

ITALIAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE FOR
REASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE STATE?

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ABSTRACT

Mary Clare Freeman: Italian Sustainable Development Implementation: A Case for Reassessing the Role of the State?

(Under the direction of Holger Moroff)

Sustainable development has become the major paradigm driving international environmental policy and initiatives since its introduction by Norwegian Prime Minister Brundtland in 1987. Despite major progress by the United Nations, the European Union and multilateral stakeholders throughout the world, success of sustainable development is fragmented. The gap between developed and developing countries is widening, initiatives are not meeting aims, and prioritization by actors of sustainable development is uneven. I hypothesize that fragmentation of sustainable development occurs at the state level, and that more data and research on the role of the state should be included in sustainable development indicators in order to improve the execution of related initiatives. The purpose of this paper is to look at the role of the Italian government at the national and regional levels, in policymaking, providing infrastructure and resources, and engaging civil society in the efficient implementation of sustainable development.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFC	chlorofluorocarbons
CO ₂	carbon dioxide
EEA	European Economic Area
ESDN	European Sustainable Development Network
EU	European Union
EU ETS	European Union Emissions Trading System
EU SDS	European Union Sustainable Development Strategy
GDP	gross domestic product
GHG	greenhouse gas
IMPEL	The European Union Network of Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OWG	Open Working Group
SD	Sustainable Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDI	Sustainable Development Indicator
SN4All	Sustainable Energy 4 All
UN	United Nations
UNSDN	United Nations Sustainable Development Network

I. Introduction

The United Nations first provided the platform for the conversation about economic development and its impact on the environment with the 1987 World Commission on the Environment and Development. The United Nations led and continues to lead the global commitment to eradicating environmental and economic issues through sustainable development. Proponents of sustainable development, like the European Union and the United Nations, have highlighted the major successes of this perspective over a short period of time in addressing the environmental, social and economic dimensions that occur in development. In particular, major proponents of sustainable development have committed to initiatives around the globe, reflected in both their internal and external policies. The European Union references its great strides and successes in lowering greenhouse gas emissions, while promoting energy efficiency. The United Nations touts that it provides the platform for the coordination of global actors in creating ‘best common practices’ and strategies to carry out implementation of this model. The United Nations equally points to the worldwide commitment to sustainable development implementation in both developed and developing countries by a myriad of actors¹. Despite the long-term successes highlighted by the UN and the EU, international implementation of sustainable development continues to be uneven on the international, national and local levels. It is my hypothesis that the

¹ Actors include state leaders, government ministries, academic and research institutions, non-governmental institutions and non-profit charities, private corporations like banks or Coca-Cola, civil society organizations, religious organizations, local communities, regional governments, volunteers, etc.

occurrence of uneven implementation of sustainable development at all levels is due to a lack of a comprehensive understanding of the role of the state.

There continue to be negative gaps between the environment, and economic and social dimensions of sustainable development. There continue to be an ever-widening gap between developed and developing countries. There continues to be gaps of commitment from major actors, in effective implementation and monitoring, and even more so in funding. There are even more gaps between goals and actual successes. These gaps not only exist in developing countries, but within developed countries themselves. An examination of these gaps leads to the question: What is causing discrepancies? Why is it that sustainable development is prioritized by some actors and nations, and not by others? And more importantly, what is causing the gaps between goals and actualization of sustainable development initiatives? Further study into the ‘successes’ of sustainable development initiatives that are meeting sustainable development goals reveals that success comes most frequently in developed countries with a “strong” centralized national government. However, when one pushes even deeper into developed countries, sustainable development successes prove to be uneven within a country. The question then became, if developed countries are unable to successfully implement sustainable development themselves, then how are developing countries expected to do so? And again, what is causing the internal gaps of implementation? The shift from focusing on environmental policy to government efficiency came when looking toward the United Nations sustainable development coordination efforts in developing countries, and their clear attempt to encourage a ground-up approach because of a lack of interest and commitment of governing bodies. Although it seems logical that the involvement of the state is integral to the successful implementation of any policy or action, yet bodies like the United Nations do not consider the role of the state. The

shift in the UN (multi-lateral approach) has lead to a lack of research and has diminished the role of the state. The seemingly ‘downside’ of encouraging the bottom-up approach, especially in developing countries, has weakened the efforts to measure and assess the role of the state.

Sustainable development indicators, which drive policy, goals and initiatives, are tailored around the understanding of the interaction among the environmental, social and economic dimensions of a country. This paradigm, which has evolved significantly since 1987, still continues to be the leading environmental framework and development framework of major international actors and governments. But, despite the wide promotion and commitment of this paradigm based upon the environmental, social and economic dimensions of the country, problems remain. It is my hypothesis that sustainable development indicators and the framework do not sufficiently address the crucial role of the state, especially in non-European Union and developing countries. It is my hypothesis that government plays a crucial role in not only policymaking, but in administration of initiatives through infrastructure and resources, and also through civic engagement. Indicators *should* include the role of the state in order to fully assess and understand the impact government has or does not have in efficiently implementing initiatives. The sustainable development perspective claims to integrate the social and economic dimensions of society with the environment in order to benefit present and future generations, but the current format (i.e. conceptualization/empirical work) is lacking because, crucially, it is missing the role of traditional-law making systems. If we revise this perspective to include the role and strength of government, the availability of resources and infrastructure, and how government engages civil society, we may be better equipped to solve problems. Our failure to evaluate these factors has impaired the development of accurate, comprehensive models on environmental challenges. In this paper, I suggest that the inclusion of more data on the political

and legal structures could help to clarify the critical factors necessary in the implementation of effective environmental strategies.

I will begin by defining sustainable development, outlining its evolution in the international sphere, and reviewing its implementation at the European Union level to demonstrate successful implementation exists through policymaking and strong governing bodies, but that its constant evolution demonstrates the persistent gaps. I will then seek to provide a more normative look at the advantages of sustainable development model in that it is a measurable, evolving and multilateral paradigm that has forged great success in eradicating pressing environmental issues tied to development; however, I also seek to demonstrate that the advantages of sustainable development reveal its limitations as these advantages exist within a highly ‘structured’ and political framework. Similarly, the next section will discuss the limitations of the current model, which does not systematically consider the role of strong/poor governance, resources and infrastructure provided by that state, and the role of civil society. I will then use two case studies that focus on implementation of “National Sustainable Development Strategies” in Europe and Italy to exemplify both the strengths and weaknesses of the paradigm. One study compares Italy to the other Southern European Union states; the other compares Italian regions to one another. Finally, this paper will offer analysis of the two case studies to illustrate the importance of the role of government in not just policymaking, but funding and engagement of civil society. While a full investigation with proper data is beyond the scope of this inquiry, I use the case studies to sketch out the hypothesis for future studies to include three key elements of the role of strong/weak governance in policymaking, the administrative role of providing resources and infrastructure, and civil engagement to promote successful implementation. By showing how effective sustainable development implementation

can exist due to strong governance, and ineffective implementation can exist due to improper governance in the same country, I hope to encourage further research to sufficiently address the crucial role of the state in carrying out successful sustainable development initiatives.

II. Sustainable Development

Defining Sustainable Development

Sustainable development was born out of the desire to meet the needs of current populations and to provide development initiatives for countries that were neither destructive to the environment nor to the well-being of citizens. According to Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, international development efforts through the 1980s were considered degrading to the environment. Despite initiatives, developing countries still encountered crippling poverty and inequities, while simultaneously further degrading the already weak environmental systems. Basic needs of impoverished populations, like food, shelter and work, were continuously not being met. More often than not, meeting ‘basic needs’ of populations is achieved through economic growth and stimulus. Economic growth, however, has put greater pressures on resources and ecosystems; for example, increasing industry in an area can result in heavy air or water pollution and the degradation of natural resources or depend heavily on non-renewable resources like coal. Economic growth also does not necessarily mean an increase in living standards: Poverty and economic growth can exist parallel to one another. It is understood that pressure on resources and ecosystems is now, more so than ever, “threatening...life support systems, locally and globally” (Brundtland, 1987, pg.42). Sustainable development, then, intends to harmonize the economic and environmental systems in order to provide the best and most enduring living conditions for all.

A variety of sustainable development definitions exist since the initial introduction, but one of the more encompassing one that works with the context of this paper comes from the *Sustainable Development Strategy* report by Dalal-Clayton and Bass (2002):

In a straightforward definition...nations are able to achieve positive economic and social development, without excess environmental degradation, in a way that both protects the rights and opportunities of coming generations and contributes to compatible approaches elsewhere (pg. 2).

Sustainable development includes the environment, economics and social spheres working together with both long-term and short-term impacts. In the end, however, it is important to highlight that the environment is at the center of sustainable development and that *that* is the driving component.

Sustainable development initiatives, policies and projects are driven by sustainable development indicators (SDIs), which were created to monitor progress of the framework. SDIs are assessed in order to measure the progress toward goals or initiatives. If SDIs do not reflect positive change or successes, the intention is for goals, policies, projects, etc. be realigned or reassessed. There are lead indicators for each of the three dimensions that provide an overall picture, with smaller supporting indicators. The most commonly used lead indicators include: for the economic dimension, GDP; for the social dimension, unemployment; for the environment, CO2 emissions and renewable energy. This paper will specifically use green house gas emissions and CO2 emissions when assessing the environmental dimension of sustainable development, as it is the most commonly used indicator (Pisano & Berger 2014; Bruni *et al* 2011). SDIs are intended to meet the needs of individual regions and nations and vary in number and specificity; therefore there are variations in individual SDIs at the supporting indicator level.

The History and Evolution of Sustainable Development

The World Commission on Environment and Development in *Our Common Future* (1987) laid the cornerstone of sustainable development, through which any ‘real change’ to improve the human condition must come from both sustainable economic and environmental practices. Among many strategies, “critical objectives for environment and development policies” must be grounded in “reviving and changing the quality of growth; meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water and sanitation; ensuring a sustainable level of population; conserving and enhancing the resource base; reorienting technology and managing risk; and merging environment and economics in decision making” (pg. 46). Agenda 21 later expanded these fundamentals of sustainable development in 1992 into a more feasible plan of action. Agenda 21, led by the United Nations, created nonbinding common goals for sustainable development that have been widely accepted by a large majority of UN members. Common goals included eradicating poverty through economic growth, linking the importance of free trade and environment, and the importance of technological advances (Carruthers 2005). It established the ‘three dimensions of sustainability’: social dimension, economic dimension and environmental dimensions. It concretely linked the gap between the environment and the economy that unquestionably exists, but had not yet been conceptualized.

Following Agenda 21, working policies for sustainable development are intended to link all three dimensions, but again, are noncompulsory. Agenda 21 called on all State governments to forge their own National Sustainable Development Strategy and to follow guidelines laid out by the UN and the OECD (Sustainable Development Strategies 2002). The “new global partnership” established by Agenda 21 promotes the crucial role of the State in development, but emphasizes the importance of “aid agencies, local governments and other actors on

environmental development issues in achieving sustainable development” (Borne 2011). It is recognized that while the State is integral to promoting change, not all countries are able to provide similar structures; therefore, the role of non-governmental actors is emphasized and the “role of the national hegemony is tempered” (Borne 2011). It is seemingly the hope that other governments and non-governmental actors will set an ‘example’ for the governments of developing countries and encourage their involvement in sustainable development efforts. The greatest outcome of Agenda 21 is that it is the first and most comprehensive document conceived by a large number of governments about the interaction among social, economic and environmental dimensions (Borne 2011). Agenda 21, though, is considered more of a ‘milestone’ than a concrete plan of action that many countries use to guide policies and other countries choose to ignore.

The World Summit of Sustainable Development met in 2002 following the 2000 Millennium Summit of September 2000 where Millennium Development Goals were established, encompassing a variety of sustainable development elements. The World Summit formulated *The Johannesburg Declaration of Sustainable Development*, which further expanded the understandings of sustainable development. The World Summit of Sustainable Development met to realign goals of sustainable development for the 21st century, acknowledging the relentless difficulties of developing countries and the growing disparities between the developed and developing worlds (“Johannesburg” 2002). *The Johannesburg Declaration of Sustainable Development* recognizes the new impacts that globalization has had on sustainable development initiatives, specifically those affecting the economic dimensions. Globalization has led to “the rapid integration of markets, mobility of capital and significant increases in investments flows around the world” that impedes sustainable development initiatives (“Johannesburg” 2002). It

further included a variety of current threats to sustainable development from chronic illness like malaria and HIV/AIDS to human and drug trafficking. The most significant outcome of The World Summit of Sustainable Development is the accentuation of a stronger multi-lateral approach and a larger community of actors. These actors, additionally, will be held to stronger accountability measures through which progress monitoring will be assessed regularly (“Johannesburg” 2002). The increased emphasis on multilateral stakeholders infers that governments in developing countries are not ‘stepping up’ their engagement with sustainable development even as problems persist.

Ten years following the World Summit and two decades after Agenda 21, the United Nations hosted the Rio+ 20 Conference or the United Nations Conference for Sustainable Development in Brazil in 2012. The Rio+20 Conference was the “one of the largest conferences in history of the United Nations” (United Nations 2015). Major actors from State governments, NGOs, private and public sectors, joined together to renew “their strong political commitment to sustainable development and to promote integration and coherence of policies and the implementation of actions in the social, economic and environmental areas” (United Nations 2015). Rio+20 Conference led to the creation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) building upon Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 17 SDGs created by the United Nations have been reassessed in thirteen different sessions since 2012, showing a high commitment to sustainable development from a variety of actors and commitment to efficient implementation at international level. The history of sustainable development and the international evolution demonstrates the need for reassessment and the willingness to realign and harmonize goals, and has increased in commitment of multilateral actors; however, the increase in multilateral actors may be a marker in the declining roles of governments, and the constant

reassessment might reveal that projects and initiatives are not working as effectively as hoped. Of the governments functioning in the United Nations, the European Union and individual Member States have demonstrated a significant commitment of sustainable development initiatives. The European Union, however, should be considered an exception to the international norm.

EU Goals and Indicators of Sustainable Development

For the European Union, the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) established sustainable development as “a fundamental of the European Union” policymaking, as it was an “overarching objective” (European Commission 2015a). The Gothenburg Strategy of 2001 expanded Agenda 21 and sustainable development to coordinate EU policy-making. The Strategy proposed that policymakers in Europe approach environmental, economic and social dimensions so they “mutually reinforce each other” (European Commission 2015a). The Gothenburg Strategy acted as the centerpiece in fashioning the “Sustainable Development Strategy” of 2006. The “European Union Sustainable Development Strategy” (EU SDS) uses “seven key challenges³” to create a list of ten indicators for sustainable development, which are assessed bi-annually. The European Commission touts its integration of sustainable development strategies into internal policies to create “European sustainability and sustainable communities,” as well as its integration of strategies into external policies to meet the needs of the global community. This seems to be one of the most integral components of the European Union commitment to sustainable development. The EU SDS intends to be a plan to fit every Member State and,

³ Climate change and clean energy; Sustainable transport; Sustainable consumption & production; Conservation and management of natural resources; Public Health; Social inclusion, demography and migration; Global poverty and sustainable development challenges.

therefore, works to engage multilevel stakeholders from national governments and NGOs to citizens and local governments.

The European Union in conjunction with EUROSTAT, has created a list of 100 indicators that measure sustainable development initiatives. Indicators are monitored by EUROSTAT and are assessed and presented every two years. All 100 indicators are presented in “ten themes” that *does* include good governance, but is not as well developed as other themes. For example, three headline indicators support the well-developed theme of “Climate Change and Energy”: “green house gas emissions, share of renewable energy, and primary energy consumption” (EUROSTAT 2013). It is then further underpinned by more explicit actions like “global surface average temperature.” This theme, which is well established, has more developed indicators for monitoring and implementation than “good governance.” By contrast, “good governance” lacks a lead indicator that drives monitoring and further has a weak set of supporting indicators and operational objectives, including “new infringement cases” and “voter turnout to European Parliament elections” (EUROSTAT 2013). The intention is there, but it is weak firstly because a full set of indicators have not been developed in the same capacity as other ‘themes,’ and secondly, because it is only at the European level and not the state. Good governance is *not* a priority of the paradigm as I suggest it should be. More rigorous indicators could include policy adoption by Member States, political parties involved in adopting policies, civil society engagement in voting, civil society polls on environmental interest or on the involvement of government with environment, resource allocation to environmental policy and projects, number of projects led by governments, and so on.

A substantial number of European Union policies highlight the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Policies are focused on resource efficiency, sustainable consumption

and production, sustainable cities and a sustainable use of natural resources. The European Union points to its commitment to sustainable development initiatives through leading the charge against climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (European Commission 2015). A main policy set forth to reduce climate change and promote sound economic development is The European Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). The EU ETS controls approximately 45% of greenhouse emissions of European Union countries. EU ETS reduces industrial greenhouse gases of over 11,000 “heavy energy using installations in power generation and manufacturing industry” (European Commission 2015b). It puts a ‘cap’ on the total amount greenhouse gases that can be emitted by ‘energy installations.’ If the emission allowances are exceeded, hefty fines follow (European Commission 2015b). Such policies are enforced and followed by all 28 EU countries, plus 3 EEA countries. Spearheaded by the government through policy, the collaboration and harmonization among the European Union, Member State governments and industries, has led to impressive results in achieving SDIs⁴. In addition to supranational level policies, each state has created its own sustainable development plan.

Each State has developed its ‘own’ National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) as instructed by Agenda 21: Strategies “should build upon and harmonize the various sectoral economic, social, and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country” (European Sustainable Development Network 2015). Implementation NSDSs are most often carried out by State Ministries. In conjunction with Member States, the European Union has established several mechanisms to insure proper implementation. The European Union Network of Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL) functions as the platform

⁴ Emissions significantly decreased following the recession and the Eurocrisis with the fall of heavy industry in the European Union (Pisano and Berger 2014). This will be referenced later in the paper. Nevertheless, need to look at policy outside of these changes and how policy will play out following the recession and as the economy begins to improve.

through which policymakers, agencies and officers “exchange ideas, and encourages the development of enforcement structures and best practices” (European Commission 2015c). To ensure implementation, the European Community adopted a directive on environmental liability, which relies upon the “polluter pays principle.” The “polluter pays principle,” which does not just apply to CO₂ emissions, requires heavy fines to those actors who are not following environmental guidelines and are posing a general threat to the environment. This directive, in addition to environmental inspections, EU-led assessments and studies, and regular reports from Member States, help guarantee proper implementation. EU citizens and organizations may also submit complaints to the European Commission for further inquiry. All actions are intended to hold Member States liable (European Commission 2015c). The mechanisms in place, like the ‘polluter pay principle,’ demonstrate the successes of strong governance.

III. Advantages and Limitations of Sustainable Development

Advantages

The advantages of the sustainable development paradigm, especially for hegemons like the European Union or intergovernmental groups like the United Nations, are that its indicators and initiatives are measurable; it evolves to meet new challenges and it encourages a multilateral approach. According to proponents, since its introduction into the realm of international development and environmental policy, sustainable development initiatives have led to significant progress in both developed and developing countries. In developing countries, infant mortality rates have decreased, and life expectancy has increased. Both developed and developing countries alike have shown an increase in income equality, improvements in public health and higher levels of education attainment, which have “sometimes closed the gap” between the developed and developing world (Dalal-Clayton & Bass 2002, pg. 6). Proponents argue that these advantages and successes of sustainable development are reasons for using sustainable development as an international framework for environmental policies.

The three dimensions of sustainable development – environment, economics, and social – have allowed governments and actors to create measurable indicators to ‘measure’ progress. The European Sustainable Development Strategy of 2006 ‘called for’ the European Commission to monitor progress. EUROSTAT created Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs), which “are to be developed at the appropriate level of detail to ensure proper assessment of the situation with regard to each particular challenge” (Adelle & Pallemmaerts 2009). European SDIs are

measurable and assessed if specific benchmarks are not met. This reassessment allows for indicators and goals to be “updated and developed” (Adelle & Pallemmaerts 2009). In addition to SDIs at the European level, Member States use similar indicators, but also have indicators of their own that are specific to the country’s needs. The United Kingdom has its own set of 80 varying indicators with specific relevance to the country to assess progress of sustainable development initiatives. The United Kingdom, for example, uses indicators like “Obesity” as a supplementary indicator to social dimensions and “Origins of Food Consumed in the UK” as a supplementary indicator for environmental dimensions (Defra 2013). The measurability of the indicators influences sustainable development policymaking and projects and allows initiatives to change to meet ‘new’ challenges.

Another advantage of sustainable development is that as a fluid model that develops as new ‘problems’ arise, it can adapt with new initiatives (and indicators) to meet the core dimensions of sustainable development. The financial crisis of 2008 posed a particularly unique challenge to sustainable development initiatives, especially promoting both economic and societal development, considering the industrial and financial implications are tied to successful implementation of initiatives. The framers of the EU SDS viewed this drawback as an opportunity to ‘realign’ sustainable development initiatives and link them with the Recovery Plan created to respond to the crisis. The opportunity that presented itself was to ‘rebuild’ in a way that promoted sustainable development and develop a “low-carbon and resource efficient, knowledge-based socially inclusive society” (European Commission 2009 pg. 2). When reviewing the ‘seven key goals’ of the EU SDS, they are a ‘framework’ for long-term goals using the scope of the environment to meet the changes in society and the economy. There is an even greater advantage of putting the environment at the center of the framework and integrating

it into the other two dimensions as environmental trends as of late may not shift as quickly as social or economic dimensions. This allows the model to be more accessible by not just governments, but multiple actors. This multilateral commitment is an advantageous feature to the paradigm, exemplified by the United Nations Open Working Group (OWG).

This UN Rio+20 summit attracted thousands of participants from the private sector, NGOs, national leaders as well as other members of government and multiple other stakeholders (United Nations 2011). Participants in the Rio+20 conference, according to the 2013 “Sustainable Development in Action Newsletter,” volunteered over 200 sustainable development projects from multi-sectoral actors. The Bank of America, for example, has pledged \$50 billion over 10 years to finance “Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy and Energy Access to advance low carbon emission” (Goransson & Li 2013). This project is partnered with Sustainable Energy 4 All (SN4All), which is a United Nations based group. Empirical evidence such as this points to a wide commitment by multilateral and multi-sectoral actors. The advantage here is that it encourages collaboration, communication and harmonization among multiple partners on policies and methods. It allows for a wider variety and greater supply of resources (money, technology, etc.). It “requires full and effective participation, particularly developing countries, in the global decision-making process” as they are the most affected by issues (UNGA 2012). In addition to national and governmental actors, the inclusion of other stakeholders, like NGOs, helps spread influence and information and helps engage a wider group of people. The most notable impact of the multilateral approach, however, is the fact that it reduces the number of actors that could be working against the SDGs.

Limitations

This section will outline the limitations of the sustainable development paradigm, arguing that the advantages of sustainable development exist only in a specific ‘power vacuum’; these advantages reveal the importance of a strong governing body that cannot only ‘coordinate’ the advantages outlined above, but also provide the resources or infrastructure, and engagement of civil society needed to carry out sustainable development initiatives successfully. The United Nations and the European Union alike have recognized that developing countries that would benefit from/need sustainable development initiative. However, implementation of sustainable development within a state could be difficult due to weak governance, poor resources or infrastructure, and engagement of civil society, as traditional law-making policies and systems are necessary for sustainable development (Meadowcroft 2009). The European Union as a governing body has had success with sustainable development, but could be considered an exception to an international ‘norm.’ The relative strength, power, resources and organization of its government puts it at an advantage to other governments, like those of developing nations. For example, the EU has the ability to set regulations as well as consequences – like fines related to EU ETS emissions (European Commission 2015b). Developing countries suffer from government corruption or a lack of rule of law, underdeveloped economies and uneven resource distribution, and declining social capital, which not only hinders sustainable development but most democratic processes.

When looking briefly at the ‘profile’ of developing countries, the need for sustainable development initiatives that address the environmental, economic and social dimensions is high. Sudan for example, like most Sub-Saharan countries environmentally speaking is subject to drought, high temperatures, ecological degradation and varied rainfall; clean water sources are

scarce with approximately 55% of people having access to clean water (Elagib & Elhag 2011). Sudan's economy, primarily reliant upon agriculture, would benefit from sustainable practices in resource conservation and restoration in order to improve output and efficiency, especially during dry season. In addition to economic growth, Sudan has witnessed on-going violent conflicts between groups over access to arable land and water scarcity (Reuveny *et al* 2011). Violent conflict often degrades the environment further and puts pressures on natural resources, but also leads to multiple human insecurities that threaten social and economic dimensions like poverty, access to food and resources, personal and physical security, job security, etc. Sudan is ranked a lower middle-income country and 46.5% of its population is impoverished (World Bank 2015). Sudan *would* benefit from sustainable development initiatives that would address environmental issues to strengthen the economy and social dimensions. Unlike the European Union, Sudan does not have the governmental strength to encourage sustainable development policies or initiatives. Sudan, ranked by Transparency International as 173 of 175 for governmental corruption, and by Freedom House 7 out of 7 or "Not Free" for democratic freedoms, lacks the rule of law, resources and infrastructure necessary for proper governance, let alone sustainable initiatives (Transparency International 2015, Freedom House 2014). This even raises the question of whether or not sustainable development is an immediate concern or even a priority? The United Nations is attempting to mitigate this issue through the Rio+20 conference and other initiatives, but the United Nations Sustainable Development Network reveals that as of 2007, there are no active projects in Sudan.

UN initiatives for sustainability reveal the weaknesses by showing that both commitment and prioritization of sustainable development is lacking from national actors. The UN is using sustainable development projects to encourage international coordination. The weaknesses in

sustainable development projects pledged at the conference are that they are simply voluntary, and are through NGOs, not necessarily governments. There are many potential problems with these voluntary projects, like lack of follow through or the poor allocation of resources, to which there appear to be no consequences. The UN does not have the jurisdiction to penalize countries or groups if targets are not met in the way the EU does. What is disconcerting is the lack of initiative from other major governments and leadership. While it is understood that departments of a state government will be included in the project by NGOs (for example, the Ministry of Health assessing a region that has diseases related to poor water conditions), it does not mean it is a full commitment from the government. The United Nations has stressed the importance of commitment to the goals, especially by developing countries in the “Future We Want Resolution” (Goransson & Li 2013). Uncommitted governments do not lead to policies that implement structural change.

Funding for sustainable development initiatives from the state level is also a concern for successful implementation. The European Union again presents an exception to the norm when it comes to budgeting and infrastructure. Because the European Union is not beholden to provide infrastructure to its Member States in the same capacity as the individual governments of those Member States, there is more flexibility within the annual budget to prioritize sustainable development initiatives. The largest portion of the annual European Union budget is allocated to sustainable growth and natural resources at 39.49% (European Commission 2015d). European Union countries like the United Kingdom spend the largest percentage of their budgets on public services like social protection or education (“Budget 2014,” 2014). Although it is assumed that sustainable development initiatives are integrated into national policies tied to specific spending and there are large percentages of budgets allocated to environmental efficiency, sustainable

development initiatives are not necessarily a budgetary priority. The same can be asked about developing countries – is it a priority? In addition to prioritization, sustainable development initiatives are expensive, and therefore there may not be funding available to allocate to them. *The Economist* estimates that for *all* of the Sustainable Development Goals to be met over the next 15 years would require \$2-3 trillion a year of private and public funds, which is about 4% of the world's GDP ("Development," 2015). Despite funding, the greatest pitfall in promoting sustainability internationally and from the state level is the engagement of civil society.

The "Future We Want Resolution" asserts the integral role of civil society and people in carrying out sustainable development, but also the ability of the government to engage civil society. Working through the lens of Social Constructivism, the 'mutual constitutiveness of the structure and agent model' supports the concept that civil society and governing structures have a reciprocal relationship. Social Constructivists "conceptualize institutions as social structures impacting on agents and their behavior;" in turn, individuals within societies have developed certain norms that impact the development of specific structures (Risse 2009). Therefore, laws can change norms, and norms can change laws. As with most objectives, in order for sustainable development to be successful, people must 'buy in' to sustainability measures. The European Commission expresses the importance of people, and how necessary they are:

Sustainable development will not be brought about by policies only: it must be taken up by society at large as a principle guiding the many choices each citizen makes every day, as well as the big political and economic decisions that have. This requires profound changes in thinking, in economic and social structures and in consumption and production patterns (European Commission 2015a).

Sustainable development requires sustainable behaviors. There are multiple problems when it comes to society adopting sustainable behaviors: lack of knowledge, lack of interest, prioritizing, and lack of commitment. If these problems exist, then it will be difficult to promote sustainable

behaviors. A 2001 study conducted in the United States on the relationship between knowledge and behaviors demonstrates the importance of solving these problems.

In 2001, B. J. Bord *et al* conducted an experiment in United States on the public understanding the causes of global warming and how it impacts potential behavior changes and voting for hypothetical policies. Following surveys, researchers concluded that the “key determinant of behavioral intentions to address global warming is correct understanding of the causes of global warming” (Bord *et al* 2001). It was clear from the survey that “Americans are woefully uninformed” about global warming (Bord *et al* 2001). If people are unfamiliar with what sustainable development is trying to change, then how are they expected to make appropriate sustainable behavior changes? One specific question posed by the researchers about “personal behavior changes that can help reduce the effects of global warming,” revealed that many people were not willing to make major changes like using less air conditioning or heating (Bord *et al* 2001). The answers to this question could stem from various things: People are not willing to change because it is expensive; people are not willing to change because of inconvenience; and people are not willing to make changes because they do not understand the causes of global warming. Regardless of the cause, the ultimate impact is that people will not change unless they have reason to or it is a matter of personal security. If the people do not care, then there is no reason for the policymakers to care to change policy.

IV. Case Study: Italy and Sustainable Development

European Union sustainable initiatives, again, highlight the successes and the advantages of the paradigm, but reveal its international limitations. When narrowing the scope onto Member States, it becomes easier to evaluate and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of this model. Specifically, Italy offers a unique perspective to developed countries that suffer from similar (though significantly less extreme) factors that hurt developing countries: poor governance, underdeveloped economies in varying regions, regions with high poverty and high unemployment, etc. Italian sustainable development policy and initiatives demonstrate both the strengths and weaknesses outlined above that are found in sustainable development implementation. Italian strategies involve data monitoring and analysis with goals that are reassessed regularly. Indicators help dictate policies and objectives, which evolve to changes that occur in the country. Objectives are carried out and monitored by varying stakeholders from NGOs to private research groups and local governments. It engages civil society through meetings and conferences. Despite their initiatives, the effectiveness of sustainable development throughout the entirety of Italy is uneven with a distinct disparity between Northern and Southern regions. Not only are economic and social dimensions suffering (low GDP and high unemployment) when compared with other European Union countries, overall environmental dimensions are inconsistent. When considering how sustainable development initiatives are to be successfully implemented in all countries, especially developing countries, Italy offers a unique understanding.

Country Profile

Composed of 20 independent regions, Italy is the fourth largest country in the European Union, (European Union 2015). According to EUROSTAT, Italy's population is approximately 60.1 million; 45.7% of Italian citizens live in the Northern regions of Italy, while 19.5% of citizens live in Centre regions and 36.1% live in the Southern regions and respective islands (ISTAT 2015a). Population distribution places a majority of citizens in two of the three regions that make up the 'Italian industrial triangle'⁵ in Piemonte and Lombardia. As of 2011, Italy's major industries include 'wholesale and retail trade repair of motor vehicles,' 'professional, scientific and technology,' 'construction' and 'manufacturing.' Approximately 50% of industrial activities occur in Northern regions, while approximately 20% of industrial services come from Southern regions. Unemployment rates in the South by the third quarter of 2014 were 20.5% average, whereas Northern unemployment rates were 8.5% (Industry Services Census 2011). There is a wide gap between GDP in Northern and Centre regions, versus Southern regions: GDP per capita in the Northwest area is 33,500 Euros, 31,400 Euros in the Northeast, 29,400 Euros in the Centre and 17,900 Euros in Southern regions and the Islands (ISTAT 2015b). ISTAT reports that the South is 45.8% lower than Northern and Centre regions.

Italy is a parliamentary republic with a bicameral parliament. The Head of State is the President, while the Prime Minister leads the government. The 1947 Constitution grants "local autonomy and decentralization" of powers to the 20 regions. Governance is further broken down into provinces and municipalities, each with their own competences. Administrative powers were devolved to regional governments between 1972 and 1977. Regions have "exclusive legislative powers" over variety of legislative matters including education, health services, energy

⁵ Milan, Turin, Genoa

production and distribution, coordination of public finances and taxation system, International and EU relations to region. Competences of Provinces include specifically include environmental protections, natural reserves and parks, water refuse and energy resources and waste collection. Funding for regional and provincial governments “are derived from taxation (own-source and shared), grants, and other sources.” Regional governments have “fiscal freedom” when it comes to expenditures and revenues (European Union Committee of the Regions 2015).

Italian Sustainable Development Implementation and Comparison to Southern European Countries

A 2014 quarterly study produced by the European Sustainable Development Network compared the national sustainable development strategies of Southern European countries. The overall analysis of the Southern European countries reveals that Italy is making distinct progress in sustainable development initiatives compared to its counterparts and is ‘inline’ with European Union norms and averages. The study distinctly highlights the advantages of the sustainable development paradigm and initiatives of measurability, flexibility and multilateral stakeholder engagement. It further demonstrates the crucial role of the state and ‘good governance’ necessary in carrying out sustainable initiatives through policymaking, proper resources and infrastructure necessary for initiatives and the engagement of civil society. The study outlines each state’s National Sustainable Development Strategy, compares their implementation strategies, and the successes or failures of meeting the European Union averages.

Sustainable development indicators used in the study to compare Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, reveal that Italy has made the most positive progress in Southern Europe. Indicators align Italian progress with the European Union average of sustainable development. These indicators are used to represent the ‘trifecta’ of sustainable development: society, economy and

environment. The several indicators in this report include Gross Domestic Product, unemployment rate (youth), inequality of income distribution, general government gross debt, greenhouse gas emissions, share of renewable energy in the European Union, and Sustainable Society Index (SSI). Execution of Italian NSDS mirrors other Southern European countries in vertical and horizontal mechanisms, however decouples in policy focus. The Italian NSDS focuses mainly on environmental issues, rather than the combined impact of societal, environmental and economic problems. The intention of Italian policy is to disassociate economic growth and “pressure on the use of natural resources and on the environment,” especially in agriculture, power and transport sectors (Pisano & Berger 2014, pg. 16). This initiative is measured through the use of materials and waste per unit of economic wealth. Italy’s NSDS “highlights environmental dimension with the intention of mainstreaming environmental issues into sectoral policies” (Pisano & Berger 2014, pg. 24). Integration of the environment has generated ‘real’ results, especially in greenhouse gas reduction.

All greenhouse gas emissions of the 4 Southern European countries were higher than the European Union average, but Italy is the only one that has showed a marked decrease over the years to meet Kyoto Protocol. Italy has decreased GHG output by 59 million tonnes since 1990 (Pisano & Berger 2014). Italy has taken varying additional steps to reduce greenhouse gases through policy and taxation (Pisano & Berger 2014; OECD 2013). As mentioned above, its main environmental policies tied to sustainable development include reducing the use of natural resources in relation to economic growth, especially in transportation and industry, which have seen a decrease in GHG emissions. The Climate Policy Initiative (2012) reports that Italian systems of tracking greenhouse gas emission inventory are highly developed and well monitored. Italy has committed to reducing its share of greenhouse gas emissions by 6.5% set by the

European Union. Furthermore, it has included additional industries like agriculture, in the EU ETS, to meet its individual goal of reducing emissions by 13% by 2020 (Climate Policy Initiative 2012). Italy has also decreased GHG emissions by increasing renewable energy usage. Italy increased its share of renewable energy by almost double from 2004 to 2012 from 5.3% to 13.5%. The European Union goal is to be at 20% by the year 2020 (Pisano & Berger 2014). From 2001 to 2012, Italy increased spending in the public sector on Solar PV (photovoltaic which converts solar energy directly into electrical energy) by 100%, wind power by 100% and on biofuels by 300% (International Energy Agency 2013). The “share” of renewable energy in the European Union, and among Southern European States, has increased significantly in the past several years. The European Sustainable Development Strategy (2014) group assessed this was due to increased availability and falling prices of renewable resources and improved “support schemes” for renewable energy like tax-incentives and grants. Infrastructure and resource allocation has allowed such policies and initiatives to be successful in Italy.

Sustainable development policies in the European Union are carried out by national government through both vertical and horizontal policy integration. Each country has a “National Sustainable Development Strategy,” which is overseen, implemented and monitored by the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea monitor the Italian government’s NSDS. The “vertical policy integration” used by the Italian government focuses on integrating strategies across the different levels of government from national government to regional governments down to civil society. This highlights the importance of engaging multilateral stakeholders, including civil society, for successful implementation. Italian vertical integration works to “increase cooperation and coordination among different levels” (Pisano & Berger 2014, pg. 17). Italian coordination functions through a system of conferences. There are

both the “State-Regional Conference” and the “State-Local Authorities Conference” (Pisano & Berger 2014, pg. 17) to discuss issues and roles of the different levels of government.

“Horizontal mechanisms” are used to administer sustainable development policies. This requires the “collaboration between the different ministries and administrative bodies on the same political-administrative level” (Pisano & Berger 2014, pg. 18). The Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea works in collaboration with groups like the Italian Environmental Agency and the ISPRA or the Institute for Protection and Environmental. The OECD (2013) commends the number of broad networks, stakeholders and ‘groups’ committed to carrying out sustainable development initiatives throughout the country. All twenty Italian regions, for example, have developed and carried out individual environment-related plans to meet the needs of their region (OECD 2013, pg. 45). Pisano and Berger (2014) and the OECD (2013) alike emphasize Italian engagement of the public in environmental decision-making.

Civic engagement in the environmental processes by the Italian government comes from both the national and regional levels, which is a suggestion of Agenda 21. At the national level, Pisano and Berger (2014) reference conferences for civic engagement. The OECD (2013) cites nationwide referendums to engage the public,⁶ making Italy one of the few OECD countries to utilize a “consultative-referenda” dealing with the environment (pg. 58). Furthermore, Italy was among one of the first countries to “adopt the Aarhus Convention of 2001” to allow public access of environmental information from the government (pg. 42). One of the main stipulations of the Aarhus Convention of 2001 is “public participation in the environmental decision-making process” (European Commission 2015e). At the regional level, the Aarhus Convention stipulates that public authorities are to “actively disseminate environmental information in possession”

⁶ The OECD (2013) specifically references the 2011 nation-wide referendum dealing with water and the privatization of water management.

(European Commission 2015e). There are regional offices of the ISPRA, which is responsible to the public. Regional administration is further responsible for public engagement. Milan in 2011 used a referendum to vote on the EcoPass to control CO2 emissions from cars, which voters overwhelmingly passed (OECD 2013, pg. 57). Civic engagement and education leads to increased civic interest: a 2007 European opinion poll reveals that 83% of Italians are not pleased with the environmental conditions of their day-to-day lives (OECD 2013, pg. 32). Civic interest, according to mutual constitutiveness of Social Constructivism, impacts policymaking. This is clearly reflected in Italian policy and civic engagement. Environmental conditions in Italy have improved in conjunction with social and economic dimensions, per the framework of sustainable development.

In addition to the environmental dimension of sustainable development, Italy has experienced positive changes in economic and social indicators. At the beginning of the financial crisis, all Southern European countries suffered economically and socially. Additionally, these countries have experienced longer social and economic strains than the rest of Europe. Italy, however, is the only country to have made improvements economically and socially. GDP, an indicator used for the economic dimension, in the other three Southern European countries is significantly lower than the European Union average. Although Italy did see a greater drop in Real GDP per capita compared to Spain and Portugal, at about 1900 Euros, Italy's Real GDP was higher before the economic downturn. Its Real GDP is now approximately the same as the European Union average. Additionally, youth unemployment escalated in Greece and Spain almost above 50%, whereas Italian youth unemployment is above 40%. Overall, unemployment in Italy is lower than Greece, Spain and Portugal, and is closer to the European Union average at 12.2% (Pisano & Berger 2014). These economic and social indicators are used in conjunction

with the environmental indicators to provide an overall picture of sustainable development implementation. Italy, when compared to its Southern European counterparts, has made greater progress in implementation of sustainable development policies and initiatives.

Despite the inferences made toward specific policy successes, infrastructure and the role of government engagement through vertical and horizontal mechanisms in furthering the success of Italy within Southern Europe and the European Union, the study itself does not analyze the active role of the government. The inferences made by Pisano and Berger (2014) only *suggests* the role of government, but does not prove it. This in itself points to the necessity of more data about the role of the state and government to accurately make assertions and create a more palatable argument for similar case studies. The authors of the Italian regional case study following this section offer similar assumptions about government involvement and engagement when they interpret sustainable development data, but do offer information to support their claims.

Italian Regional Case Study

A case study testing the efficiency of sustainable development initiatives within Italy by Bruni *et al* (2011) breaks down the country by region to assess the effective implementation of all dimensions of the model. The study reveals the uneven execution of sustainable development in Italy, revealing drastic differences between the Northern and Central-Northern regions, and the Southern regions. Bruni *et al* (2011) support my hypotheses of the relationship between the role of government and gaps of sustainable development implementation. This study specifically points to the social and economic divide that exists between the two regions and uses this in conjunction with the environment to support the claims of “efficient” versus “inefficient” implementation of sustainable development in Italy by the regional governments. The ‘age-old’

divergence that exists between the two regions dates back to before unification in 1861; scholars describe this divide between the “advanced North and the less developed South” as one that is based upon economics, culture, history, society and even geography (Daniele 2015, pg. 44). Although some Italian scholars suggest that this North-South divide is a bit reductionist and not as relevant to scholarly arguments as it once was, i.e. Putnam, 1993, the Bruni *et al* (2011) study suggests otherwise when dealing with sustainable development. The OECD (2013) supports Bruni *et al*'s (2011) claim of the North-South divergence of sustainable development initiatives by referencing the “marked regional variations” of environmental implementation between the North and South (pg. 13). Furthermore, this fragmentation of environmental initiatives is related to the devolution of Italy's environmental management system to the regional governments (pg. 40). And uneven implementation of initiatives is further exacerbated “by the broader economic and institutional challenges” of the regions (pg. 13). Working from the assumptions made by the authors, the study helps accentuate the positive roles of an engaged government, and the inverse impact of a weak government that has not prioritized environmental policies, nor has funding and infrastructure, and does not engage civil society.

Bruni *et al* (2011) test efficiency of sustainable development initiatives in Italian regions by using similar indicators as the European Sustainable Development Network, including regional GDP, CO2 emissions from transport, and poverty to create a ‘sustainable development index.’ The sustainable development index is put into four models to test the efficiency of all three sustainable development dimensions working simultaneously within the 20 Italian regions. What is concluded from the study is that the poverty and unemployment disparities of the North and South have a direct correlation to the efficiency with which sustainable development initiatives are carried out. Central and Southern regions of Italy, which generally have higher

poverty rates, lower GDP and higher CO₂ emissions, are found to execute sustainable development inefficiently. All four ‘efficiency’ models revealed low levels of efficiency for the Southern regions. Whereas Northern regions and Central-Northern regions which generally have lower poverty, higher GDP and lower CO₂ emissions are more likely to efficiently address all dimensions of sustainable development (Bruni *et al* 2011). The Northern region of *Lombardia*, for example, had 100% efficiency in all models (Bruni *et al* 2011, pg. 52-54). The OECD (2013) describes the “divergence in (sustainable development) performances in regions is linked to differences in wealth, capacities and priorities” (pg. 41).

Bruni *et al* (2011) attributes this discrepancy greatly to political and social interest of regional governments that leans to the North because of industry. Although data is not provided by Bruni *et al* (2011) to support this claim, the OECD similarly supports that Italian environmental policy and initiative implementation is tied to regional governments, citing uneven implementation and commitment to policies in Southern regions (Krzysztof 2013, pg. 1). As described in the country profile, Italy devolved powers and specific competences to the regions between 1972 and 1977. Regional and provincial governments have competency over fiscal responsibilities, as well as direct responsibility for environmental and energy initiatives. OECD blames the discrepancy between Northern and Southern commitment to environmental policy on the devolution of these powers. The decentralization of power from the national government to regional governments has “created ambiguities about respective roles of (national and regional) authorities, and tended to increase gaps and inconsistencies in the transposition of EU environmental directives” (Krzysztof 2013, pg. 3). Italian environmental initiatives are generally emergency responses and short-term initiatives. In the specific review of environmental policy and implementation, the lack of coordination among the central and

regional authorities hinders an efficient and stable institutional environmental framework, as well as the reduction of administrative costs tied to implementation (Krzysztof 2013, pg. 3).

Moreover, a lack of coordination is emblematic of weak governance in specific region. Poor coordination delays the preparation of environmental plans, which interferes with investments and effective management of environmental services, which the OECD (2013) declares most commonly in the South (pg. 45).

Regional resources and spending also impact implementation of sustainable development initiatives. The OECD cites the importance of improving sustainable development initiatives by “better use of public funds and mobilising private investment” in Italy (Krzysztof 2013, pg. 5). Funding for expenditures in regional and provincial governments is “derived from taxation, grants and other sources” (European Union Committee of the Regions 2015). Regions with lower GDP and higher poverty rates will not have the same tax revenues as regions with higher GDP and lower poverty rates to spend on services in general. Therefore, the budgetary capacity to spend on certain initiatives may not be present, and once again may not be a priority. For example, the three regions that include the “Industrial Triangle” of Milan-Turin-Genoa of Piemonte, Lombardia and Liguria have high GDP, low poverty rates and low CO2 emissions. Lombardia, for example, has the lowest CO2 emissions at 1.7 and one of the highest GDPs in the North of 27, 429 Euros. According to sustainable development models that test efficiency, Lombardia has 100% sustainable development efficiency across all tests (Bruni *et al* 2011, pgs. 52-54). Public spending per capita in Italian regions was higher in North-Center regions than in Southern regions in 2012 (ISTAT 2013). These statistics point to the availability of more funding because income taxes would be higher in Northern Regions compared to those in the Southern

region. This demonstrates the relationship between government resources and effective enforcement.

Bruni *et al* (2011) attribute a great deal of the discrepancy between the North and South in the political preference to the North because of the foreign market interest in industry (pg. 47). Although the authors do not offer support for this claim, some evidence can be provided through looking at foreign investment or involvement, and environmental cases. Once again, the “Industrial Triangle” of Northern Italy is responsible for 50% of industrial activity in Italy. The Italian Trade Commission (ICE) reported in January 2009 there were 7,162 foreign companies in Italy, which employed approximately 850,000 employees. Of these firms, 77% operated in the North, and 46% of all foreign firms operated in Lombardia (Vietor *et al* 2011, pg. 36). Additionally, Italy’s main export partners are France, Germany and the United States (European Union 2015). These countries, especially France who is a leader in Europe for resource productivity, and Germany who leads Europe in ‘green initiatives,’ are strongly committed to standards of environmental efficiency (Popova 2013, pg. 74; Thiel 2008). These interactions may encourage more efficient implementation of sustainable development, especially environmental dimensions like CO2 emissions.

The authors further suggest that political preference equates to stronger infrastructure and also greater social pressures to meet the needs of lower CO2 emissions. The latter assertion can be supported by the ‘mutual constitutiveness’ component of Social Constructivist theory. In a 2012 environmental survey of Italy, Italians in Northern regions, especially the Northeast, were more likely to engage in environmentally conscious behaviors and were interested in environmental issues (ISTAT 2014). Over 50% of participants in Northern regions exhibited interest, whereas only 38.1% exhibited interest in the South (ISTAT 2014, pg. 2). This public

interest is further supported by the OECD (2013), which calls attention to the fact that judicial proceedings and cases, in regards to environmental violations, occur more often in Northern Italy than the South (pg. 59). The OECD (2013) states that this is “linked to higher awareness, availability of funds and the location of headquarters of principal NGOs” (pg. 50). The interests of Italian citizens influences policy, therefore policies reflect civic norms, It seems, that the stronger the government and civil society’s interaction with the government, the more efficient the implementation (Bruni *et al* 2011, pg. 47). The authors imply, much like Putnam (1993), that the strength of the government in engaging civil society determines how well services are delivered.

The authors of this study modeled sustainable development indicators to test their efficiency simultaneously in order to provide a more ‘concrete’ understanding of all three dimensions of sustainable development. They further suggest that this model could be used to assess the efficiency of other sustainable development initiatives in other regions, and this methodological approach could be beneficial (Bruni *et al* 2011, pg. 55). However, their analysis of the efficiency model is extremely limited and only offers possible reasons *why* Northern regions are more efficient than Southern regions, which rely heavily upon government and political engagement. It would seem to be even more beneficial to include an indicator of good governance in order to support their claims of “why” Southern regions have less efficiency than Northern and Center-Northern regions. Does efficient government equal efficient implementation of all of these dimensions? If there is a negative correlation, then is it possible to reassess and understand what is causing ‘inefficient’ implementation of sustainable development initiatives?

Discussion

It is fair to argue when comparing Italy at the national level to the regional level when implementing sustainable development that the effectiveness of sustainable development policy and implementation can be linked to traditional lawmaking systems that fashion policy, provide resources and infrastructure, and engage civil society. Firstly, it is not to argue that Spain, Portugal and Greece are not taking initiatives or following through with implementation of their National Sustainable Development Strategies. Nor is it to suggest that Spain, Portugal and Greece have ‘worse’ governments than Italy. Freedom House’s *2015 Freedom in the World Report* rates Italy’s “government function” as strong,⁷ as well as the other Southern European countries, except for Greece.⁸ If anything, Italian government has traditionally been criticized for corruption, lacking transparency, and functioning poorly. The comparison is useful, however, in understanding the strengths and weaknesses found within sustainable development, but more importantly highlights the role of both strong and weak governance. The Pisano and Berger (2014) study highlights the successes of the Italian NSDS from the national level, and compares its successes to Southern Europe. When compared to its Southern European counterparts, the Italian successes have a stronger tie to policy, a better developed implementation and monitoring framework carried out by multilevel governance, and civic engagement through community forums hosted by local and regional government leaders. Narrowing the scope, Bruni *et al* (2011) underlines the successes featured at the national level to the regional level, but demonstrates the fragmentation of Italian sustainable development initiatives between the North and South. When looking inward, Bruni *et al* (2011) reveal that the Italian successes at the national level may only

⁷ Italy scored a 10 of 12 for functioning government.

⁸ Portugal and Spain scored a 12 of 12, whereas Greece scored an 8.

be representative of specific regions and not the entire country. Successes are argued to be dependent upon regional government policymaking and implementation, regional funding, and regional engagement with civil society. Both studies offer similar insight when comparing successes against the backdrop of inadequate implementation.

‘Good governance’ is the authors’ leading grounds for success or lack thereof in both studies⁹. When comparing implementation of NSDS of Italy to other Southern European countries, Pisano and Berger highlight the role of government in a differing policy approach of Italy, the use of vertical and horizontal integration methods for multi-stakeholder approaches and community engagement. The chief difference between Italian sustainable development policies and those in other Southern European countries is that it ‘decouples’ economic growth from the environment, whereas the others attempt to integrate all three dimensions into policy. Germany has previously adopted a similar policy approach to Italy, called “ProGress,” which has decoupled economic growth from environmental degradation. The OECD uses the policy program as an example of what is currently making Germany the leader in green initiatives and sustainable development on its “Green Growth in Action” topics page (OECD 2015). Reasonably this policy choice, which has made Germany a ‘standout’, has similarly made Italy a standout in the Southern European region and points to the success of the policy approach. It may not necessarily be the ‘strength’ of the functioning government, but rather the choices and priorities made by policymakers. The OECD (2013), in conjunction with Pisano and Berger (2014), commend Italy for its integration of the environment into policies, and especially its commitment to prioritizing climate change.¹⁰ But, prioritization of climate change and the

⁹ Although, both authors do not offer data to support their claims.

¹⁰ In 2012, the Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea created a comprehensive policy plan geared toward decreasing greenhouse gases (OECD 2013, pg. 13).

environment, according to the OECD (2013), is uneven within Italian regions and is dependent upon political priorities. Priority further determines the quality of infrastructure and resources required for implementation, as well as the level of civil engagement.

When comparing Italy to other Southern European countries, Pisano & Berger (2014) imply that mechanisms for coordination and implementation of sustainable development are more developed. Described above, Italy has a strong multilateral network of vertical and horizontal implementation and infrastructure to carryout sustainable development. Yet again, the quality of infrastructure and availability of resources breaks down by region: Southern regions more often than not have difficulty with implementation of plans according to the OECD (2013) – partly because of wealth which is lower than in Northern regions and infrastructure, which Putnam (1993) argues are underdeveloped. The Bruni *et al* (2011) study equally suggests the relative efficiency of sustainable development implementation in the Northern region of Italy is tied to preferential political interests, which impact regional infrastructure and resources. Political interests are higher in Northern Italy than in Southern Italy, not just because of foreign market interest in industry as Bruni *et al* (2011) argues, but equally because of “wealth, capacities and political priorities” (OECD 2013, pg. 41). Political prioritization reflects spending, as well as civic norms.

Generally speaking, prioritization of a policy or initiative results in more resources allocated toward implementation and engagement. When directly comparing the discrepancies of economic and social dimensions in Italy with the other Southern European countries, alongside the discrepancies of economic and social dimensions of Northern and Southern Italy, the question is raised about ‘concern’ of the environmental dimensions of both the government and its citizens. It is apparent that civic engagement and interest play a role in the efficiency with

which sustainable development is delivered. If the economy is suffering, as the other Southern European countries are compared to Italy and as the Southern Italian regions compared to the Northern Italian regions, then sustainable development efforts may suffer out of lack of concern for both citizens and the government. The ‘social’ and ‘economic’ situations are far worse in these areas; therefore, attention may not be specifically paid to the implementation of sustainable development plans or the coordination of all three dimensions. According to mutual constitutiveness, preference and norms impact the preference of policymakers and policies. Subsequently, the concern for economic and social conditions in Italy is ‘less’ when compared to its Southern European counterparts. In a Eurobarometer poll of European public opinion, 50% of respondents of the 20 Italian regions polled reported their greatest concern for their region was first unemployment, and about 30% recognize the economic situation (EUROBAROMETER 2012, pg. 155). Polls of other Southern European countries reveal similar opinions, but with higher rate of concern: in Spain, on average 60% of respondents found unemployment to be the first major concern, followed by the economic situation of their region; in Greece, unemployment is the first concern of all for regions with an average of 63.75% of those polled, and then the second concern the economic situation with 42-44% of respondents indicating it (pg. 65); in Portugal, all three regions polled similarly with 64%-76% of respondents placing the unemployment first as the greatest concern, and then 39% of respondents putting the economic situation second (pg. 219). Although sustainable development is intended to address economic, social and environmental dimensions, economic and social concerns are of highest concern in the European Union and especially in these countries, which may cause environmental policies to lack prioritization. Furthermore, the OECD (2013) reports that “according to opinion polls, Italians appear to be among the least satisfied of any Europeans with their country’s

environmental quality” (pg. 14). It is reasonable to argue that because that Italian concern for these two dimensions is less, and concern with the environment is high, there may be less social pressures on policymakers and governments to focus on other pressing issues and put more attention toward the environment. Looking inward to Italy, there are similar patterns in ‘concern’ among citizens when comparing regions. Northern and Central regions on average demonstrated less concern about unemployment than certain Southern regions, as well as concern with economic standards (EUROBAROMETER 2012). This poll, coupled with the environmental poll mentioned above in the Bruni *et al* (2011) study, supports the claim of norms impacting prioritization of certain policies, as well as the reciprocity of civil society and the government.

With these polls in mind, prioritization of ‘CO₂ and GHG emission control’ by Northern regions to Southern regions declared by Bruni *et al* (2011) can be supported by regional expenditures. Carruthers (2005) describes that sustainable development is at the will of the free-market: if there is funding available, money will be allocated to sustainable development. Funding reflects several components of a government, especially financial strength and prioritization. In 2012, the Italian government spent \$3.8 million Euros on environmental expenditures, or approximately .26% of GDP. The majority of environmental expenditures, or 65%, was allocated to preventing environmental degradation and to “safeguard the environment from pollution” (ISTAT 2015c). Looking at the regions specifically, Northern regions spent an average of 4.6% of environmental expenditures on the protection of environment air and climate, whereas southern regions spent 1.7%. Similarly, Northern regions spent on average 8.9% of environmental expenditures on fossil energy management, whereas the Southern regions spent only about 3%. When contextualizing the Bruni *et al* (2011) study, CO₂ emissions and standards are of greater priority to regional governments, therefore reflect the concerns of civil society.

Beyond the mutual constitutiveness of the institution and the actor, direct civic engagement also seems to be a characteristic of both case studies in carrying out successful implementation. The “Future We Want” suggests the importance of engaging civil society in sustainable development, as well as the European Commission (Goransson & Li 2013; European Commission 2015a). Sustainable development requires sustainable behaviors of civil society in order for it to be executed. Pisano & Berger (2014) refer to conferences held by the Italian government to engage all levels of stakeholders in implementation and policy building, including civil society. These conferences are intended to not only seek opinion, but to promote understanding, education and involvement in sustainable development. The breakdown, however, occurs at the regional level when administration and authorities have “fragmented relationships” with social partners (OECD 2013, pg. 58). This “polarization” is caused by a regional “Not in My Backyard” attitude and “stimulated by political motives” (OECD 2013, pg. 58). Once more, Bruni *et al* (2011) suggests that there is greater political and social pressure in Northern regions by civil society to follow-through with sustainable development initiatives; therefore, the government is more likely to do it and people are more likely to commit. This does, however, depend greatly upon the two previous factors mentioned, government and funding.

V. Conclusion

Sustainable development is an all-encompassing paradigm that seeks to solve the problems of individuals and the environment now in order to better ‘the world of the future.’ As it presently stands, sustainable development has a strong base of participants and actors and has seemingly made real “progress” in the decades following its first introduction into the environmental policy schema. But despite the progress, gaps still exist. Although successfully functioning from the top-down in the European Union and Member States, sustainable development seems to be a paradigm that is widely a bottom-up initiative that is working in communities, civil society groups, NGOs, local governments. Policies that are being made toward sustainable development are positive, but are small steps that occur over longer periods of time (like emission standards). Critics of sustainable development state that it is difficult to conceptualize, too broad and that it is difficult to establish consistency, as problems will rapidly change from one generation to the next (Meadowcroft 2009). Therefore, creating policies is difficult and creating policies that will work for every country will be difficult; with this in mind, then comes the difficulty getting other countries to commit to specific policies on the international scale, like the United States.

The Italian case studies offer some insight into mechanisms and efficiency of implementation. While both cases show some successes, these successes are seemingly based upon governance, infrastructure and resources, and civil engagement. Italy, a ‘developed country’ that seemingly has all the ‘traditional systems’ in place, is only able to deliver positive

sustainable development initiatives in certain regions because of political preference that drives preferential policies, developed infrastructure and resources, and positive civic engagement. If a developed country is unable to follow-through on sustainable development, then how are developing countries expected to do so? Countries that need sustainable development initiatives the most lack these “traditional” systems. Therefore, commitment must still continue to come from bottom-up initiatives organized through the United Nations or multi-sectoral pooling and initiatives, and through other countries making individual strides to better what they can internationally, like GHG emissions. Again, the actors working toward sustainable development, reduces the number of those against it.

Both a top-down approach and bottom-up approach are clearly needed to implement sustainable development initiatives, policies and projects, and of course, both methods have demonstrated success. It would be beneficial to include more information of good governance indicators when assessing and monitoring sustainable development, especially related to policymaking, infrastructure and resources, and civic engagement to help clarify these assertions made above. But furthermore, it could further help clarify *if* the role of the state is integral to sustainable development, or if the United Nations and NGOs are taking the appropriate approach of coordinating non-state efforts. In the end, however, the ultimate question is even if the role of the state is found to be beneficial when included in indicators and even if the role of the state is proven to be an integral component to a successful implementation of sustainable developed countries, how can we make countries buy-in? How do we hold governments accountable for themselves? And how do we even assess whether or not sustainable development is a priority? Are the United Nation’s sustainable development activities causing countries not to act for themselves or prioritize for themselves because they know that it will be done for them?

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