

TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: *Sustainable development has become the development paradigm of our new era. The present paper aims to offer some considerations regarding transnational partnerships for sustainable development, focusing on the European Union countries from the South-Eastern area. The research methodology is based on the literature review of the topic, as well as a quantitative and qualitative analysis. Working in transnational partnerships has been seen as a way of addressing complex issues, such as sustainable development. These kind of partnerships are voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiatives specifically linked to the implementation of globally agreed commitments, facilitating and strengthening the process towards sustainable development. The investigated EU countries from the South-East Europe demonstrate strong commitment for being part in transnational partnerships for sustainable development from different perspectives: the significant number of transnational partnerships and the great number of partners in each partnership coming from widespread areas, the wide variety of the approached topics directly connected to sustainable development and the types of organizations involved as partners. The merit of this paper, in spite of some limitations, is to contribute with an original research regarding transnational partnership for sustainable development, setting a focus point on the way to further research.*

Key words: sustainable development; transnational partnership; South-East European Countries

JEL classification: Q01; R11

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is a landmark in the changing world we live in. The concept has evolved into a multi-dimensional comprehensive one, a subject of interest at all levels. Sustainable development is today more than a supreme and generalized objective, it is a global strategy, a principle of living. Worldwide, organizations, countries and institutions are striving to think and act accordingly.

Within this context, the paper aims to offer some considerations regarding transnational partnerships for sustainable development, focusing on the European Union countries from the South-East area. The research methodology is based on literature review, using bibliographic resources (e.g. books, studies and articles, official documents - strategies and reports), as well as on a quantitative and qualitative analysis relevant for the topic.

2. Sustainable Development Approaches from the Perspective of Transnational Partnerships

Researchers and policy makers show great interest for the study of sustainable development, which has been the subject of worldwide debates since the concept of sustainable development appeared in the '70, first interpreted by the members of The

Club of Rome (Meadows et al., 1972). Society makes a common effort to find, offer and implement the right solutions for that kind of development “that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, as stated by the definition given by the Brundtland Commission (WCSD, 1987).

Besides economic development and environmental protection, sustainable development also focuses on the commitment to advancing human well-being and life quality in a society socially acceptable, economically viable and environmentally sustainable. This kind of development is constrained by the fact that it should take place within the ecological limits of the planet.

Sustainable development has received a global political dimension, starting with Agenda 21 in 1992, an action plan for sustainable development, followed by other initiatives such as UN Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2002 and revised in 2012 at the Earth Summits.

Current debates speak about the importance of interconnections and interdependences, about an integrated approach and coordination between institutions and organizations at different levels. Within this context, cooperation is crucial for improving sustainable development outcomes, therefore working in partnership has become commonplace as a way of addressing such complex issues.

Partnership has been defined in many different ways in different contexts. According to Syed et. al. (2012), partners look for mutual benefits, including two-way flow of energies, expertise and knowledge to justify investment. Partnerships involve organisations making a commitment to work together on something that concerns both, developing a common sense of purpose and agenda and generating joint action towards agreed targets (The Health Education Board for Scotland, 2001).

Mostly, we are interested in partnerships for development. Picciotto (2004) speaks about the key features of a partnership for international development: “Partnership is a means to an end – a collaborative relationship toward mutually agreed objectives involving shared responsibility for outcomes, distinct accountabilities and reciprocal obligations. Where there is no common vision of what the partnership is about, no mutual stake in the outcome, lack of clarity in task allocations, or imbalance in influence and unfairness in allocation of costs and benefits, the partnership is hollow.” Partnership can be considered a collaborative relationship between entities to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labor, aims to take advantage of what the recipient, as well as the donor can bring (Axelrod, 2004). Partnerships can be found under different forms of collaborative arrangements, such as consortia, alliances, joint ventures, roundtable, networks and associations (Lawrence et al., 2002); however, no matter of their form, partnerships mean inter-organizational structures where resources, power, and authority are shared and where people are brought together to achieve common goals that could not be accomplished by a single individual or organization independently (Kitzi, 2002). Mattessich et al. (2001) state that “collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.”

In terms of sustainable development issues, partnerships are considered one of the most participatory and effective mechanisms to implement sustainable development and enhance international cooperation. They have a special character as they are voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiatives specifically linked to the implementation of globally agreed commitments. These partnerships are not a substitute for government responsibilities and commitments; they rather intend to facilitate, strengthen and expedite implementation by involving those relevant stakeholders that can make a contribution to sustainable development.

The European Union, one of the world key players, has become preoccupied with sustainable development issues and adopted in 2001 its first Strategy of Sustainable Development (European Commission), stating that sustainable development is one of its major political objectives. The strategy was revised in 2005 and 2009 for a unitary and coherent strategic vision, completing The Lisbon Strategy and aiming to become a catalyst for changing the behaviour of the European society towards sustainability. The EU has made a good start in applying the principles of sustainable development, but increased efforts are needed to put Europe on a sustainable path. This requires a strategy with a stronger focus, a clearer division of responsibilities, wider ownership and broader support, a stronger integration of the international dimension and more effective implementation and monitoring. As sustainable development is a purpose overlapping national dimensions, all member states, governments, businesses, NGOs and citizens are called to become more involved and to participate together through different forms of collaboration to attain sustainable development objectives. (European Commission, 2006). Therefore, partnership is seen as the key to success. Transnational partnerships for sustainable development aim to improve the territorial, economic and social integration process and to contribute to cohesion, stability and competitiveness.

3. Transnational Partnerships for Sustainable Development: Empirical Evidence from South-Eastern European Countries

3.1. Research Methodology

In order to establish the research group, we refer to South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme, which is part of the European Territorial Cooperation objective of EU Regional Policy and has as main objective the sustainable and balanced development of the European territory. We conduct our research on a selected group of countries which are considered eligible within this programme, establishing two criteria: to be an EU member state and to participate in the programme with the whole territory. Hence, our research group includes eight countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

All these countries, as member states, have the obligation to adhere to and to respect EU commitments for sustainable development. Moreover, for each investigated country sustainable development is a perspective of the national becoming and each country has its own strategy of sustainable development. In order to get a general image of the selected countries' performance in terms of sustainable development, we present in Table no.1 the countries' EU ranking according to Human Development Index (UNDP, 2013), Environmental Performance Index (Yale University and Columbia University, 2012) and Sustainable Society Index (Sustainable Society Foundation, 2012), three indexes considered among the most relevant in terms of measuring sustainable development.

Table 1: Selected Countries Ranking in EU according to HDI, EPI and SSI

Country	HDI 2013 / score/ EU ranking	EPI 2012/ score/ EU ranking	SSI 2012/ score/ EU ranking
Austria (AU)	0.895 / 7 th	68.92 / 4 th	6.56/ 2 nd
Bulgaria (BG)	0.782 / 28 th	56.28 / 25 th	5.13 / 21 st
Croatia (CR)	0.805 / 26 th	64.16 / 14 th	5.55 / 11 th
Greece (GR)	0.860 / 16 th	60.04 / 20 th	4.32 / 26 th
Hungary (HU)	0.831 / 21 st	57.12 / 24 th	5.29 / 18 th
Romania (RO)	0.786/ 27 th	48.34 / 28 th	5.48 / 15 th
Slovakia (SK)	0.840 / 20 th	66.62 / 9 th	6.01 / 6 th
Slovenia (SL)	0.892 / 10 th	62.65 / 18 th	6.12 / 4 th

We note that none of the countries has the same position in each of the 3 rankings, moreover, the position of each country in the rankings differs substantially; this fact may be considered quite interesting taking into consideration that each index aims to measure the same phenomenon, that of sustainable development. From the selected countries, we could appreciate that best performers are Austria and Slovenia, while the last positions are occupied by Romania and Bulgaria. A possible explanation could be related to the fact that countries better performing have a longer experience and have been preoccupied with sustainable development issues for a longer time, whereas the others are rather new in the field.

In terms of each country's involvement in transnational partnerships for sustainable development, we start with a quantitative analysis, considering the number of transnational projects for sustainable development that each country is part, followed by a qualitative analysis of the projects.

For our analysis we use two databases of transnational partnerships for sustainable development: one of the South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme (SEETCP) and one provided by CORDIS referring to R&D projects within FP7. The analysis period is set for a 7-year interval, between 2007 and 2013. From the database of SEETCP we refer to the transnational partnerships from two of the four priority axis, namely Protection and improvement of the environment and development of transnational synergies for sustainable growth areas, as they both approach issues concerning sustainable development. From the CORDIS database of transnational projects financed within FP7 we refer to those having as subject sustainable development. We have to take into consideration a limitation of our research determined by the fact there here might also be other transnational projects for sustainable development we did not consider due to lack of a integrated coherent database including all EU partnership projects in the field of sustainable development or because their subject does not does not explicitly refer to sustainable development, but they refer to topics connected to sustainable development.

3. 2. Research results

We present as follows in Table no. 2 the number of transnational partnerships for sustainable development in which each of the selected countries is a partner, whether it is the lead partner or a project partner.

Table no. 2 Number of transnational partnerships for sustainable development in the selected countries

Programme	AU	BG	CR	GR	HU	RO	SK	SL
SEE – Transnational Cooperation Programme Development of transnational synergies for sustainable growth areas	16	25	15	25	25	28	12	22
SEE – Transnational Cooperation Programme Protection and Improvement of the Environment	25	27	24	24	27	31	12	21
FP7 - Sustainable Development	17	8	3	12	14	4	5	10
Total	58	60	42	61	66	63	29	53

The total number of transnational partnerships for sustainable development of the selected countries range from Slovakia (29) to Hungary (66): Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria and even Slovenia are close to the highest value, while Croatia is closer to the lowest value. Overall, we can consider that these figures prove a strong commitment to be part of a transnational partnerships.

These partnerships cover a wide range of topics, presented as follows in an aleatory order: management of natural assets and protected areas, biodiversity, integrated water ecosystems, flood risk prevention, prevention of environmental risks, energy and resources efficiency, promoting a balanced pattern of attractive and accessible growth areas, promoting the use of cultural values for development, tackling crucial problems affecting metropolitan areas and regional systems of settlements, sustainable transport, sustainable production and consumption, sustainable agriculture, civil society for sustainability. This variety of topics shows that sustainable development is a very complex issue, which must be addressed from different perspectives.

Another interesting aspect of our analysis refers to the types of organizations from the selected countries which got involved in these transnational partnerships. We note that, in the same way, many different types of organizations are present in these projects, such as: ministries, other governmental institutions, municipalities, universities, public or private companies, research institutes, NGOs, demonstrating that society, as a whole is preoccupies with sustainable development issues. We also note that each partnership includes at least 5 partners, sometimes reaching about 25 partners or even more, coming from different countries, not only from the analyses region, not only member states. This great diversity, regarding the topics, the number of partners, the types of organizations and the multitude of regions and countries they come from, is the premise of successful stories.

For exemplification, we choose to present as follows a couple of transnational partnerships randomly considered, so that each investigated country is the lead partner (Croatia is not present among lead partners in any of the investigated project databases.).

Table no. 3 Exemplification of transnational partnerships for sustainable development

Partnership Lead Partner/ Project partners	Area of intervention	Project tile	Project objective	Value (mill. Euro)
Austria/ Belgium Germany, France, Turkey, Ukraine	Sustainable transport	LOG4-GREEN	To boost the regional competitiveness and growth in six European regions; Logistics clusters of these regions have joined forces to elaborate and to start the implementation of a Joint Action Plan.	2,8
Bulgaria/ Croatia, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovenia	Energy and resources efficiency	Envision 2020	To analyze the energy sector and the consumption of energy resources in partner countries; To identify the technologies to be used to promote energy efficiency, To identify and develop	1,4

			new innovative financial instruments, To identify road maps and strategies shared by all the City partners involved.	
Greece/ Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Rep. of Moldova, Romania, Slovenia	Promote the use of cultural values for development	SAGITTA-RIUS	To manage heritage assets and safeguard cultural diversity; to mitigate the protection/use conflict; to develop and transfer a practise-validated toolkit to unlock and communicate cultural values; and to improve access to heritage for all.	2,49
Hungary/ Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovin, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia	Prevention of environmental risks	SEERISK	To develop a common methodology for the assessment of climate change related natural hazards and risks; it enhances the awareness of local populations and the efficiency of disaster preparedness.	1.97
Romania/Austria, Czech Rep., Hungary, Italy, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine	Cooperation in management of natural assets and protected areas	BIOREGIO Carpathians	To contribute to the sustainable development and improved environmental quality in the SEE area by developing a SEE marine and river integrated real-time system for monitoring the transportation of dangerous goods, focused on improving maritime and river safety.	2,19
Slovakia/Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine	Prevention of environmental risks	Donauregionen+	To describe the potential of the middle a lower part of the Danube and its importance for the Europe as important development corridor, to elaborate the Joint Donauregionen Development Strategy, considering the scenarios of the ESDP for this part of Europe.	2,08
Slovenia/Romania, Slovakia,	Tackle problems affecting	ViTo	To promote transnational urban governance structures and	2,3

Hungary, Italy, Greece, Rep. Of Moldavia	metropolitan areas and regional systems of settlements		implementing pilot measures to have visible results that improve the attractiveness of towns to foster their economic development in SEE.	
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4. Conclusion

Transnational partnerships are considered one of the most participatory and effective mechanisms to implement sustainable development and enhance international cooperation offering a stronger focus, a clearer division of responsibilities, a wider and broader support, a stronger integration of the international dimension and more effective implementation and monitoring procedures.

Our research on a group of eight EU member states from the South-East Europe highlights their strong commitment to be partners in transnational partnerships for sustainable development. Different kind of organizations (e.g. ministries, other governmental institutions, municipalities, universities, public or private companies, research institutes, NGOs) are involved a significant number of transnational projects (partnerships) covering a wide range of topics directly related to sustainable development, such as: management of natural assets and protected areas, biodiversity, prevention of environmental risks, energy and resources efficiency, promoting a balanced pattern of attractive and accessible growth areas, promoting the use of cultural values for development, tackling crucial problems affecting metropolitan areas and regional systems of settlements, sustainable transport, sustainable production and consumption, sustainable agriculture, civil society for sustainability. Each partnership includes at least 5 partners, sometimes reaching about 25 partners or even more, coming from different regions, countries and areas. This great diversity in terms of approached topics, number of partners and types of organizations (partners) is the premise of successful stories.

The merit of this paper, in spite of some limitations previously mentioned, is to contribute with an original research regarding transnational partnership for sustainable development, setting a focus point on the way to further research.

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