

## TOOLKIT – SUSTAINABILITY

### 1. Environmental sustainability: what is it?



Environmental sustainability: what is it and when did we started talking about it?

Together with social and economic sustainability, the environmental sustainability is one of the most current and important topics nowadays. In the past 200 years, the world's population has grown from 900 million to nearly 8 billion people. And what about now? According to ONU, an estimated **10 billion** people are going to live on our Earth by the end of this century. Considering the huge amount of population, we are still paying **little attention to the human impact on our planet**, to the side effects of technological progress and to the warnings of the scientific community about

climate change. Sustainability, in this sense, is the only way to process this growth and to fully protect climate and nature.

The need for sustainable and environmentally friendly economic growth took shape **in the early 1970s**, when society became aware that the traditional development model would cause the **collapse of the Earth's ecosystem** in the long run. Over the years, environmental efforts by the international community, including the Paris Climate Agreement, have shown concretely that the planet's limits are real. And so, the new development model has based its foundations on respect for the future.

Sustainability was defined for the first time as the condition of development capable of **“ensuring that the needs of the present generation are met without compromising the ability of future generations to realize their own needs”**. This implies a steady and preferably increasing well-being (environmental, social, economic) and the prospect of leaving future generations with a quality of life that is not inferior to the present.

We should keep in mind, however, that sustainability is a **dynamic concept**, in that the relationships between the ecological and anthropic systems can be influenced by the technological scenario, which, as it changes, could loosen some constraints related to, for example, the use of energy sources.

A technical description of environmental sustainability comes from **The Natural Step**, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to innovation through sustainability, which points the focus on four types of reductions:

- Reducing the **extraction** of natural substances from the earth's crust (metals, fossil fuels, etc. )
- Reducing the **production** of chemical substances and compounds (plastics, dioxins, etc.)
- Reducing the physical **degradation** of nature and natural processes (marine and forest habitats, etc.)
- Reducing obstacles that **prevent** people from meeting basic human needs (working conditions, health, etc.).

We are facing right now **tremendous challenges** due to rapid population growth, greenhouse gas emissions, unsustainable energy use, and deforestation, overuse of resources and associated pollution, the loss of biodiversity, and overall we are experiencing a gradual loss of our basis of existence. What can we do?

The answer should be found in an **equilibrium between consumerist human culture and the living world**. We can do this by living in a way that doesn't waste or unnecessarily deplete natural resources, encouraging individuals to live in a way that creates minimal waste and even regenerates some of the resources we use every day.

The only way we can prevent this is choosing a sustainable path in order to grow together with our planet.

## 2. The 2030 Sustainable development Agenda



The community of 193 countries of the United Nations signed the 2030 Agenda whose essential elements are the **17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 subgoals**, which aim to reduce poverty and social injustice and combat climate change, as a function of economic improvement and societal progress.

One of the most important group of goals is focused on **Ecosystem Integrity**: system integrity consists of preserving ecosystems, not only by limiting

emissions of polluting gases but by avoiding any irreversible alteration. Development must take into account not only economic income and the quantity of goods produced but also the quality of the environment and the quality of life, which includes the health, cultural and social conditions of the population. Some of the goals are:

- **Goal 6:** Ensure the availability and sustainable management of **water and sanitation** for all. This goal addresses not only drinking water and sanitation issues, but also the quality and sustainability of water resources worldwide. The warming of the earth's surface, the continued growth of irrigation and other water consumption, the gradual disappearance of aquatic habitats, and numerous pollution phenomena, profoundly affect the global water system and biodiversity. All together we should achieve universal and equitable access to clean water and sanitation and the improvement water quality globally. Businesses must sustainably manage their water wastes from product processing and service delivery.
- **Goal 7:** Increase **energy production using sustainable technology** and at the same time reduce production costs. But above all, greater energy efficiency is required: using less electricity to produce more in all sectors is now needed. We should invest in industries and farms that require less electricity, but also greater efficiency in products: vehicles that consume less and use renewable sources, household appliances that require less electricity, homes that need less energy for heating. Energy is critical in combating poverty through advances in health, education, water supply and industrialization, and combating climate change. Energy from renewables, sun, water and wind is sufficient to progressively meet humanity's energy needs, but there is a need to make them more affordable, favorably target markets, further develop these technologies and upgrade the entire energy infrastructure.
- **Goal 13:** Take urgent measures to **combat climate change** and its consequences. Changing precipitation and temperature cycles affect ecosystems, such as forests, agricultural land, mountainous regions and oceans as well as the plants, animals and people living there. Globally, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions increased by more than 50 percent between 1990 and 2012. The goal includes strengthening resilience to natural disasters caused by climate change and jointly raise \$100 billion a year from various sources to help developing countries adapt to climate change.
- **Goal 14:** Conserve and sustainably use the **oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**. Oceans and seas deeply characterize our Planet, covering more than two-thirds of its surface. They produce half of the oxygen we breathe and absorb 30% of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, mitigating the effect of climate change
- **Goal 15:** Protect, restore, and promote **sustainable use of the Earth's ecosystem**, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, reverse land degradation, and the loss of biological diversity. Desertification must be combated by 2030, and areas affected by desertification, as well as droughts and floods, must be rehabilitated. Regarding the protection of species diversity, Goal 15 calls for urgent measures to stop poaching and trade in protected animal and plant species.

### 3. Dragon Dreaming: a technique for sustainable growth

The Dragon Dreaming method supports the creation of projects that stimulate a **sustainable culture** on this earth. This method aims to spread a new “living model” with a strong connection between human beings and environment in order to build communities and support personal growth at the same time.

This revolutionary method was created in Australia by **John Croft**. Croft noted that there are four steps common to all successful programme:

- Dreaming or having visions,
- Planning
- Doing
- Celebrating and Analysing.



90% of projects fail because they fail the first step (dreaming), and that of the remaining 10%, 90% fail the second step (planning). This means that only 1% of projects succeed in producing something concrete and achieving what they set out to do, and only 10% of projects that are implemented live more than three years. From the desire to learn how to handle these difficulties and the realization that each of these four steps are crucial for the project not to fail, Dragon Dreaming was born.

Each project originates from the **dream of one person, its creator**, and then heads toward the environment and community around him or her; what the creator conceives in his or her mind remains at a theoretical level until the project advances to relate to its **surroundings**. It is at this, practical, stage that the environment responds and reacts

to the project and sends its positive or negative signals that we can learn to take in and manage.

At this point before going to the next step of **planning** we need to ask ourselves a series of questions to turn an idea, a theory, an intuition into something concrete and tangible: what would happen if...? What opportunities and spin-offs would it have? Imagine if we were able to...?. After we have a feedback from the environment and are motivated to implement it, we gather information, going into planning considering alternatives, design a strategy and test a pilot project. The idea leaves the conceptual state and faces the outside world, trying to understand what we need for it to materialize. In the **doing** phase, the idea is implemented becoming something concrete and tangible. Theory has become practical, the project is manifested on a local scale, and changes are produced. If the Commitment grows we know we are going in the right direction, otherwise if it drops there is a blockage somewhere that we need to dissolve. The final step is that of celebration understood not only as celebration, but also as analysis and feedback.

Here, we reconnect with Doing and Dreaming. If Dreaming worked, if Planning worked, if Implementing worked **we feel satisfied**. Often projects that do not work produce “burn-out” and the best way to cure this symptom is to Celebrate! It is through the celebration of our achievements that **we combat individual and group attrition** and reconnect with our dreams: have we lived up to our expectations? Did we hit our goals? Which parts of the project were accomplished well and which parts had difficulties? It is important for both the group and ourselves to celebrate and acknowledge the new knowledge and skills we have gained along this journey.

Dragon dreaming is a design system that is inspired by chaos and complexity theory, living systems theory, fractals, and ancient Aboriginal spirituality and aims to support an ecological transition and sustainable growth. The process consciously combines the use of the two hemispheres of the brain, the right hemisphere, intuitive and creative and the left hemisphere, rational and logical, between the ego's selfish subjectivity and the objective world, between thinking and doing and between being, working and playing. The idea behind it is to meet the three criteria of Dragon Dreaming: be supportive of personal growth, healing and empowerment, and creating a healthy community in which the dreams of all involved are respected and fulfilled, while serving the earth by increasing well-being and building life-supporting structures.

#### 4. Sustainable infrastructures

Building **resilient infrastructure** and promoting innovation and equitable, responsible and sustainable industrialization is one of the UN's sustainability goals, which points to innovation and sustainable infrastructure as essential tools for productivity and income growth, with the goal of better health and education outcomes. Funds from Next Generation EU, the aid plan for the European countries most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, are tied to spending **30% on sustainable infrastructure projects** that have the inherent goal of mitigating climate change and lowering CO2 emissions.

Sustainability is about the relationship between **resilience, functioning, economics, environment and construction**. Living a territory involves building housing and developing transportation networks and services (water, electricity, digital) that intersect with one another. **Infrastructure marks the territory**, changes its landscape, transforms it, unites it, but at the same time divides it, significantly impacting the ecosystem in which it is embedded. Building sustainable infrastructure therefore means developing a service support system in harmony with the environment and landscape. It means respecting people, their work and their safety during the construction phase, improving the lives of communities in economic as well as social aspects, enhancing the landscapes affected by the works, and thinking about a maintenance and care system that can ensure that large constructions can withstand, adapt and improve over time to known events, such as an earthquake, or new ones, such as climate change.

Infrastructure systems are designed to provide supply services that cover specific demands for energy, primary goods, mobility, and information and they interact with communities. There are different kinds:

- **Landscape infrastructure** is a system of open spaces in and around cities that provides a wide range of services to the urban community. It is an **alternative, flexible** infrastructure with the inherent potential of its versatility with an intimate relationship with nature. Landscaping adds local identity, provides opportunities, supports natural habitats and processes, provides water, food, and material resources, and increases a city's resilience in coping with a changing climate and weather events.
- **Transportation infrastructure** includes facilities and systems for passenger and freight mobility. They represent a basic catalyst for development because they are closely related to the urban and rural economies that feed the city. The strong physical presence and resulting **footprint** on the land pose a number of challenges: infrastructure creates connections as well as barriers between nature and local communities. Sustainable transportation infrastructure therefore aims to avoid, minimize and compensate for negative impacts on individuals, communities and ecosystems as they expand.
- **Water infrastructure** provides for the treatment, collection and distribution of drinking water, rainwater and wastewater. Drinking water availability and wastewater management are, historically, key factors in the creation and development of human **settlements**. Water infrastructure performs the function of extracting water from the environment and returning it with minimal impact. In addition to ensuring and optimizing the performance of networks and facilities, planning for sustainable water infrastructure must include management of watersheds and natural processes, with the goal of minimizing construction impacts. Contaminant source control and groundwater recharge are another aspect of water infrastructure, along with efforts to reduce overall water consumption. Designing natural drainage and harvesting strategies for rain and stormwater management is an essential component, particularly in urban environments with extensive water impermeable surfaces.
- **Energy infrastructure** manages and converts available natural resources into energy carriers such as electricity, heat, and fuel, distributing them to end users. Energy security and stability are critical to quality of life, economic development and, consequently, social stability. However, energy production is currently the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions on the planet. For this reason, energy is at the center of efforts to ensure sustainability and resilience of facilities and their supply chain. Sustainable energy infrastructure should ensure constant and equal access to energy while promoting its rational use and efficient practices. It also aims to target the use of natural resources with regenerative capacity, providing renewable and low-emission alternatives.

The role of sustainable infrastructure is therefore strategic. Infrastructure must be considered as crucial from a global sustainability perspective, also assigning them **attractive and qualifying functions** so that they do not penalize any one community over another, and so that they can generate economic-social value without burdening the environment.



## 5. Economic sustainability

The concept of sustainability can be divided into three fields:

- Environmental sustainability
- Economic sustainability
- Social sustainability

Economic sustainability is the basis of sustainable development. As early as the 1970s, people began to talk about economic growth linked to respect for the ecosystem. Economic sustainability can be defined as the **ability of an economic system to generate income and employment to sustain populations.**



This is why economic sustainability underpins any macro area of sustainability, whether it concerns the **preservation of economic, human, social and natural capital.** This is because the principle of any development must be to ensure that future generations have the same availability of resources that we currently have, following a principle of **equity.**

If by embarking on an economic strategy (for greater profit) one does not pay attention to the human and environmental spheres, sustainable development cannot be achieved. Sustainable economy is a type of economy in which the development of society is pursued based on a concept of sustainability from both economic and social and environmental perspectives. The resources used to support our economic development must be able to **regenerate** to be available for future generations. In the sustainable economy, it is the world's heritage that is at the heart and engine, and this heritage is not only based on environmental resources but concerns every form of diversity on Earth, starting with **cultural diversity.**

The concept behind the sustainable economy is the indispensable ability of the "Earth system" to **restore the energies** that have been used in a given period. For this reason, the European Union's new industrial strategy supports the sustainable growth through a series of objectives to be pursued and through some monetary funds in order to:

- Revitalise fossil fuel-dependent territories using the **Just Transition Fund**, which is part of the EU's climate finance plan
- Ensure that EU is directed to environmentally sustainable companies and enhance sustainable financing to companies in the **decarbonization process**
- Use the **Border Carbon Adjustments** mechanism to protect EU companies and jobs from unfair international competition
- Develop **circular economy**, focusing on energy efficiency and energy saving and renewable energy technologies
- Use natural gas and hydrogen as potential technological **innovations**
- Invest in **artificial intelligence** and implement a single European data and digital market
- Define European standards on **cybersecurity**
- Invest more in **research** and development
- Review EU **antitrust** rules to ensure global competitiveness.

All these principles are made for the incorporation of environmental, social and governance issues into investment analysis and decisions. This is the famous **ESG paradigm (Environmental, Social, Governance)** that still benchmarks the entire global financial industry. Essentially, the financial world is asked to invest not only from a risk/return perspective, but also taking into account instances and constraints related to environmental protection.

## 6. Green economy



The green economy is a **model of development of productive activities** based on an assessment of the environmental impact and economic benefits of sustainable growth. Its cornerstones are new energy sources, technological innovations and waste reduction.

It is inspired by ecological sustainability and is already widespread in the world. An increasing number of companies are already investing in sustainability, earning profitable revenues and creating so-called **green jobs**, the employment opportunities born of the green economy. Moreover, the green economy is concerned not only with

production, but also with the **impact** it will have on the environment. Through private sector interventions and public funding, it is intended to reduce pollution, safeguard the ecosystem and biodiversity.

These are the main activities that can be useful from the perspective of the green economy. Which are the main goals? Truly “green” productive activities are not only derived from renewable energy sources or waste recycling systems, but include all **sustainable conversion of traditional sectors**, such as:

- industries, buildings and offices, renovated in the optimum of energy saving, with special attention to fixtures, heating, heat dispersion and much more
- economic sectors that want to reduce the environmental impact in activities of extraction, transportation, treatment and processing of raw materials
- technological innovation for the reduction of waste material in production processes, primarily referring to packaging
- production innovations for the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and other pollutants

**Innovation**, therefore, can actively contribute to **reducing waste and environmental impact**, as well as boosting a green economy. Reducing energy consumption should be matched by increasing energy efficiency and clean energy production. By 2025, electric renewables should reach **50% of consumption**, thermal renewables should increase by about 33%, and biomethane up to 1.5 billion cubic meters. The increase in energy production is expected to be driven by developments in renewable energy sources that have not yet expressed their potential, such as marine energy. Green hydrogen should also play an important role in the future.

Awareness is needed on the part of companies (corporate social responsibility) environmentally friendly tools and technologies. In order to put a true form of green economy into practice, it is necessary to start with an **analysis of the actual and potential environmental damage** that a company might determine over the life cycle of its products.

For example, a production may lead to polluting the air while in other cases one may go on to incentivize the use of less than clean energy. The way in which goods or services are produced can also be changed, repurposed and made less impactful on the environment. Examples can be given here, such as companies that decide to greatly reduce their **packaging, use different raw materials, or invest in clean energy**.

Some huge benefits coming from green economy would be:

- **Increased demand**
- **Reduced costs:** by rethinking the production model, it will also be possible to reduce production and disposal costs. Many companies have been able to see the reduction of waste by repurposing certain departments, and more. Costs related to packaging, misuse of energy and reckless use of raw materials can often be reduced.
- **Development of new professional figures:** project managers, consultants, but also plant engineers and installers. An installer, for example, will be able to do a lot of work in the certification of plants, their general evaluation, and the installation of new systems through which to produce clean energy and reduce pollution. Jobs have also sprung up for coordinators, who are also responsible for guiding the activities of individual workers toward a different mindset.
- **Adopting circular economy**, one of the pillars of green economy.

## 7. Circular economy

To understand what is meant by “circular economy,” we have to go back to 1976, when in a report submitted to the European Commission, entitled “The Potential for Substituting Manpower for Energy,” Walter Stahel and Genevieve Reday explained their idea of a circular economy and its impact on job creation, resource savings and waste reduction.

They said that in a circular economy, **the value of products and materials is maintained for as long as possible. Waste and resource use are minimized , and when a product reaches end-of-life, it is used again to create new value.**

There are mostly three pillars about circular economy:

- Employ **few resources** upstream in the production process and limit the production of new raw material by recycling existing raw material
- Minimize **waste** production (of products/energy that are discarded or wasted)
- Keep individual materials in the production circle **as long as possible**



Circular business models take into account not only the impact on the environment but also the **economic and business** factor. The circular economy also produces benefits on **business continuity**, this is because scarcity of raw materials, sudden fluctuation in material prices and possible supply disruptions make the linear economy model unstable and not at all secure.

Circular economy produces benefits (social, economic and environmental) throughout the production chain, stimulating continuous growth and improvement of all production phases, that of design, production, distribution, consumption, collection, recycling etc. The current economic model (non circular) has been based for decades on the production of new raw materials to circulate the world and the economy, causing enormous environmental risks and generating continuous social issues.

In March 2020, the European Commission presented, under the European Green deal in line with the proposal for the new industrial strategy, the action plan for a new circular economy that includes proposals on designing more **sustainable products, reducing waste, and empowering citizens** together with the development of research in electronics and information and communication technologies, plastics, textiles, and construction.

In February 2021, the European Parliament voted for the new **Circular Economy Action Plan**, calling for additional measures to achieve a zero-carbon, environmentally sustainable, toxic-free and fully circular economy by 2050. Also included are stricter recycling standards and binding 2030 targets on material use and carbon footprint. The circular economy is a production and consumption model that involves sharing, lending, reusing, repairing, reconditioning and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible.

The principles of the circular economy contrast with the **traditional linear economic model**, based instead on the typical “extract, produce, use and throw away” pattern. The traditional economic model depends on the availability of large quantities of readily available and cheap materials and energy. It also calls for measures to be taken against planned obsolescence of products, a strategy inherent in the linear economic model. We are facing an increase in demand for raw materials and at the same time a scarcity of resources. The world’s population continues to grow, and as a result the demand for these finite resources also increases. This need for raw materials creates a dependence on other countries: some EU member states depend on other countries for supplies. More rational use of raw materials can also help decrease CO2 emissions.

## 8. Buy Local!

Among the **FAO's 12 recommendations for sustainable eating** is to favor local (and seasonal) produce. This is a responsible choice for a greener lifestyle.

There has been a lot of talk in recent years about the virtues of **km 0-products** that we can apply not only to agricultural products but generally to **all durable or non-durable goods**. Until a few years ago, food traveled only a few miles to get from field to table. In our days, one only has to go to any supermarket to find foods of any season and imported foods such as exotic fruits, seaweed, and soybeans. Although rich in nutritional properties and tasty, these foods, however, hide a decidedly **eco-unfriendly side**, caused by their great environmental impact: to arrive on our tables they require a long **transportation** by polluting means (cargo ships, planes and trucks), a lot of **packaging** for their containment and a **refrigeration** process for their preservation. All this comes at a high price for our planet: just 1 kilogram of cherries travels by air about 12 thousand kilometers from Chile to Italy, consumes 6.9 kilos of oil and releases about 21.6 kilos of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.



**Short supply chain foods** are products grown and sold close to home: they have traveled little distance to reach our tables, required less energy, packaging and processing for their transportation, packaging and storage. They are less polluting, therefore more sustainable. In addition, they are fresher and richer in nutrients because they do not suffer organoleptic losses associated with transportation, particularly of vitamins that begin to deteriorate soon after harvest. Plus, if it is a handmade item, we need to consider that fewer resources-electricity, water and gas-have been used to produce it than products made in larger companies that require production facilities and factories. In addition to transportation and resources, another major environmental benefit of buying local is packaging. There are many more sustainable alternatives to plastic bags and the old styrofoam and bubble wrap packaging used in

shipping until recently. But if you choose to buy locally, most items sold have much less packaging. And if you bring your own reusable bags, it's even better!

Buying local gives you the opportunity to **talk directly with the people who grew**, handled or made what you want to buy. And so it allows you to ask any questions you feel are important, and establish a relationship of trust, as well as make healthier choices for yourself and the planet. This is very important for **community orgasing**, support to other people and sense of belonging.

Buyin local can help you **save money**. When you buy food or produce from small independent and artisan stores, you are probably buying directly from the grower or producer. This eliminates a huge part of the cost and we can also get additional benefits, such as a small discount. Being a loyal customer can give you access to exclusive promotional sales, or further price reductions.

According to the **Retail Merchants Association**, for every \$1 spent at a local merchant, **\$0.45 is reinvested locally**, while only \$0.15 remains in the community from the same dollar spent at a big box store. Imagine the impact we could have in our communities if we changed our buying habits! Buying from a local vendor means providing direct support. Local, independent vendors rely on local customs, so every purchase they make helps them maintain their business. It also provides an opportunity for the individual to grow their business, develop their skills, and reinvest in their business and it also means rediscovering local traditions by savoring again the typical flavors of the past.



## 9. Fair Trade in sustainable development

Fair trade is a form of trade that aims to guarantee the producer, and his employees, a **fairer price** (ensuring a higher revenue than that received from the traditional market), while also ensuring the **protection of the land**. It opposes the profit maximization practiced by large organized retail chains and large producers. Typical character of this trade is to sell the products to the final customer, limiting the chain of intermediaries.

The **WFTO** establishes **10 Principles** that Fair Trade associations must follow day to day in their work and monitors them to ensure that they adhere to these principles: the creation of Opportunities for Economically Disadvantaged Producers, Transparency and Accountability, Fair Trade Practices, Fair Payment, absence of child labor and labor exploitation in general, commitment to non-discrimination, gender equality and economic empowerment of women and freedom of association, assurance of good working conditions, capacity building, promotion of Fair Trade and respect for the environment.



Fair Trade is practiced mostly by cooperative associations, with a high volunteer presence in rich countries. At the heart of it, there is thus the desire to **counter traditional trade** that relies on practices deemed highly **penalizing for small-scale farmers**. Especially in times of global crisis, Fairtrade-certified farmers' cooperatives are more robust and sustainable when looking at economic resilience, social welfare, environmental sustainability and good organizational management. Specifically, it reports that Fairtrade Standards, the Fairtrade Price system, and producer support programs have a **positive impact** on certified organizations and their communities when compared to non-certified organizations. And this is especially true in difficult and emergency times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Cooperatives come out stronger because they enjoy a good management system, and they stand out for transparency and democratic decision-making processes. The

researchers also noted that good organization promotes sustainability because cooperatives are induced to make decisions related to environmental, social and economic dimensions.

Fair Trade farmers also fare better when looking at **indicators of social well-being**, such as gender equity, workplace safety and health, compared to other organizations. **Women** in Fairtrade organizations for example show more confidence in expressing their thoughts and views. In a focus group used for the study, cocoa farmers from the Kuapa Kokoo organization in Ghana made it clear that women's decision-making power has improved over the past four years. Similar progress was also noted on issues such as health. For example, more structured banana cooperatives use the proceeds from the Prize to provide health services and training, including safety measures for COVID-19.

We often don't think about it, but our purchasing choices have a major impact on the workers who produce what we buy, the community, and the environment. If we pay an **excessively low price** for our purchases, most likely someone else is paying for them instead of us or we are paying in another way for costs associated with production. A derisory selling price may hide **exploitative conditions for workers**, low-quality raw materials, polluting production processes, and destruction of the environment and natural resources. Paying little for a product, therefore, could result in social, environmental and economic crises that would negatively impact everyone's quality of life.

Choosing to buy food and other fair market products may seem unaffordable at the moment, but by paying the right price we can improve the living and working conditions of farmers, ensure a better future for vulnerable communities, and protect the environment and our health.

The climate crisis and the ever-increasing poverty due to the economic crisis resulting from the health emergency make our choices important now more than ever, even in mass retail.

## 10. Social Sustainability

Social sustainability is one of the pillars of sustainable development. It is defined as the **set of actions aimed at achieving equity in society**. To this end, social sustainability implies a diversity of actions affecting mainly legal, economic and cultural levels. In general, social sustainability is achieved through the **elimination of poverty and the realization of basic conditions of dignity** for the life of every human being. It implies the nullification of inequality of benefits among the social classes of a country and among the different populations of the world.



In particular, social sustainability concerns the right of a human being to be able to live in an environmental and socio-economic environment that allows him or her to be **able to express** his or her individuality. This benefit is not only limited to the legitimate interest of each human being, but is linked in general to the broader goal of building of a **better society for the whole community**. This goal of sustainability is also realized by strengthening social cohesion and enabling all citizens to act in political decision-making processes. In addition, social sustainability is also realized by the **protection of minorities**, especially in terms of their rights and the expressive guarantee of their traditions and beliefs, within the limits of constituted laws.

The idea of social sustainability thus implies the right to live in an environment that can **express the potential of each individual**, giving strong importance back to **human value**: in this sense, our common aim should be to overcome inequality and educational barriers.

One of the main concept of social sustainability is the **People Care**. The concept of well-being opens up to an ecosystemic view that includes not only the economic dimension but a general condition of a person's well-being both in the work context and in private life. The workplace can – and should – be seen as a community of care and as an educational context for the social, where the protection and promotion of the worker's well-being is the cultural starting point. The **social value of the individual**, of the worker, must be systematized through the sharing of services, the promotion of well-being, and a better corporate relationship: a social value that is considered indispensable for improving productivity and innovation. The **worker** is the most relevant link between the company and the outside world: precisely because of this, he is the **first stakeholder** every company would do well to take care of. A person, who should be guided, supported, helped to perceive the need for commitment to work. Job training should be understood not simply as training in the use of techniques and tools but in a complex way. Today, the role of training is the **enhancement of the human resource**.

One of the main purpose of this concept is related to health and wellness: thi target is not only prevention but – more in detail – **health promotion**. Only by promoting such practices can we ensure adequate support for people in the pursuit of health in living and working environments, through conditions of increased safety and personal gratification. Another important topic is the **quality of education**: it has social welfare as its focus and the attention is directed toward the widespread right to have equitable, inclusive and quality education. The third point is having a **decent work**: promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation. Knowing safety techniques in work at heights, co-financed spaces or high-risk environments improves the quality of one's work, reducing risk factors.

Nowadays, all **large companies** that constitute public interest entities with an average of more than 500 workers in the case of a group, must submit a **sustainability report** once a year, which is an official document through which to certify the performance of the business not from a financial point of view (like the annual report) but as a report intended for stakeholders and of international scope aimed at confirming adherence to the set objectives. By law, there is no compulsory model, but the **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)** came into being precisely with the intention of meeting this demand through international guidelines to produce a comprehensive financial statement in economic, environmental and social terms. Companies that adhere to such social responsibility initiatives can also boast of the EU label of environmental excellence: **Ecolabel**, a guarantee for consumers. Then there are a number of standards for social responsibility. For example, SA 8000 is an international standard for social and ethical certification of entities, both private and public, developed by SAI. It fights for respect for the basic rights of workers, for the protection of minors, as well as ensuring safety and hygiene in the workplace; in a word, it embraces a whole series of safeguard and welfare elements to be adhered to through compliance with the standards that identify it.

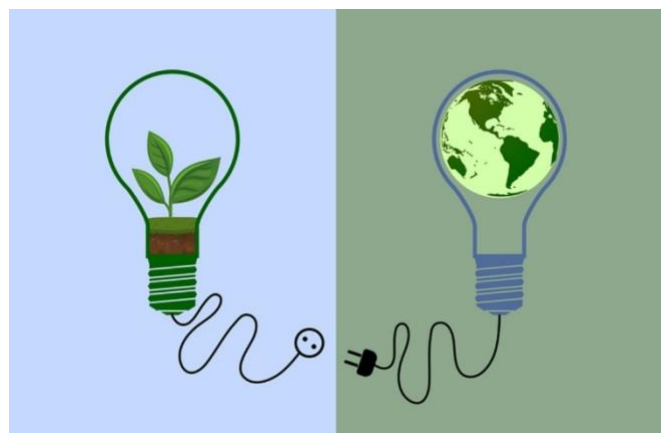
## 11. Local strategies for sustainability

**Local governance** plays a central role in the concrete application or a vision of sustainable development. A very interesting international research was done by the **Arco research center** (Action research for Co-development) which conducted a comparative analysis of some international experiences in defining and implementing local sustainable development strategies in order to draw useful suggestions

In particular, the starting point of this analysis was the fact that **local dimension is where interactions between institutions, organizations and citizens occur** most immediately. Local dimension is also the place where **inequalities**, forms of exclusion, imbalances in power and vulnerabilities are perceived most strongly by citizens. It is therefore the level at which a sustainable development strategy can be defined that reflects the actual needs and opportunities specific to the area. By empowering them to play an active role in policy making, **local actors** can become the effective players in the enhancement, sustainable use and protection of shared economic, social and environmental resources. The analysis looked above all at some cities: Åland (Finland), Basque Country (Spain), City of Buenos Aires (Argentina), Catalonia (Spain), Flanders (Belgium), New York City (United States), North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Palawan (Philippines), Seoul Metropolitan City (South Korea), Valencian Community (Spain), and Wales (United Kingdom). The analysis determined the importance of some **key measures** that should be applied:

- Empower strong **political ownership** of the strategies by the local governments and public authorities involved to ensure effective commitment to their implementation
- **Cooperate** on a local and global level
- Enable real **involvement** of all social actors to empower them to be informed and influence the strategy at every stage, with a focus on the younger generation
- Conduct a rigorous diagnostic **analysis** involving a broad set of experts and stakeholders and comparing with similar contexts/places in other countries, combining official statistics with data and information from new sources (e.g., big data)
- Adopting, through a participatory process, a vision of sustainable development that is simultaneously capable of being **rooted** to the territory, but with a global perspective
- Define tailored and contextualized goals that enable the citizens to understand their importance and value, ensuring a strong link to the SDGs and prioritizing key issues for the territory
- Ensure alignment and coherence with **supranational** and **national strategies** and support metropolitan cities and municipalities in developing their own local strategies from regional ones
- Design a clear, **efficient and transparent governance system** and institutional architecture for strategy implementation, assigning pivotal roles to inter-ministerial / inter-departmental bodies in an integrated approach.

To elaborate a local strategy, is very important to have a clear and consistent definition of **objectives, targets and indicators**, avoiding confusion and misunderstandings and promoting consistency among all levels (local, national and supranational). Local strategies for sustainability need periodic **monitoring** and progress reports that include up-to-date indicators, policies undertaken, and results achieved, considering the possibility of coupling them with voluntary local reviews. On a local level, communication plays a crucial role: it should be a structured, effective and innovative communication strategy to involve the entire local community in the definition, implementation and advancement of the local sustainable development strategy.



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Overall, two elements appear imperative to make local actors capable of defining, guiding, and implementing sustainable development strategies, policies, and initiatives, making the collective goals, resources, and efforts coherent: **strong political ownership and long-term will on the part of local institutions**; and an active, involved, and self-aware local citizenship for sustainable development. Without these elements, it is difficult to begin the process, and it is even more complicated for the strategies adopted to have real consequences for future policies and/or initiatives.

## 12. Cooperation and European Solidarity for social sustainability

Europe has been faced in recent years a number of challenges that have a clear social impact, requiring a comprehensive **response to local, national European and global political action**. We are experiencing the growth of inequality between generations that requires a stronger focus on the planet that will be handed over to young people who will find themselves living in a context of diminishing social, health, economic and environmental opportunities and resources. Climate change, dwindling resources, and food insecurity in the least developed countries increase forced **migration** to more developed countries, which on their side face a huge demographic imbalance, as well as a growing shortage of labor and professionalism not only in industry but also, and especially, in the area of care and personal services. Working conditions, economic growth, equality and the fight against poverty are closely interconnected issues in our nowadays context and it can only be addressed within a **common platform** with a strong European solidarity capable of combining (increasingly green) for decent work, gender equality and equality among workers from wherever they come. More work paid with fair wages can promote the reduction of poverty, certainly in-work poverty, and the reduction of discrimination.



**Territorial disparities** not only between regions and areas in each country, but also between different European countries and between European countries and the rest of the world jeopardize the future development of many territories. Access to basic services, opportunities, and infrastructure (transportation, broadband, health, schools, etc.) is **unevenly distributed** among the population with remote, rural, and disadvantaged regions increasingly falling behind and lacking services. Children, working-age adults and the elderly in such settings are unable to access essential services that can ensure a good quality of life and acceptable health conditions.

**Eradication of poverty and discrimination** are basic social conditions necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development

Goals and cannot be achieved in a context where discrimination against migrants, vulnerable people, women, ethnic or religious minorities, LGBTI prevails. In her inaugural address to the European Parliament, the newly appointed President of the European Commission **Von Der Leyen** said that “the ‘European way’ also consists in using all our potential: our citizens, our talents, our diversity. It consists in creating a more just and egalitarian Union. It will be this idea that will spur me on every single day of my term.” In order to move in this direction and to ensure the necessary interconnection between the goals, President Von Der Leyen asked all Commissioners-designate to ensure, within their mandate, in each of their specific areas, the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular attention to the dimension of social sustainability. Von Der Leyen therefore promised to redefine the **European Semester** to make the Cooperation stronger and stronger.

**European territorial cooperation** is central to the construction of a common European space and a pillar of **European integration**, to which it brings clear added value in several forms: it helps ensure that borders do not become barriers, brings **Europeans closer together**, facilitates the solution of common problems, facilitates the sharing of ideas and best practices, and encourages strategic collaboration to achieve common goals. European social sustainability should be taken as compass and a map: it offers a long-term perspective that transcends electoral deadlines, short-term considerations and simplistic policy choices dictated by considerations of political expediency. They are an unprecedented, cross-cutting effort to promote the development of modern, dynamic economies that help promote a world characterized by **better living standards**, reduced inequality and moving in the direction of ensuring that no one is left behind, while respecting the limits of our planet to be protected and preserved for future generations.

Specifically, there are some main areas for transformational change towards social sustainability in the EU:

- The equitable transition to a **low-carbon**, circular and resource-efficient economy
- The transition to a **socially inclusive** society and economy, decent work and human rights
- The transition to sustainable **food** production and consumption;
- The investment and innovation and long-term **infrastructure** modernization and the promotion of sustainable enterprises
- The promotion of global sustainable development through **trade**.



