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GLOBAL AND LOCAL ACTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS AND ATTEMPT AT SYNTHESIS

Abstract: *Sustainable development constitutes one of the key paradigms shaping contemporary public policies, development strategies, and social actions. This article presents an overview and a synthetic analysis of actions undertaken in support of sustainable development at three levels: global (world and Europe), national (Poland), and local (the Małopolska region). The analysis encompasses normative frameworks and top-down policies as well as bottom-up initiatives, the role of education, higher education institutions, and regional partnerships. The aim of the article is not to provide a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of individual instruments, but rather to present an overview of current activities, identify key actors and mechanisms, and highlight the importance of coherent, systemic, and multi-level approaches to sustainable development.*

Keywords: : sustainable development, Agenda 2030, systems approach, education, public policies

DZIAŁANIA GLOBALNE I LOKALNE NA RZECZ ZRÓWNOWAŻONEGO ROZWOJU: ANALIZA I PRÓBA SYNTEZY

Abstrakt: *Zrównoważony rozwój stanowi jeden z kluczowych paradygmatów współczesnych polityk publicznych, strategii rozwojowych oraz działań społecznych. Artykuł przedstawia przegląd i syntetyczną analizę działań podejmowanych na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju na trzech poziomach: globalnym (świat i Europa), krajowym (Polska) oraz lokalnym (region Małopolski). Analiza obejmuje zarówno ramy normatywne i polityki odgórne, jak i inicjatywy oddolne, rolę edukacji, szkolnictwa wyższego oraz partnerstw regionalnych. Celem artykułu nie jest szczegółowa ewaluacja skuteczności poszczególnych instrumentów, lecz przedstawienie panoramy aktualnych działań, identyfikacja kluczowych aktorów i mechanizmów oraz wskazanie znaczenia spójnych, systemowych i wielopoziomowych podejść do zrównoważonego rozwoju.*

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, Agenda 2030, podejście systemowe, edukacja, polityki publiczne

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has occupied an important place for several decades in debates concerning the relationships between economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental protection. At present, it is no longer merely a normative postulate but has become an operational framework for public policies and development strategies implemented at various levels of governance. Its essence lies in striving to balance three interrelated dimensions - environmental, social, and economic - in a long-term perspective. Achieving this balance is not straightforward; it requires continuous practices and activities that enable dialogue among representatives of different scientific disciplines, professions, occupational groups, and age cohorts. Such dialogue, as well as the dissemination of its outcomes and perspectives, is supported by scientific conferences, workshops, and the activities of various associations and foundations. The understanding of sustainable development, especially in terms of everyday practice, continues to evolve [Kostecka 2024].

The implementation process of sustainable development is multi-level and involves multiple actors. Global normative frameworks are created primarily by the United Nations, while their implementation takes place through European, national, and regional policies, as well as through the activities of local governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and educational institutions. In practice, the principal challenge is not the lack of initiatives, but rather their fragmentation, limited coordination, and insufficient linkage between top-down and bottom-up actions.

The aim of this article is to provide a synthetic structuring of the most important frameworks, actors, and mechanisms related to sustainable development across three levels of governance, with particular emphasis on the regional level. The article adopts a panoramic perspective and does not aspire to deliver a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of individual policies; instead, it seeks to identify key elements of the system and to highlight the importance of systemic approaches in the analysis and implementation of sustainable development.

II. METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a review-analytical approach. It is based on an analysis of scientific literature as well as strategic and programmatic documents (including the 2030 Agenda, European Union documents, and national and regional strategies), complemented by a qualitative analysis of selected examples of institutional and partnership-based initiatives. Elements of synthesis and cross-level comparison were applied in order to identify recurring patterns of action and mechanisms conducive to the integration of policies and initiatives across different governance levels.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An Overview of Sustainable Development Actions

A comprehensive *overview* of actions undertaken in support of sustainable development should be presented at the global and European levels, the national level, and at an illustrative regional level (e.g., the Małopolska region).

Global and European Level

The 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals currently constitute the primary reference framework for sustainable development actions worldwide. They function as a common language of objectives and indicators, enabling coordination among countries, regions, and sectors.

A significant role in their implementation is played by specialized United Nations agencies, in particular UNESCO [UNESCO 2020], which promotes education for sustainable development as a tool for shaping competences, attitudes, and social practices. Public-sector efforts are complemented by initiatives engaging the private sector, such as the UN Global Compact [UNGlobal Compact 2021], as well as by cooperation networks facilitating knowledge transfer and the dissemination of good practices, including the RCE Network [UNU IAS 2025].

At the European level, the key framework is the European Green Deal [European Commission 2019], which integrates climate objectives with sectoral policies and financial instruments, thereby creating a coherent regulatory environment for national and regional action.

National Level – Poland

In Poland, the implementation of sustainable development is carried out through national strategies, reporting on progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, and the implementation of sectoral policies. Major challenges include interministerial coordination, ensuring the long-term stability of objectives, and the availability and comparability of data enabling progress assessment. The national level performs an intermediary function between global normative frameworks and regional and local action.

Local Level – Małopolska Region

The regional level constitutes a key arena for translating global and national goals into concrete actions. In the Małopolska region, this is achieved through climate and energy strategies, air quality programs, transport initiatives, and a broad spectrum of educational and social activities.

An important role in integrating actions across different levels is played by RCE South Poland, operating as a regional node of the international RCE network. This initiative brings together universities, local governments, civil society organizations, and public institutions, supporting the coordination of educational and project-based activities and strengthening coherence between public policies and local practice.

A further important component of the regional ecosystem is represented by initiatives implemented within the Małopolska Partnership for Lifelong Learning (MPKU). This partnership provides a cooperation platform for public administration, educational institutions, higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations, and labor market entities. Activities carried out within this framework — such as the Małopolska Learning Day, the conference series “Małopolska Open to Knowledge,” Partnership Mornings, the Educational Municipality of Małopolska program, and the Małopolska Festival of Professions — support sustainable development goals primarily in their social and educational dimensions, strengthening competences, social inclusion, and the adaptive capacity of the region.

Systems Approach and Complex Adaptive Systems

The presented *overview* indicates that sustainable development should be analyzed as a complex adaptive system, in which outcomes result from the interactions of multiple actors, policies, and processes rather than from isolated interventions [Meadows 2008, OECD 2020]. Within this perspective, mechanisms of institutional learning, the capacity to adapt to changing conditions, and the coherence of goals and narratives across governance levels are of central importance.

In order to structure the landscape of activities, the article presents - in tabular form - selected initiatives, networks, and organizations related to sustainable development (table 1). This compilation is neither exhaustive nor normative; rather, it serves as an orientation map facilitating the identification of key actors, thematic areas, and cooperation mechanisms.

Table 1 - Tabela 1

Selected initiatives and organizations related to sustainable development / *Wybrane inicjatywy i organizacje związane ze zrównoważonym rozwojem*

Name / <i>Nazwa</i>	Links / <i>Linki</i>	Keywords / <i>Słowa kluczowe</i>
AASHE – Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education	https://www.aashe.org	education, HEIs, sustainable campus <i>edukacja, uczelnie, zrównoważony kampus</i>
Action for the Climate Emergency (ACE)	https://acespace.org	climate education, youth <i>edukacja dla klimatu, młodzież</i>
Allianz nachhaltiger Universitäten in Österreich	https://nachhaltigeuniversitaeten.at	HEIs / <i>uczelnie</i>
BSR – Business for Social Responsibility	https://www.bsr.org	business, ESG, supply chains / <i>biznes, ESG, łańcuchy dostaw</i>
C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group	https://www.c40.org	city, climate / <i>miasto, klimat</i>
CDP – Carbon Disclosure Project	https://www.cdp.net	ESG reporting, climate / <i>raportownie ESG, klimat</i>
COPERNICUS Alliance	https://www.copernicus-alliance.org	education / <i>edukacja</i>
Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (Europe)	https://www.covenantofmayors.eu	local governments, climate / <i>samorządy, klimat</i>
EEA – European Environment Agency	https://www.eea.europa.eu	environmental policy, data / <i>polityka środowiskowa, dane</i>
EEAC Network	https://eeac.eu	management, counseling <i>zarządzanie doradztwo</i>
Education for Climate Community	https://education-for-climate.ec.europa.eu/community/	climate education, GreenComp <i>edukacja klimatyczna, GreenComp</i>
ESDN – European Sustainable Development Network	https://www.esdn.eu	SD policies / <i>polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju</i>
EIT Climate-KIC	https://www.climate-kic.org	innovations, transformation <i>innowacje, transformacja</i>

European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP)	https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/	circular economy <i>gospodarka obiegu zamkniętego</i>
EUROCITIES	https://eurocities.eu	cities / <i>miasta</i>
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization	https://www.fao.org	agriculture, food <i>rolnictwo, żywność</i>
GEF – Global Environment Facility	https://www.thegef.org	environmental financing <i>finansowanie środowiskowe</i>
Global Ecovillage Network	https://ecovillage.org	local communities <i>społeczności lokalne</i>
GRI – Global Reporting Initiative	https://www.globalreporting.org	ESG reporting <i>raportowanie ESG</i>
ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability	https://iclei.org	local governments <i>samorządy</i>
Inner Development Goals	https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org	competences, transformation <i>kompetencje, transformacja</i>
IRENA – International Renewable Energy Agency	https://www.irena.org	renewable energy / <i>energia odnawialna</i>
ISSB / IFRS Sustainability Standards	https://www.ifrs.org/issb/	finances, standards, reporting / <i>finanse, standardy, raportowanie</i>
PRME – Principles for Responsible Management Education	https://www.unprme.org	managerial education <i>edukacja menedżerska</i>
RCE Network	https://www.rcenetwork.org/portal/	ESD, Agenda 2030 <i>edukacja dla zrównoważonego rozwoju, Agenda 2030</i>
SBTi – Science Based Targets initiative	https://sciencebasedtargets.org	climatic targets / <i>cele klimatyczne</i>
SDG Academy	https://sdgacademy.org	online education <i>edukacja online</i>
SULITEST	https://www.sulitest.org	sustainability literacy <i>kompetencje dla zrównoważonego rozwoju</i>
UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme	https://www.unep.org	environment <i>środowisko</i>
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme	https://www.undp.org	development, SDGs <i>rozwoj, Cele Zrównoważonego Rozwoju</i>
UN Global Compact	https://unglobalcompact.org	responsible business <i>odpowiedzialny biznes</i>

WBCSD – World Business Council for Sustainable Development	https://www.wbcsd.org	business, transformation <i>biznes, transformacja</i>
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Source: Own elaboration

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable development is neither a single policy nor a collection of independent projects, but rather a process requiring long-term, systemic coordination of actions. The conducted analysis indicates the key importance of:

1. multi-level coherence between global, national, and local frameworks,
2. the role of education and higher education institutions as catalysts of change,
3. regional partnerships, such as RCE and MPKU, integrating diverse stakeholder communities,
4. moving beyond fragmented project-based approaches toward systemic approaches,
5. the depoliticization of sustainable development, understood as grounding actions in data, knowledge, and long-term objectives.

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