the Heads of State at the Millennium Summit, back in 2000 (Bebbington 2020). They were the “world's first explicit development partnership framework between developed and developing countries” (de Villiers *et al.* 20200. In opposition with the MDGs, which were composed by the staff of the UN and some other international organizations, the SDGs have been concocted with transparency and openness (UNDG, 2013). The response and outreach for consultation and review was more than unparalleled and remarkable (Nanda 2020). The Secretary General of the UN in his *Synthesis Report* stated that many people, especially the young, had the opportunity to share their views about the SDGs processes, through national, thematic and online consultations and surveys (GYC, 2015). The three significant pillars – the economic, the social and the environmental, and the equilibrium among them, can be observed in the MDGs (Bac, 2008). This balance was practical but not profound enough. According to Jeffrey Sacks, the adoption of the SDGs has been influenced by the growing urgency for sustainable development globally. He recognizes that sustainable development may have many definitions (the fundamental definition is the one that derives from Brundtland Report). However, most of them are obscured and vague, due to the discrepancy and contradiction between long – term sustainability and short – term prosperity (Kuhkman and Farrington 2010). Jeffrey Sacks acknowledges that gradually the meaning of sustainability is

inextricably linked to the three aforementioned pillars and this is where he meets Mark Stafford – Smith. Jeffrey Sacks perceives that the difference between MDGs and SDGs is that the ultimate goal of SDGs is to achieve the linkage and combination of economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion (Sacks 2012). Mark Stafford – Smith claims that SDGs have been considered an expansion of the MDGs' framework, because they were trying to connect, and to link in a significant way, the social, economic and the environmental aspects of the goals (Stafford – Smith M. *et al.* 2017). Consequently, many would say that the SDGs, are built on MDGs

1. MDGs and SDGs Comparison – Assets and Omissions of SDGs

SDGs and MDGs present some differences. Initially, many would argue that MDGs is a reflection of a *North – South aid Agenda*, whereas other would claim that SDGs are a *global agenda* for sustainable development. As stated by Wendy Harcourt, developing countries were strongly related with some of the MDGs in a way that many of them were identified and labelled as “Minimum Sustainable Goals” (Harcourt 2005). Additionally, David Hulme demonstrates the fundamental role that the Cold War played, in such way that many governments were adopting aid policies that were conceptualized in the terms of geopolitics, liberalism and globalization (Parr and Hulme 2011). On the other hand, the SDGs are goals that are universal and destined for all. That is a significant asset of the goals. There are no discriminations between the rich and the poor, the developed and developing countries. They are goals that have been created and conceived by environmental ministers from all around the globe, in the context of Rio +20 conferences back in 2012. Moreover, the MDGs were 8 in total, including 21 targets. The ultimate purpose of these goals was the eradication of poverty. As specified by Sakiko Fucunda – Parr, such a fact indicates that the Heads of State had not scrupulously conceived the meaning of development and sustainability (Parr 2016). Simultaneously, the significance of sustainability was scarcely present, specifically in MDG7. The 8 MDGs and the 21 targets were not enough to combat global poverty. On the contrary, SDGs are 17 in total, including 169 targets, prioritizing environmental, social and economic sustainability, and *condemning the hierarchy* among those goals. Consequently, SDGs are advantageous for the international society, because they are equal among each – other and they promote sustainability in all its forms. Furthermore, many values were well – recognized by the world leaders, in the UN Millennium Declaration, values such as equality, tolerance and freedom (UN, 2000). Plus, the Heads of State expressed their desire to take further steps in what concerns human rights, democracy, and good governance (UN, 2000). The creation of the MDGs was destined to reflect the Millennium Declaration. On the contrary, this mirroring never occurred because human rights, democracy and good governance were *omitted*, and they were never included in the MDGs (Nanda 2007). It seems that the center of MDGs was statistical averages and aggregated number that encouraged inequalities, disparities, discrimination and injustice. Consequently, an important asset of the SDGs is that they achieved the inclusion of goals that are related to the human rights, democracy, peace and healthy institutions. The first step was in July 2013, when the UN Secretary General, regarding the progress in what concerned the implementation of the MDGs, submitted a report, having the title “A life for dignity for all”. In his recommendation, he emphasized multiple times, the strong connection between, human rights, peace and development. It was of a great significance the fact that he demonstrated the need for the global goals to be founded on human rights (UN, 2013). In October 2013, Ban Ki Moon set in motion the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in order to facilitate the promotion of sustainable development. SDSN published a report with the name “*An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development*” which recognized good governance and security, as one of the four fundamental dimensions of society and for sustainable development (SDSN, 2013). What mostly inflamed the existence of a human rights perspective to the goals was a letter that was sent to the Secretary General of the UN, by several civil society groups, who demonstrated their fundamental need to express that the Agenda 2030, «will not deliver without human rights at the core» (CESR, 2014). Civil societies like *Amnesty International*, *International Disability Alliance*, *Center for Reproductive Rights* and *International Women's Health Coalition* set the human rights in the center and suggest ways for the accomplishment of the security of human rights (economic, cultural, civil and political), gender equality and women's rights. As a result, the UN Secretary General, in his Synthesis Report with the title “*The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet*” stated that «all voices have demanded that we leave no one behind, ensuring equality, nondiscrimination, equity and inclusion at all levels. We must pay special attention to the people, groups and countries most in need» (UN, 2014). Some of the main groups that Ban Ki Moon referred were women, persons with disabilities, slum dwellers, migrants, refugees and displaced people. The 17 SDGs seem to be very ambitious, wide open, inclusive, targeting the elimination of poverty, the improvement of human rights and the achievement of environmental sustainability. However, Chris Hoy underlines once again that the SDGs are

complex and have no prioritization something that impedes their attainment (Hoy 2015). Also emphasizes the need for the adoption and the implementation's difficulty of the goals at the national level of the countries. Michelle M. L. Lim *et al.* states that despite the fact that SDGs seem to meet the needs of the present, some shortcomings seem to appear. The first omission of the SDGs is the prioritization of the economic growth in order to combat poverty (Lim *et al.* 2018). That can be easily perceived because the SDG1 indicators have oversimplified the meaning of poverty. However, economic growth and consequently elimination of poverty, cannot be treated as a goal in itself. Amartya Sen discusses that development should be more focused to enhance the freedoms that people enjoy, freedoms that are valuable and matter (Sen 1999). Those freedoms consist the content of other SDGs; political liberty, education, good health, social empowerment and economic opportunities. In other words, there is not a strong linkage between those freedoms, and international community does not seem to sufficiently comprehend the crucial impacts of those freedoms in poverty (Lim *supra* note 21). Another weakness is that SDGs have inconsistently approached the international law. The SDGs goals and indicators do not make any mentions to multilateral agreements regarding biodiversity, and to human rights conventions. However, it is of a great significance that all the nations states that adopted SDGs under international law, are committed to the extent that they agreed to be committed.

Further, up, this paper compared the MDGs with the SDGs, endeavored to derive the assets of the SDGs from the weaknesses of the MDGs and further discussed some of the omissions of the SDGs. What is to be investigated below is the SDG 11. Specifically, this text will examine the extent that this goal was well promoted in the MDG framework, will present its indicators and will discuss what has been accomplished in the context of the SDG11 and what needs to be done.

2. How We Reached SDG11? An Evaluation of This Goal

The great significance of urbanization was something that was ignored by the MDGs. It is a fact that in the post – colonial period the house provision has been evolved. What is more is that governmental housing policies of many countries, were friendly and in accordance with the international housing policies (Wakely 1988). However, the problems of the slums seemed to be growing and growing. The only element that is related to the sustainability of the cities (SDG11) is the Target 11 of the MDG7. The aim of Target 11 was to improve significantly the lives of 100 million people who dwell in slums by 2020. What Sylvia Croese *et al.* seems to demonstrate is the great diversity in international policies in what concerns housing. Those policies, according to Sylvia, have been encouraged by the adoption of the Habitat Agenda, in the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which inflamed the States to focus in the building of sustainable human settlements, eradicating gradually the existence of slums (Croese *et al.* 2015). What also played an important role is the heavy participation of civil society organizations and the intensified conversation that followed between the NGOs and the official UN conference in Istanbul. Michael Cohen recognizes that some aspects of this target were problematic in what concerns mostly its definition. First of all, the term “*improvement*” has been left intentionally and explicitly vague, because it was expected to be interpreted mainly in the local level – slums in many Third World countries, were being considered as a local problem, in order for the municipalities to reach local solutions (Cohen 2014). However, the term improvement itself could include some other improvements, related to the access to the clean water and sanitation, health, housing and education (UN, 2012). Another weakness is the definition of *slums*, because what can actually be regarded as a slum in France, is different from what can actually be considered as a slum in Zambia (Cohen *supra* note 26). What can be easily noticed from the MDGs is the narrow perception of sustainability of the cities because only the Third World slums (due to the ambiguous definition of the *slums*), were in the epicenter for the accomplishment of sustainable human settlements. This narrow perception becomes wide, with the adoption of the 2030 agenda. Among the SDGs, Goal 11 addresses urban problems and aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Angela van der Berg, highlights the gravity of SDG11, claiming that the key role of cities as drivers of the global sustainable agenda, was highly acknowledged and appreciated at an international and political level to date, due to the adoption of this goal (Van der Berg 2018).

What is of great importance for the targets of the SDG11, is the extent of their adoption and monitor by nations. This could solve many problems that have arisen and may be arisen in the future. One of the most fundamental global monitoring tools that was instituted by the UN Habitat back in 2015, was the City Prosperity Index (CPI). Using regulated methods and statistical analysis and tools, CPI aims to ensure that governments will be able to identify city challenges – demographic, economic, social and environmental, in order to intervene urgently (Obure *et al.* 2020). Six dimensions comprise CPI; infrastructure, productivity, quality of life, equity, environmental sustainability and governance (Linton 2020). However, it is crucial to mention that CPI lacks the

ability to translate and transform information, which was obtained through evaluation, into policy planning at the local level (Linton *supra* note 31). Many would claim that if there were a huge desire to attain SDG11 in the local level, the neighborhoods are the best way to start, because they are considered a unit of the city, and many interactions of society and economy can be perceived in an intensified way. Developments and amelioration of the neighborhoods entail affordable housing, climate action and enhanced public health. Sharifi and Murayama (2013) state that those developments can be reached with the use of *neighborhood sustainability assessment tools*. Operating with these tools, the neighborhoods' performance is evaluated, their way towards sustainability is supervised and their progression in what concerns their approach to sustainability is highly identified. Marta Braulio-Gonzalo recognizes three tools that are internationally applicable and used in studies (Gonzalo *et al.* 2015). Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM – United Kingdom) Comprehensive Assessment System for Built Environment Efficiency Urban Development (CASBEE – UD, Japan), and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Neighborhood Development (LEED – ND, USA). According to Arslan *et al.* (2016), those programmes have been advantageous, not only because they use specific technologies in order to reach their targets, but also for being transparent and encouraging innovation. However, those programmes use computations that are punctilious and rigorous and sometimes there is more work to be done than usual. Furthermore, some of their policies are difficult to be implemented in other countries, because those policies reflect their nations policy. For example, BREEAM's policies are more relevant to the United Kingdom because it uses UKs policies (Starrs and Burrows (2016)). There are some targets that seem hard to be achieved due to the COVID – 19. The vulnerability of the slum dwellers is in test every day (Target 11.1). They cannot reach many infrastructures, including water, sanitation and waste management. Although many governments managed to reduce the percentage of the people living in slums from 28% (2000) to 23% in 2014, the ratio of those dwelling in slums has increased to 24% in 2020 (UN 2020, pp. 15, 46). Additionally, the International Community does not seem to meet target 11.2 of the SDG 11, because only half of the countries have convenient and safe public transportation (UN, 2019) (data for 2020 are not available). It is expected that such a situation will inflame the countries to adopt measures in order to achieve safe transportation. Thus, the buses and trains will not be crowded, and the risk of transmission of coronavirus will be diminished. However, this target includes two additional features; efficient public transportation and climate responsive (UN 2018, p.2), but due to the pandemic, governments have prioritized safety and convenience. Furthermore, according to the 2020 SDGs Report, the 11.6 target, regarding the reduction of the environmental impact of cities by paying attention to air quality, it is expected to remark some progress. Due to coronavirus, cities' lockdowns permitted the depletion of air pollutants, because many factories closed, and many cars were not in use. However, due to the great relaxation and flexibility of international environmental law, if the governments decide to remove their cities' lockdowns, they will indirectly encourage the reset of an unhealthy past (Supra note 37 p 47).

Further up, this paper investigated some of the most significant points, regarding the Sustainable Development Goal 11, giving emphasis to the policies' implementation both in an international and local level, discussing the problems that can be observed in targets 11.1, 11.2 and 11.6. What is to be examined below is the linkage of SDG11 with SDG 3 (Good Health Well Being).

3. The Interlinkage between SDG11 and SDG 3

As was mentioned above, SDGs have been formed in a way that permits them to confront complex economic, social and environmental provocations. According to Elder *et al.* (2016) the existence of the interlinkages between the SDGs, could be perceived as an attempt to introduce a new way of thinking and approach, towards a problem that must be solved, and its gravity is serious enough. Interlinkages may be highly dependent to one another, which means that such interlinkage is contributory for the linked goals (McCollum 2018). This essence of the contribution is the reason that some interlinkages are characterized differently. Le Blank has stated that in order to fulfill one goal, the achievement of another goal is required; in order to make progress in one area, progress must also be made in others (ISC, p.21). However, such statement is not related to all the goals.

The relationship between health and cities is well – recognized. The promotion of health and the accomplishment of SDG3 can be easily found in well – designed and constructed cities, in opposition with poor designed cities or settlements, for example the slums, that encourage the creation of not healthy environment, the discouragement of physical activities, and the exposition to air pollution and traffic. Moreover, direct health promotion in transportation can be accomplished if improvements regarding access in health care, work and education are a national initiative.

Improving transport systems (11.2) is more likely to help achieving the reduction of non – communicable diseases (3.4) and the reduction of the mortalities due to air pollution and road traffic (3.6 and 3.9). Mathews *et al.*

(2007) discusses that combat cities, green spaces and safer roads for cyclists, can help the reduction of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, obesity, and mental – health problems. In addition, the reduction of transport in combat cities can encourage the mobility options of non-drivers. The amelioration of transport systems, especially for the cyclists and the pedestrians, which are considered vulnerable road users, could help the gradual annihilation of deaths and injuries, related to road traffic accidents. The encouragement of walking and cycling, and the improvement of public transportation, not only can contribute to the diminishing of transport emissions, but also can reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from dangerous air pollutants.

Conclusion

Sustainable Development Goals are without any doubt, universal, wide, open, ambitious and based in a significant level to the three pillars which many could say that are vital, in order to accomplish sustainability; economy, society and environment. Some problems seem to be unimportant like the fact that 169 targets and 232 indicators can cause ambiguity. What this paper, can easily understand, is the fact that some of the problems were related to the definitions of some terms (see MDG7 target 11) and their wrong conceptualization (negative interlinkage and wrong conceptualization of poverty [SDG 1 to SDG 8]).

Another problem mentioned, was the lack of prioritization within those goals. SDG11 is undoubtedly an extended version of Target 11 MDG7 and can be easily connected with good health and wellbeing. Improvements in public transportation can inflame the reduction of deaths, which are related to diseases, most of them linked with air pollutants and with road traffic accidents. What municipalities can do is to take all the necessary steps and measures, in order to motivate cycling and walking? For example, they could use street lighting that will guide the pedestrians and mostly the cyclists during the night. In addition, the protection of vulnerable road users such as pedestrians or cyclists, need to be prioritized and related legislation has to be adopted. Furthermore, it is of a great importance that governments need to take all the necessary steps in order to combat heavy crowding in public transportation, because in such environments, diseases like coronavirus are easily transmitted.

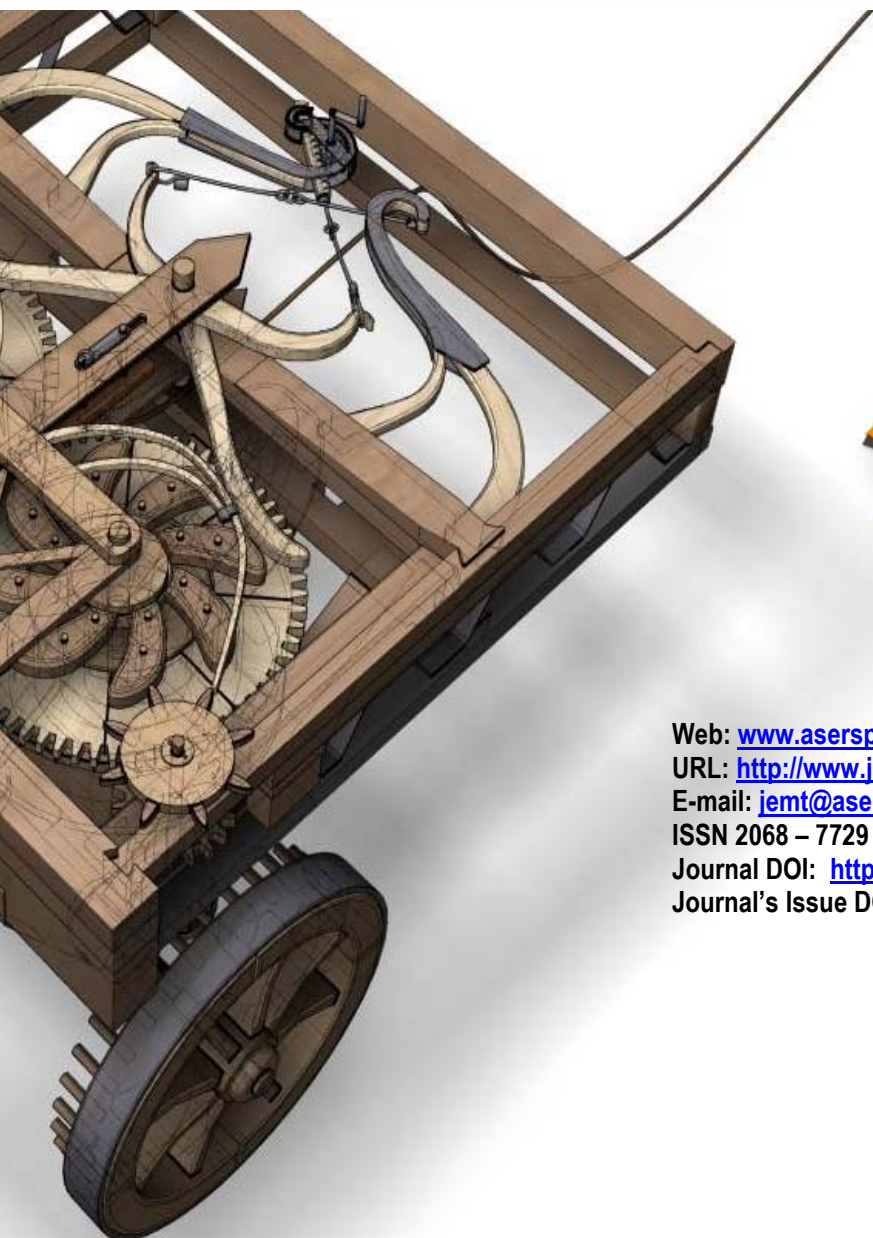
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