Sustainable Development
Still haven't found what we're looking for…

Sustainable as spider net,
Integral as a child's spirit,
Coherent as mother nature

Much debate has swirled around the United Nations' (UN) 2000–2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). On one hand, the MDGs established the fight against poverty in the global political consciousness. On the other hand, they maintained a traditional statistical approach to "development" that focused on indicators more than transformation. Critics (such as Blanco Sío-López, 2015; Martens, 2015) have contended that the MDGs reinforced power imbalances and the indicators included in the political program were unattainable by many developing states since the beginning.

Following the emergence of these criticisms, the "World We Want Campaign" was launched by the UN in order to open public participation in the definition of the post–MDG development agenda. Non-governmental organizations, private companies and even individual citizens (through a computer platform) were invited to provide opinions on the global development agenda that would succeed the MDGs. Following these consultations, world leaders met again at the UN in New York in September 2015 to adopt the continuation of their commitment to the fight against poverty, and the so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged on September 25, 2015. The Sustainable Development Agenda, which lasts until 2030, includes 17 goals and 169 targets for global sustainability and human development. In many ways, it reflects an unprecedented global agreement (UN, 2015) that derives from the inclusive agenda utilized to prepare the UN summit.

In fact, the participatory process surrounding the SDGs resolved significant political problems related to legitimacy and responsiveness. *Regions & Cohesion* has already dedicated much attention to sustainable development partnerships and the need for effective relationships among different partners in broader strategies aimed at promoting transformative development.

While the inclusive approach selected by world leaders resolved one set of issues, it also obviously led to a broader agenda with less measurable objectives and implementation challenges. In fact, much attention has been dedicated in the literature on "sustainable development" to its lack of definition. The coalition behind sustainability includes various groups who support a poorly defined term, but implementation has been a challenge. When issues related to rights, responsibilities, costs, benefits, and so forth have been discussed, such as in global climate negotiations, consensus breaks down. The means of implementation in the Sustainable Development Agenda present particular challenges because international norms are passed down to nation-states that are responsible for implementation in association with subnational and local agencies and actors. These proposed partnerships are fraught with difficulties.

Regions & Cohesion has promoted significant debate on "transformative," "universal" or "interconnected" development perspectives. However, we have recognized the need to define sustainable development more clearly in order for the SDGs to be achieved. This special issue emerges from the 2017 RISC International Conference, which was organized in association with the GAMMA (*Innovación para la Integralidad en la Gestión Ambiental del Desarrollo Sustentable Apoyado en Datos Masivos y Aprendizaje Automatizado*) Research Program coordinated by the guest editors of this issue, Miguel Equihua Zamora and Octavio Pérez-Maqueo. The objective of the program is to support innovative methods for the study of the concept of "ecosystem integrity," which is a natural benchmark for measuring the conservation status of ecosystems at a given time and place. It is defined as the state of an ecosystem that arises from its self-organization capacity in accordance with the local physicochemical factors and biological processes. It stimulates development strategies that integrate socioeconomic and ecological systems for the promotion of healthy development.

The focus of GAMMA is to innovate how ecosystem integrity is operationalized through the use of new technologies and big data as well as how it infuses decision-making through the implementation of emerging policy-making norms, such as policy coherence for development. The project aims to highlight our understanding of socio-ecological systems, analyze the impacts of development policies on the health of these systems and inform mechanism design to enhance/preserve ecosystem integrity.

In order to contribute to our attempts to provide more clarity to sustainable development, the GAMMA program, including the GAMMA-UL Chair in Regional Integration and Sustainability, includes key concepts from natural and political sciences focusing on interactions in and between political, socio-economic and bio-physical systems. These key concepts guide this special issue: (1) integrality, which encompasses a system's

ability to regenerate itself; and (2) coherence, which examines the ways through which policy interactions either mutually support or undermine (in the case of incoherence) development objectives. In order to maintain sustainability, coherence is viewed as the means by which integrality is pursued. Policy Coherence for Development also addresses current challenges associated with means of implementation of the SDGs.

The articles included in this special issue all discuss the definition and implementation of sustainable development agendas from the international to local scales. They highlight the two core concepts proposed by GAMMA—integrality and coherence—in comparative contexts, and they address the difficulties that exist in promoting broad international sustainable development norms in local contexts with specific sustainability issues and development needs. While we still haven't found what we are looking for in terms of sustainable development, our desire to pursue sustainable human development remains strong.

The Editors

REFERENCES

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