# Dissemination of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Regions of the Russian Federation: Readiness Inspection

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Abstract: The development of SDG ideas is significant not only as the implementation of the intention to achieve balanced development but also as a test of the readiness of state and regional systems to be adequate to modern management requirements, including the openness of information. Purpose of the article: to assess the readiness of the Russian regions for the transition to new management criteria, for which three tasks have been set. The first is to show the general process of transition from sustainable development in Russia, including its regions, to the SDGs. The second is to present a monitoring system for evaluating regional processes related to sustainable development. The third is to compare the current system of indicators with the one recommended by the UN. The theoretical basis is the research that is at the intersection of the theories of information openness and social responsibility of the government as a reflection of patron-agency relations. The authors chose the Results-oriented public administration approach (Eisenstadt and Runiger, 1980), (Lindberg Steffan, 2013), (Ugur and Erdogan, 2007), (APJ, 2010), (Yigitcanlar et al., 2019), seen as a manifestation of Good Governance. Three conclusions can be drawn from the study. First, the regions of the Russian Federation (as a whole) are not yet ready for the implementation of the SDGs. Second, a system of experts has developed and monitors trends related to the SDGs: quality of life, level of environmental safety, etc. Third - the system of indicators used to assess the sustainability of regions (cities), reflects the lack of a developed information base and indirectly fixes the lack of political will of the leaders to orient management towards economic, social, and environmental results. So far, in Russia, loyalty to the higher management is valued higher than the development of the economy and the growth of the quality of people's life.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The movement towards sustainable development as a global world trend emerged at the end of the XX century. This meant replacing economic orientations with a wide range of parameters, including social, environmental, and political ones. The development of the course was carried out through the concretization of the forms of embodiment, and therefore new opportunities for the UN for monitoring their implementation by states. Currently, the movement towards sustainability is focused on achieving 17 goals (SDG's), designated as milestones in the UN policy document "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (2015).

In parallel with the specification of the parameters, the development of the trend is carried out through the spread of its ideas to ever lower levels of management: in particular, to regions (cities) and enterprises. For these purposes, similar to the UN control over the development of countries, the monitoring of enterprises and regions, carried out by Governments is being organized. In this context, i.e. combining national development with the transformation of goals in the regions and at enterprises, the UN recommends organizing activities to achieve the SDG's. The purpose of our analysis is to assess the readiness of the regions of the Russian

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Federation to rebuild the guidelines of their management for new tasks

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The development of SDG ideas is significant not only from the standpoint of the implementation of the intention to achieve balanced development, but also as a test of the readiness of systems (both state and regional) to be adequate to modern management requirements, including the openness of information. Now, when, in general, statistical problems are mostly resolved and data collection on most of the UN-recommended indicators is being established, it is important that the regions develop the statistical base by providing relevant information on their websites, as well as publishing it in regional statistical compilations.

The openness of information is recognized as the most important criteria for Good Governance, while its provision is considered the most important duty of the state, one of the principles of implementation of the Public Administration. As a reminder, this term is usually used to denote the modern stage of government. This allowed democracy to reach such a level that the state, within the framework of the system of patron-client relations, is obliged to report to the population, which, in turn, through the institution of free elections and on the basis of open information and annual reports of leaders, selects those candidates for managerial positions who will manage better than others.

The theory of patron-client relations as the basis of the accountability mechanism, including in the framework of the openness of state information, is the methodological basis of the publication. As you know, Sh. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger are considered its originators. (Eisenstadt and Runiger, 1980) This approach was deepened by C. Lindberg (Lindberg, 2013), Stiglits J. (Stiglits, 2002), and many other authors who substantiated the mechanism for the implementation of "vertical democracy". At present, the issues on the topics of both accountability and transparency of the public administration system are of great interest to researchers, as noted by the authors of reviews, for example (Kaya and Yayla, 2007; Mol, 2010; Yigitcanlar, 2019) and others.

The second theoretical trend, actively used by the authors of the publication, is the work describing the role of SDGs (Stiglits, 2014; Allen, 2019), revealing the need for its expansion to the regional level (Olakitan Atanda, 2019) and many others, as well as assessing the availability of information on achievements of a region in this direction (Gardner, 2019).

Let's name two more directions that cannot be ignored. The first is the abundant literature describing the emergence and development of Smart cites (Visvizi, 2019; Joss, 2019; Yigitcanlar, 2019) and others, as well as research on methodological problems of improving city/regional reporting (Huovila, 2019; Greco, 2019; Joss, 2019) and many others. Both directions are of great importance, although they were used in our publication only as guidelines for the future. The first is due to the fact that Smart cities exist in the country, but are little included in the state regional policy. They were formed on the initiative of citizens and, as a rule, were not reflected in the rankings. The second is due to the fact that Russian researchers do not yet have special opportunities for choosing a system of reporting indicators. For them, the main selection criterion is not the appropriateness of the indicator as the best criterion for evaluating, but the real possibility of obtaining comparable data.

## 3 DISSEMINATION OF SDG IDEAS TO THE REGIONAL LEVEL

The UN and OECD rightly see the dissemination of the ideas of the SDGs to the regions as the most important task for the development of the global trend. Indeed, the ideas of sustainable development can then and only then be recognized as actually achieved, when they are accepted by each person, becoming a guideline in the management of all enterprises and cities.

With that in mind, the OECD launched the Territorial Approach to the SDGs project (A Territorial Approach, 2020), which was intended to initiate the implementation of ideas in cities of OECD countries. It is the result of 18 months of political dialogue with 1000+ interested parties. Its conclusions and recommendations were based on specific ideas from pilot cities and regions of ten countries (Germany, Argentina, Belgium, Japan, Iceland, Russian Federation, Brazil, Denmark, Norway), where several interviews and seminars were conducted during 2018-2019. Moscow was named such a city from the Russian Federation, and its mayor Sobyanin S.S. signed an agreement on the transformation of the development goals of the capital, as well as on the readiness to submit annual voluntary reports to the OECD.

For 600 cities and regions of the world that voluntarily joined the SDGs movement, performance indicators and three basic directions were developed: city participation in the national movement (1), a reflection of SDGs targets in the city/regional plans (2), use of SDGs as a means of increasing the responsibility of all interested parties, i.e. both the authorities and civil society (3).

For Russia, the regional aspect of the implementation of the SDGs is especially important, since the country's regions differ significantly in the specifics of their economic and cultural development, and, accordingly, they should have different priorities for sustainability. Having recognized the importance of 17 goals, the Russian government, however, does not seek to extend the new attitudes to the middle and lower management levels. The regions of our country are, at best, at an intermediate (transitional) stage - moving towards sustainable development in general, but many do not implement this either.

We point out, however, that the task of transitioning regions to sustainable development has been set. It is fixed in the Concept of The Russian Federation's Transition to Sustainable Development (The concept of the transition…, 2018), which is constantly being edited, although it does not reflect any special measures to initiate reforms in the regions. Experts admit that only two cities of the Russian Federation are fully prepared to implement the SDGs course: Moscow and St. Petersburg, although the first and so far the only regional report on the SDGs, made in the Rostov region, has been published (Rostov Region).

It should be remembered that the appointment of Governors by the President dominates in Russia, and not the elections. Therefore, trying to control the region, in one form or another they put their proteges, and not those who will be guided by the needs of the population. This circumstance is reinforced by the preservation of centralized budgeting. By transferring most taxes to the top, lower-level executives do not have sufficient funds at their disposal. This prevents them from introducing innovative projects, and also makes them dependent on higher management.

The dissemination of ideas for sustainable development is a reflection of the real penetration of the ideas of the SDGs into the consciousness of the population. So far, this direction cannot be considered a part of Russia's national strategy. The country's government does not track sustainability intentions as part of its regional policy. To some extent, this is explained by the fact that the coronavirus epidemic has temporarily changed priorities.

So, only two cities can join the SDGs Implementation Program, about 50 cities in one way or another take into account the ideas of sustainability when making management decisions, but the majority are struggling to survive without having financial resources, and also, not recognizing these goals as encouraged by the Government and President of the country.

## 4 QUALITY OF REPORTING INFORMATION AS AN INDICATOR OF THE REGION'S READINESS FOR A NEW COURSE

If the government of the country does not yet recognize the importance of transforming the activities of the city (region) in accordance with the new tasks, the experts are actively involved in assessing the changes. They have developed and are implementing several ratings that make it possible to publicly assess the successes/shortcomings of regions in areas related to sustainable development, see Table 1.

Table 1: Ranking system of regional development in the direction of sustainability.

| Initial data and year of creation | Evaluation purpose and indicators |
|---|---|
| Quality of Life Rating. RIA Rating, 2013, http://riarating.ru/regions/ | A comprehensive accounting of indicators that record the actual state of living conditions of people (72 indicators, which are combined into 11 groups). |
| Rating of innovative development of the federal subjects of the Russian Federation. NRU HSE since 2012, https://issek.hse.ru/rir/ | Indicators characterizing the social and economic conditions of innovation, scientific and technical potential, the level of innovation activity, the quality of regional innovation policy. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Rating of the state of the investment climate in the Russian Federation. ASI since 2014 http://asi.ru/investclimate/rating/ | Assesses the efforts of regional authorities to create a favorable business environment and identifies best practices. |
| Rating of fundamental (ecological and energy) efficiency. Interfax-ERA since 2007 (ANO "NERA" until 2010) http://interfax-era.ru/ | Evaluates the work of 5,000 enterprises. Regions are assessed according to 5 criteria - energy and resource, technological and ecosystem efficiency, dynamics of efficiency since 2005, and transparency of business environmental reporting. |
| Ecological and economic index of regions. WWF Russia (World Wildlife Fund), 1989, http://new.wwf.ru/ | The goal is to calculate a comprehensive indicator of the ecological and economic index, which adequately reflects the ecological situation in the regions and the ecological and economic sustainability of their development; calculated based on an analysis of environmental, economic and social indicators. |
| It has been compiled by the public organization Green Patrol since 2008, published 4 times a year http://www.greenpatrol.ru/ru | The goal is to carry out public monitoring and carry out a comparative assessment of the regions in the field of environmental safety and environmental protection. |
| Sustainable Urban Development Ranking. Agency SGM (Sustainable goals Management agency) since 2012, www.agencysgm.com | The goal is to identify leaders and outsiders of sustainable development of the environment and cities to determine the potential for growth and improve competitiveness. |
| Index of Digital Life in Russian Regions. MSM SKOLKOVO, only 2014 and 2015 https://iems.skolkovo.ru/ | The goal is to quantitatively measure the progress of digitalization in 15 million-strong cities, outlining areas of possible interaction for business and administrations. |
| Public infrastructure development index in Russian cities. The Institute for Regional Studies and Urban Planning of the Higher School of Economics has been formed since 2017 https://irsup.hse.ru/ | The goal is to monitor the current state and formed conditions for the development of infrastructure, assess the quality of the city policy in order to prepare recommendations for local government bodies to improve urban planning. |

* The table is compiled on the basis of data from the Institute for Regional Studies, https://irsup.hse.ru/ratingsinfo

Summarizing the information provided, we can conclude that in Russia, as in many other countries of the world, a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the development of regions towards sustainable development and the SDGs is being established. Various kinds of expert organizations, including prestigious scientific (Skolkovo) and university centers (NRU HSE), mass media (RIA rating, Interfax-ERA), independent agencies SGM, public organizations Green Patrol and foundations (WWW), each in their direction and by their own methods organize and publish the relevant monitoring.

Let's describe the results of the ranking of sustainable development of cities, as our profile topic. First of all, let us point out the general conclusions of the experts from AGM, with which we cannot but agree. The first is their recognition of the importance of city monitoring both as indicators of development and as evidence of the authorities' real interest in the implementation of the SDGs. Second, there are only two cities in the Russian Federation: Moscow and St. Petersburg that can really join the global trend. The third is the closeness (absence) of regional information. Our analysis of the websites of regional authorities and the judgments of the experts of AGM coincide - there is very little information, over the years of compiling the rankings it does not grow. Against this background, there is a positive trend in the growth of openness of information from enterprises: the market has become an effective driver of innovation. Fourth, experts point to the forced use of indirect methods of assessment: a survey of residents, content analysis of the press, which, however, cannot replace the data of official regional statistics, and also enhances the factor of subjective assessments.

## 5 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS AND THEIR COMPLIANCE WITH THE DEVELOPED OECD PROGRAM

The experts from AGM, as indicated, did not reveal on the websites of cities (regions) significant and obligatory for all indicators characterizing economic and social development. They were forced to simplify the assessment system as much as possible, see Table 2.

Table 2: A system of indicators selected by experts to assess the development of regions towards the SDGs.

| Comparison options | Indicator name |
|---|---|
| Population (demographics) | Natural growth rate, %; migration growth rate, %; demographic load, %; mortality from socially significant diseases per 100,000 people. |
| Social infrastructure: – Healthcare | The number of doctors per 10,000 population; the number of nursing staff per 10,000 population; the number of hospital beds per 10,000 population; the capacity of outpatient clinics per 10,000 population. |
| – Education | The number of those in need of attending preschool institutions in relation to the number of places in them, %; the number of students in secondary educational institutions per 10,000 population; the number of university students per 10,000 population; the number of winners of the All-Russian Olympiad for schoolchildren per 10,000 of the population under working age, %; the number of computers in schools per 1,000 students; the number of city schools in the TOP-500 rating of the best schools in Russia; the number of city universities in international academic rankings. |
| – Security | The number of registered crimes per 1,000 population, the number of murders per 1,000 population |
| Urban infrastructure: – housing and utilities | Housing commissioning, m²/person; the share of families waiting in line to improve their living conditions, %; renovation of the housing stock, %; share of dilapidated housing, %; equipping of housing with systems of heat, water supply, sewerage, %; average annual output of a heat supply source, thousand Gcal |
| infrastructure: – transport | The number of trips by 1 person on public transport per year, thousand times; the number of victims of road traffic accidents per 10,000 populations. |
| – communication | Internet users per 1,000 people; the number of connected mobile devices per 1,000 population. |

Analysis of the indicators used in the urban sustainability rating confirms the lack of information. The presented list is not only quantitatively small, but it does not meet the requirement of assessing not only sustainable development but development in general. On its basis, it is impossible to identify economically and environmentally leading regions. The authors of the rating, where they could have inserted facts of the region's participation in national events, but, apparently, even these events are not presented on the website in full.

It is clear that the indicators characterizing changes in management, on which the OECD Program is based, is not reflected in the system: there is no indication of the submission of data by the region to the Voluntary Report of the Russian Federation, no data on changes in the planned indicators of regional development towards sustainability, there is no possibility of identifying national initiatives to solve urgent social or environmental problems in the region, in particular, the creation of Smart Cities.

Based on the available opportunities, the experts identified the main clusters of cities: leaders (1), difficult to assess (2), outsiders (3). This division has not changed since 2012, which is typical.

Thus, the first cluster includes twenty cities - the leaders of the ranking. They can be roughly divided into five groups: capitals (Moscow, St. Petersburg), the largest cities of the Urals and the Volga region (Yekaterinburg, Perm, Kazan); dynamically developing regional centers (Tyumen, Krasnodar, Stavropol); centers of the oil and gas industry (Surgut, Nizhnevartovsk, Novy Urengoy); a number of cities in the Moscow region (Krasnogorsk, Mytishchi, Domodedovo, Khimki).

The second cluster is made up of cities that occupy fundamentally different places in different positions. Experts draw attention to the imbalance in the regional organization, expressed in the fundamental difference in the positions of regional centers and cities on the periphery. The strongest imbalance is typical for the cities of the Sverdlovsk region, Orenburg region, and Udmurtia. Their administrative centers (Yekaterinburg, Orenburg, Izhevsk) are in the TOP-50 cities of the ranking, and smaller cities in these regions (Nizhny Tagil, Pervouralsk, Serov, Orsk, Sarapul) are located at the bottom of the ranking.

Twenty cities that took the lowest positions in the ranking included mono-cities of the Urals and Western Siberia (Prokopyevsk, Kiselevsk, Leninsk-Kuznetskiy, Pervouralsk, Nizhniy Tagil, etc.), as well as Crimea and the North Caucasus (Khasavyurt, Feodosiya, Yalta).

The experts from AGM came to the following general conclusions, with which one cannot but agree. Their constant analysis of changes in the position of cities in the ranking of sustainable development shows that the positions of the majority of cities

(87%) change insignificantly, i.e. that only the authorities of 13% of cities reflected on the sustainability course (SDGs). At the same time, their analysis of the dynamics of the ranking results over several years showed that the more balanced a city is in terms of economic, social and environmental development, the more steadily it develops during an economic downturn and has a higher development potential during a period of economic growth in Russia.

# 6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Russian Federation as a whole has fulfilled its obligations to the UN, having presented the Voluntary National Review of the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the Russian Federation in July 2020, for which it received corresponding public recognition. At the same time, our analysis of the websites did not reveal any significant changes in the management of regions in order to reorient them to new goals. The country is implementing the Concept of the transition of the Russian Federation to sustainable development (1998), which is regularly edited. The lack of legislative consolidation of the SDGs by the government of the country predetermines the fact that the regions do not seek to restructure their activities, which experts note.

The absence of not only regional reports on sustainable development, but also the absence of information (formatted according to a unified methodology) on their own websites indicates both a low level of information transparency and an underdeveloped accountability system in the country. There are no reports and places occupied by the region in the ratings; therefore, the population does not have objective information for choosing leaders.

Experts of the Russian Federation, representing the scientific community in different types of organizations, are ready to organize monitoring of the region, but a serious obstacle to their work is the lack of information on the indicators of their development. It seems that the statistics committee should develop a system of mandatory reporting, and think over both a unified methodology for their measurement and the development of the system in order to gradually move from a general assessment of the sustainability of the region's development to a more detailed system of parameters that allow assessing the implementation of the SDGs, including improving the management system taking into account the recommendations of the OECD.

# 7 CONCLUSION

At the moment, Russia has really confirmed its readiness to follow the path of the SDGs by submitting a Voluntary National Report to the UN. We'd most like the next report to reflect not only the country's successes but also problems, including shortcomings in regional politics.

Assessing positively the work of the experts, we would like, on the one hand, to invite them to compile a ranking of Smart cities, as well as to take into account the number of such cities in the general regional reporting. At the same time, we would like to advise to expand the ranking of the evaluated criteria as potentially possible, based on the Recommendations of the OECD and scientists. The data may not yet be available, but regional specialists will see their future landmarks.

The transition to free elections of mayors and governors will not only increase the degree of democratization of governance in the country, but also make the policy focused on the population and not on senior management

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