Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree programme

in Economics and Management of Arts and
Cultural Activities

Final Thesis

Cultural Associations as Catalysts for Sustainable Development: the case of *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*

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Academic Year
2022 / 2023

Summary

Preface

The present thesis represents a thorough and systematic investigation into the central role of cultural associations as catalysts for sustainable development, with a specific focus on the case study of *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*. Through a deep analysis and critical exposition of the concepts of sustainability, culture, and nonprofit organizations, this research aims to make a significant contribution to the understanding of an increasingly relevant topic within the academic sphere and global discourse.

In the introductory chapter, we will proceed to delineate the contextual framework, providing a comprehensive overview of the *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*. This section will encompass a detailed exposition of the organization's history, mission, and activities, thereby laying the groundwork for a complete appreciation of its role in the context of sustainable development.

Chapter two serves as a gateway to the concept of sustainability, which has evolved significantly since its early discussions in the 1960s. Initially closely tied to environmental concerns, sustainability has now embraced a holistic perspective, recognizing the intricately interconnected and globalized nature of our world. This chapter will encompass an exploration of the three pillars of sustainability—environmental, economic, and social—as well as an examination of the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and its associated sustainable development goals, providing an essential reference framework for understanding global challenges and the strategic directions required to address them.

In chapters three and four, we will delve into the significant role of culture and nonprofit organizations within the context of the sustainable development framework. We will analyze how culture can serve as a vehicle to promote sustainable values, interculturality, and mutual understanding. Additionally, it will be examined the crucial role of nonprofit organizations in acting as agents of positive change, fostering connections among communities, and promoting education, awareness, and action for the common good.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, the diverse themes addressed throughout the research will be synthesized to clearly define the pivotal role of a cultural association like *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* within the paradigm of sustainable development.

Indeed, the organization demonstrates its commitment through its ongoing collaborations with both local and international partners, which have not only ensured its sustainability but have also facilitated its growth and influence over time.

Furthermore, even though the association's primary mission does not revolve directly around environmental issues, through its educational activities, it effectively promotes cultural heritage and fosters awareness of the intricate interplay between the social and natural environment in which it operates, eventually enhancing sensitivity toward ecological matters.

The research conducted through a multidisciplinary approach has led to several considerations that will be discussed in the final conclusions. The aim is to make a meaningful contribution to academic literature and the global discourse on sustainable development and the actions required to build a better future for all and the entire ecosystem.

It is imperative to recognize that the environment in which we live is a complex and fundamental resource that must be treated with the utmost consideration, not only in terms of immediate benefits but also with a focus on both current and future generations.

Chapter 1

Presenting *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere, le vigne ritrovate*

1.1 History and scope of *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*

La Laguna Nel Bicchiere is a cultural association born in the middle of the lagoon of Venice, among her little and beautiful islands.

It all started from the idea of Flavio Franceschet who was a professor of the P.F. Calvi middle school to start gathering for the old vineyard in the territory of Venice, which had its relevance in the past. The first activity started in San Francesco alla Vigna and counted on the systematic support of the children of the school for the harvest, the crushing, and the wine production to "cultivate knowledge of the land by perceiving the colors, smells, tastes of the seasons and the earth" [1]. Participation then expanded to other schools, and the locations of the grape harvest have diversified over the years: from San Francesco della Vigna to Sant' Elena, to the former Venetian Gas area, to Sant' Erasmo and finally, in the Scarpa Volo area in Mazzorbo (where the last harvest has been in 2007).

In 2008, Franceschet in his retirement decided to become an association non-profit with the scope of recovering the vineyards, safeguarding a tradition, and protecting an original and almost unknown landscape by revealing the hidden city-countryside relationship of Venice.

Over the years, it has been involved with vineyards in several parts of the island city, without ever becoming the owner of any. Many were the vineyards used in collaboration with the owners who later decided to take full ownership: this was the case for the Scalzi vineyard, the vineyard near the 'Corte sconta' trattoria, the Tana pergola, and the vineyard in Malamocco. The grapes from the latter vineyard were used to produce Merlocco (Merlot from Malamocco) and Luviana Liberate (Trebbiano), while the grapes from the Scalzi were used to produce Arcangeli Scalzi wine.

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[1] www.lagunanelbicchiere.it

At present, the Association cultivates four vineyards: the one of the former Camaldolese convent on the island of S. Michele, those near the church of S. Elena and the IPAV (former IRE) rest home on Giudecca, as well as a vineyard in Vignole. It also produces Bacò delle Streghe wine with grapes harvested from the vines of the 'Alla strega' pizzeria in Barbaria delle Tole.

1.2 Historic context

To better understand the purpose of the association to regain and rebirth the old vineyards of Venice and its lagoon it is fundamental to know a little bit of its history as a Repubblica marinara and city built in strict connection with its society network.

Venice's economic expansion dates to the centuries of the first crusades, when as the issuance of the Chrysobolla in 1082 by Alexius I Comnenus, the Byzantines granted Venice free access to the ports of the different provinces of the empire. Once established territorial domination in the Greek area through the creation of the salient points of traffic, in 1297 the Great Council decided to define a business policy for the city, which had the Arsenal as the hub of all mercantile initiatives.

In addition to textiles and spices, the Maritime Republic had also learned to trade wines from the Mediterranean, introducing them throughout Europe. In particular, during the "little ice age" period from the 14th to the mid-19th century, the Venetians were able to charge wines from the eastern Mediterranean with secular values, turning them into a fashion, a remedy for the body and spirit in a Europe plagued by famine and the Black Death due to the consequences of climate change. (Scienza, 2015)

Venice, with its rich history and unique geography, has had a long and intimate relationship with wine. As a city built on a lagoon, Venice had to import many of its necessities, including wine. The Venetians were expert traders and were able to secure wine from all over Europe, bringing it back to Venice to be consumed and sold.

Venice's affair with wine was not limited to consumption and trade, however. La Serenissima had deliberately chosen not to have a hinterland and to direct its interests onto the sea, according to the motto "coltivar el mar e lassar star la tera".[2] Nevertheless, vines are present both in the city and

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2 Phrase attributed to Tommaso Mocenigo, doge of Venice from 1414 to 1424, the year of his death.

the lagoon: they decorate gardens, adorn houses with shady pergolas, dispose of table grapes and small quantities of wine for family use, or produce the wine needed for religious services.

The city also had its own vineyards and wineries located in the surrounding areas of Mestre, Treviso, and Conegliano. Tended by Venetian farmers, they were a source of pride for the city.

The official end of the Venetian Republic occurred with the Treaty of Campoformio, signed in 1797 by the French general Napoleon Bonaparte, commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy, and Count Johann Ludwig Josef von Cobenzl, representing the Empire of Austrians. Most of the estates formerly owned by patrician nobles and religious orders passed into the hands of the state, which mismanaged them. Agriculture experienced, especially from the second half of the eighteenth century, a situation of progressive degradation (Rorato, 2015).

The situation improved starting with the union of Italy and thanks to the establishment of fundamental institutions such as the School of Viticulture and Enology in 1876 (today the "Cerletti" Agricultural Institute), which will be a point of reference for the renewal of agriculture from then on.

Finally, the international success of the Venetian viticultural sector came after the end of World War II, together with the outbreak of some companies around Conegliano, such as the now renowned Carpenè Malvolti House.

On the other hand, concerning the vineyards that once belonged to religious orders and those that adorned the palaces of the Serenissima, *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* is one of the first organizations that has been working since 2008 to recover the memory of these places. From the brief excursus made above, we can guess how the motivations behind the realization of this initiative, can be traced back to the past of the city itself, its development, and the role it played in the European history of wine.

So, if one of the aims of the association is to preserve and revive the past of these places and cultures, the other one is to involve the new generations in the project. The first time I visited *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*, I recall Renzo de Antonia (the president of the association) stating, "Venice's children are unaware of the origins of the fruits and vegetables in supermarkets." This struck me as a promising starting point for conducting research on our current awareness of the environment around us and the goods we purchase, often without realizing their impact. In Venice,

a city built upon canals and adorned with paved streets, there's little opportunity to witness the cultivation of vegetables. This situation can be misleading, especially for new generations, making Renzo's observation all the more pertinent.

1.3 Structure and resources

The organization is composed of five co-founders: Cesare Benelli, Flavio Franceschet, Mauro Lorenzon, Alfio Lovisa e Gianantonio Posocco, a board made by Renzo de Antonia (the president), Vanna Purisiol (Vice-president), Paola Cogolati (administrator), and the Members: Dora Baharova, Paola Cogolati, Gianni Darai, Renzo De Antonia, Colleen McCann, Giannantonio Posocco, Yasra Pouyeshman, Vanna Purisiol, Simone Salin, Lia Vianello.

Furthermore, it counts several volunteers who come each year from different parts of the world - Europe, Korea, Australia, United States - to contribute and work in the vineyard. They can work in strict contact with the local reality of Venice, a city generally associated only with mass tourism, and provide real sustain to the association while meeting people from different countries and backgrounds, thus raising cultural clashes. Some literature appeals this phenomenon as "volunteer tourism" that could be interpreted as tourism in which individuals willingly choose to engage in volunteer activities as part of their travel experience. It combines the idea of tourism with the voluntary or altruistic aspect of volunteering and the profil of the person who take part of these activities has been defined by S.Wearing as someone who "...for various reasons volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2001)

Although it is difficult to trace a trend on the reasons leading these people to choose this type of volunteer activity over others, here there are some motivations, categorized into four major groups, individuated by Maja Milovanovic in her analysis "Turismo e Volontariato: Stato dell'arte di una possibile forma di turismo alternativo"[3], that generally lead volunteer tourism :

1- Material/Utilitarian Motivations: Driven by education as a primary motivation, volunteer tourists aim to gain knowledge, acquire new abilities, and accumulate

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[3] Maya Milovanovic, Turismo e volontariato Stato dell'arte di una possibile forma di turismo alternativo [tesi di laurea], anno accademico 2011/2012, Università Ca'Foscari, Venezia

intellectual insights to utilize as cultural assets in their professional endeavors or to share with colleagues and employee. These involve the expectation of obtaining rewards, which may not be necessary monetary but can contribute to prosperity in the future. The potential advantages associated with voluntary tourism in this context consist of knowledge acquisition, hands-on experience, technical expertise, networking opportunities, enriching one's resume, and enhancing career prospects or earning potential upon reintegration into their home community.

2- Affective and Social Motivations: This motivation category revolves around the desire for social interactions, relationships, and friendships during the voluntary tourism experience. Voluntary tourists prefer group activities that involve sharing and solidarity. They may also seek approval from specific social groups to gain prestige and enhance their social influence. These motivations are linked to fulfilling social and psychological needs, self-realization, esteem, and belonging, which align with the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

3- Altruistic and Solidarity Motivations: These motivations revolve around global concerns and go beyond personal interests. They are driven by the desire to make contributions through community actions, research, conservation, development efforts, or other forms of support to causes that align with participants' values of civic or environmental responsibility. In this context, tourists seek to fulfill altruistic and solidarity-oriented needs. Many volunteers are motivated by concerns for the common good or specific situations of hardship, aiming to assist individuals, social groups, or ecosystems in need. This often leads to the establishment of intricate give-and-take relationships with the local community. Ultimately, there is personal satisfaction derived from performing a "good deed" and contributing to a cause of social justice. This personal benefit aligns with the fulfillment of needs situated at the highest levels of Maslow's hierarchy.

4- Other Motivations: Other motivations for voluntary tourists are influenced by the location of their volunteer work and the nature of their volunteer activities. This category encompasses several factors. For instance, some volunteers may be driven by the desire to gain certain advantages associated with assuming a volunteer role, such as wearing a uniform that bestows authority and prestige, or the opportunity to enjoy an economical vacation. Others may be motivated by the need to break free from their

daily routines or to undergo a transformative experience. Additionally, the quest for novelty and a sense of encountering the "other" can be factors in this category. It's important to note that the concept of the "experience economy," which places emphasis on the emotional aspects of consumption, comes into play here. In this evolving economic paradigm, tourists construct their identities and nurture their personalities and a sense of belonging to specific social groups during their leisure and holiday experiences. They choose destinations and types of tourism products that align with their self-concept, whether it's their present self or their ideal self. This experiential perspective on tourist consumption also reflects the pursuit of identity and "hedonistic" products that fulfill aspirations and the need for self-fulfillment, which are characteristic of the "Generation Y." The ideals and culture of this generation differ from those of previous generations and are significantly influenced by exposure to media and modern communication tools facilitated by technology and the internet.

Considering the factors outlined above, it becomes evident why a place like *La Laguna nel Bicchiere* could attract a diverse range of people, including volunteer tourists. Indeed, inside *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*, a motivated person can all play a valuable role and discover their own niche, deriving a profound sense of fulfillment.

Besides external volunteers, that may only participate at one harvest or two, *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* relies on the support of some specialized workers, that offer them to provide their expertise for free or slightly less.

Managing a vineyard can be a complex and challenging task, requiring careful attention to a range of factors including soil health, weather patterns, grape varieties, and pest control, among others. In this regard, they have the advantage of relying on professional enologists and pruners who bring specialized knowledge and skills in the fields of viticulture and agronomy, ensuring the ongoing cultivation and production of high-quality, healthy wine.

The idea behind the association is in fact that each member of the organization but also outside the organization (such as the local community) can contribute with their own expertise and skills. This concept highlights the critical significance of attracting individuals possessing specialized knowledge and experience. This imperative arises from the acknowledgment that the association's

accomplishments and efficiency are greatly reliant on the insights, skills, and expertise that experts can bring to the table.

For instance, activities extending beyond the primary tasks of vine cultivation and wine production encompass tasks such as website programming, grape transportation between islands, and the design and creation of labels require special attribute that not everyone can have, but that are necessary to overcome the task.

The resources they manage to acquire result from the cooperation of local workers, who voluntarily offer to carry out these occasional tasks as acts of solidarity towards the organization. In return, they are reimbursed only for their actual expenses incurred, such as the cost of fuel in the case of boat transportation.

In these terms, they do not possess all the physical and non-physical assets needed, but they entrust their local network, whose key benefit is to supply them with expertise and courtesies.

Regarding the logistics, the staff's responsibilities are divided into four main sections: vineyards, winery, education, and cultural activities. While each section involves distinct tasks, it's important to note that the organization operates without a strict hierarchy, emphasizing a collaborative and mutually supportive approach among its members.
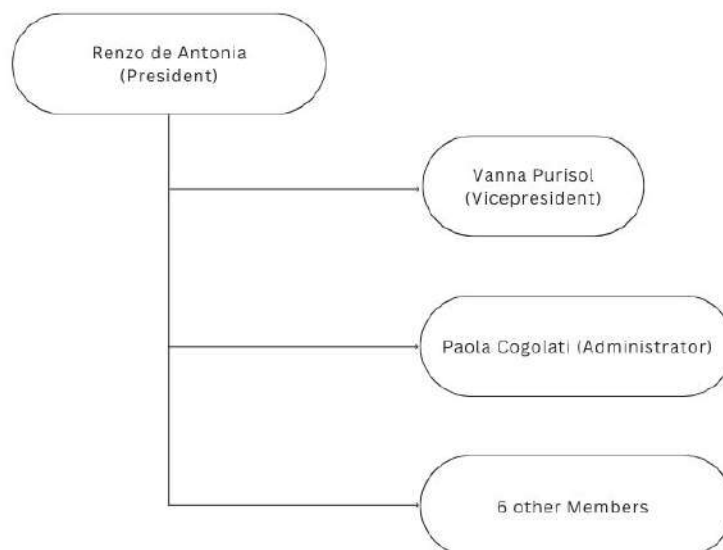

Figure 1 Staff structure of Laguna nel bicchiere-Le vigne ritrovate

Key activities are:

-Restoration of lagoon vineyards and their maintenance

-The annual grape harvest for each vineyard

-Cellar work

-The production of wines

-Extensive educational activities with local schools.

1.3.1　Collaborations

In addition to the vineyard activities, collateral projects are organized in collaboration with other organizations. Over time, *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* has nurtured a robust network that has empowered it to engage in numerous projects alongside diverse collaborators such as: *Chiostro di Sant'Elena, Comitato Bragora, La Biennale, Momos, Morion, Non solo verde, Palazzetto Bru Zane, Progetto Move coltivando il paesaggio, Rialto Novo, San Servolo Servizi, Slow Food Venezia, Spiazzi Verdi, Il Nuovo trionfo, Vida, Venice Calls.*

Furthermore, they actively take part in local festivals and fairs such as: *Festa del carciofo violetto a Sant'Erasmo, Festa del mosto, Isole in rete, Festa della decrescita alle Zattere, Festival delle arti in Giudecca* and *Ombre coraggiose a Forte Marghera*.

They collaborate with Slow Food for the Festa di San Giovanni in Bragora and for Terra Madreat in the Serra dei Giardini di Castello involving school groups and setting up workshops on food and nature with students and citizens.

Ultimately, they remain actively engaged in seeking and pursuing new opportunities for collaboration and projects. One notable endeavor they have been participating in since June 2019 is their involvement with U.V.A., which stands for Urban Vineyards' Association.
This association, in alignment with *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*'s vision, serves to safeguard the rural, historical, and natural heritage embodied by urban vineyards, at international level. Comprising vineyards from Italy, France, Spain, Greece, and the United States, U.V.A. members collectively strive to enhance the significance of these vineyards, viewing them through the lenses of culture and tourism. Their shared goal is to guarantee that the productivity of these

vineyards contributes to the well-being of both the local community and future generations, all while maintaining a steadfast commitment to environmentally sustainable practices.[4].

Education and participation in local fairs have a significant impact on the association's outreach and engagement with the wider community. Their actively participation in fairs and similar events provide an opportunity for people to learn about the organization and engage with their members and activities. It's during these occasions that the foundation for potential collaborations is often laid. This is achieved by generating interest and advocating for the cause, ultimately fostering connections with like-minded individuals and organizations.

During the fairs, interactive activities such as workshops, exhibitions, and degustation help to promote the cultural heritage of the association and facilitate cross-cultural learning and understanding. Moreover, by engaging with the community in this way, the cultural association attracts new members, increases public awareness of their activities and objectives, and create opportunities for partnerships with other organizations.

San Michele is the "headquarter" of the association, they share the public space of the cemetery with Veritas, which is a multiutility and publicly owned stock company that provides environmental services and it is responsible for the management of cemetery and funeral services.[5]

In San Michele, the convent dates to the 1200s and its current structure to the 1400s, so when the municipality allowed *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* permission to manage the facility, they had to restore the patio and some parts of the internal structure because it was in a state of neglect and therefore unusable. For its historical artistic character, the building is under the superintendence, this means that for any further renovation works it should intervene, make a proper analysis of the condition and appropriate construction management; additionally, it is a public good, so all the process should be promoted by the municipality of Venice. Nowadays, they still cannot use the full complex, but the vineyard is completely renovated, and one of the ancient caves of the convent hosts the wine storage barrels and all the bottles and materials needed for the harvest and pressing of the grapes. So, despite the limited access to the structure, so far, they have been able to carry on their activities coming to terms with the limited space available.

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[4] https://www.urbanvineyards.org/en/sustainable-beautywill-save-world

[5] www.gruppoveritas.it

Either to visit or to work in the association, it must be an associate and the membership costs 20 euro per year. They cannot sell the wine they produce because of the government agreement of a not-for-profit association, so the main revenues come from the member cards, which oscillate between 167 in the first year (2017) and 242 in 2022.

In addition, from 2021 the collaboration with Palazzetto Bru Zarne granted them 1000 euros in income per year in the change of a degustation of their wines at the events during the season.

Analyzing the financial report of the last five years (from 2017 to 2022) it shows that costs, including that of the materials such as bottles, labels, and corks, have always been covered by revenues. This growth would be investigated more in the following chapters where it will be taken into consideration within the strengths and the weakness of the organization. The economic and financial study would be useful to evaluate *La Laguna Nel Biccheire* as a no-profit organization related to its territory and insert it in the wider framework of the No-profit companies which operate in local areas.

Chapter 2

Sustainable Development and Agenda 2030

After introducing *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*, this thesis shifts its focus to explore the concept of sustainable development, with an emphasis on its principles and challenges in the global context. This transition is intended to underscore the essential components outlined in Agenda 2030, ultimately bringing us closer to understanding how the unique characteristics of cultural association align with the goals of sustainable development and, consequently, how they actively contribute to its progress.

2.1 A change of perspective

At a time in history when the urge for global issues arises and sees the rethinking of free market dynamics based on capital accumulation and profit maximization; new challenges are ahead.

After the Industrial Revolution, some political economists like Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill[6], David Ricardo, and Thomas Robert Malthus[7] began to question the limits of both economic and demographic growth, parallelly recognizing the inherent trade-offs between wealth generation and social justice (Purvis et al., 2019).

The 'classical' economists thought that the economy would naturally arrive at the so-called "steady state". The increase in productivity (the ability to produce a greater quantity of goods with the same effort) has no limits, so they thought this process would sooner or later lead to satisfying all the needs of society; accumulation would cease, and it will suffice to reproduce the goods

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[6] John Stuart Mill key concepts include utilitarianism (intended as the ethical theory that equates the good with the maximum happiness of the greatest number of people) as a basis for evaluating economic policies, the theory of value based on utility, advocacy for free trade, limited government intervention, concerns about the distribution of wealth, emphasis on education and human capital, support for women's rights and labor equality, and a recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability.(https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/john-stuart-mill/)

[7] In his work "An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society" published in 1798, Thomas Malthus presents his theory. He argues that population growth will consistently surpass the availability of food, and that the advancement of humanity is unattainable without strict restrictions on reproduction. Malthus posits that population will increase exponentially if left unchecked, while the means of subsistence will only grow linearly. (https://www.britannica.com/summary/Thomas-Malthus)

consumed in time to time. However, while most of them were afraid of reaching this point, identifying it with the end of progress, Mill argued in favor, recognizing that a stationary condition of capital did not imply any arrest of human progress. On the contrary, we would say today that Mill was pushing towards sustainable development, hence qualitative development with no quantitative growth (Daly, 2001).

Neoclassical theory with its subjectivist theory of value shifted the focus to utility, exchange, and efficiency, leaving the theories of classical economics aside for several decades.
During the 1960s and 1970s concerns expressed at the negative environmental consequences of unrestrained economic growth started to arise.
Encouraged by philosophical movements like the "happy degrowth" put forth by French economist and philosopher Serge Latouche, economists and politicians have embarked on a reconsideration of the concept of development, distancing it from the belief that endless growth should be the ultimate goal of economic and industrial endeavors.

Arising from the worldwide economic downturn of the Great Depression (1929-1939) and the devastation of the unfolding World War II (1939-1945), the idea of having a comprehensive indicator that could measure the overall welfare status of a country became popular. As a result, the original formulation of gross domestic product (GDP) was presented by Simon Kuznets in 1937, whose idea was to capture all the economic output of individuals, firms and government in a single measure, which should increase in times of prosperity and decrease in times of crisis.
GDP offering insights into the essence of an economy and intended to be superior to other statistics, emerged as the prevailing instrument for assessing the size of a nation's economy.[8]

It is defined by the final value of goods and services produced in a country within a given period, hence more properly associated with a measure of much having instead of wellbeing. As Daly explains in his book *Beyond Growth. The Economics of Sustainable Development,*[9] the concept of 'economic growth' is commonly understood as the expansion of GDP. From this perspective, the belief is that all challenges can be addressed or at least alleviated through continual GDP growth.

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[8] https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/03/gdp-a-brief-history/

[9] Beyond Growth. The Economics of Sustainable Development, Herman E. Daly, Beacon Press, 2014

In economics, GDP is the sole measure expected to perpetually increase, without ever reaching a point where the additional costs of further growth outweigh the additional benefits. While in microeconomics, each activity has an ideal size beyond which additional growth becomes economically unviable. When these individual units are combined at the macroeconomic level, the idea of an optimum size completely vanishes. This occurs due to various factors, including the perception that macroeconomics is not viewed as a part of a larger whole, but rather as the entirety itself. In other worlds, GDP offers valuable insights into economic output and productivity, it neglects a crucial aspect: the efficient utilization of resources in the context of increasing entropy.

Beyond GDP, it's vital to consider not only the quantity of economic activity but also the quality and sustainability of growth. The general over production implies an uncontrolled exploitation of the resources available on earth, which according to the second law of thermodynamics feeds an irreversible process called "entropy" (Cojanu, V., 2009). Following this principle, isolated system (a system that doesn't exchange energy or matter with its surroundings) always tends to increase during a natural process, naturally moving towards a state of greater disorder or randomness. This view, related to the scholar Georgescu, who first theorized a correlation between the laws of entropy and economics, has been taken up by Daly to explain how, it is necessary to reconsider the measure of resource exploitation of a system. Indeed, the gross domestic product, as it was originally proposed, considers an infinite system, while instead we live in a finite system. As resources are consumed and the general entropy of the system increases – earth in our case – the conventional GDP measure fails to account for the long-term consequences of such resource depletion and environmental degradation. In the same publication, Daly proceeds to explain how indeed macroeconomics is itself a subset that must respond to larger laws, namely those of a finite and close system. In this regard, the Texan economist refers to the masterful work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, who investigated the relationship between entropy and economic development and compiled his analyses in "The Entropy Law and the Economic Process"[10].

Georgescu-Roegen argued that economic processes and activities result in the generation of entropy, just like any physical or natural process. Entropy can be understood as a measure of the unavailability of energy for useful work within a system. In the context of economics, it represents

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[10] Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, La legge dell'entropia e il problema economico (1971), in Energia e miti economici, tr. it. Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2008.

the dissipation and degradation of resources as they are transformed and used in the production and consumption processes.

The hourglass (figure 2) metaphor is used to illustrate the concept of entropy in economic systems. In this metaphor, the upper chamber of the hourglass represents the low-entropy state, where natural resources are abundant and concentrated. As economic activities take place, resources are extracted, transformed, and consumed, leading to the dissipation of energy and the generation of waste, thus increasing entropy. This is represented by the narrowing portion of the hourglass, where resources become scarcer and dispersed.
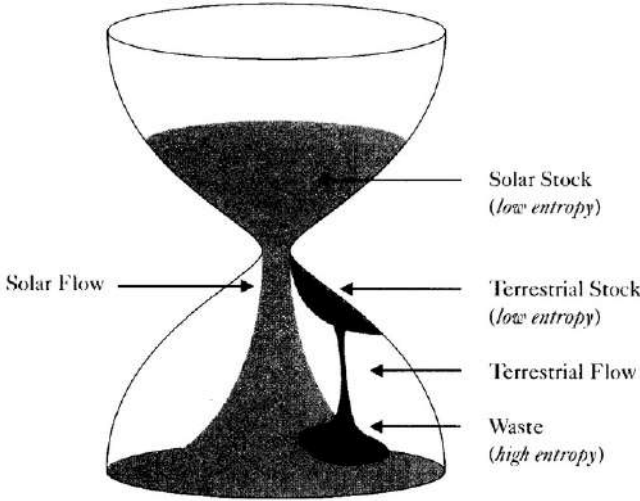
Figure 2 Georgescu-Roegen entropy hourglass (Daly, 2001, p.40)

However, beside the evident deficits of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a comprehensive understanding of a country's growth and development, it still remains a fundamental benchmark that provides a standardized and easily comparable metric across nations and timeframes. By tracking changes in GDP, analysts can observe the overall economic performance of a country, identify trends, and make comparisons with other countries or historical data.

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of a country's growth and development, other indicators and metrics have been introduced over time. Today GDP is often analyzed together with other indexes such as, just to name a few of the most relevant, the Human Development Index

(HDI)[11], which incorporates factors such as education, health, and life expectancy, or the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW), also known as GPI – Genuine Progress Indicator (the two indexes only differ for some items and the name) which measures the sustainable economic well-being of a nation (Chelli et al, 2013).

All considered, it can be said that the overall change of perspective led to the introduction of qualitative criteria in the evaluation of human work and its products, as a new parameter of judgment. Meaning that factors such as environmental sustainability, social justice, and well-being are now globally considered alongside traditional economic indicators like GDP and productivity.

2.2 A global issue

Economic growth, defined as a consistent increase in GDP per capita, requires calculating a global average by summing up the national GDPs to obtain the Gross World Product (GWP) and dividing it by the world population. By performing this calculation, we can observe that over the span of 200 years, PML per capita has exhibited sustained growth, albeit with significant disparities across different regions of the world (Sachs, 2015).

As Jeffrey D. Sachs explain in "The Age of Sustainable Development"[12], to analyze the global growth process it is important to differentiate between two types of growth: endogenous growth and catch-up growth.

Endogenous growth, seen in technology-leading countries like England in the early 18th century and later in Germany and the United States during the 20th century, is characterized by continuous innovations that originate within the country itself. These innovations, referred to as endogenous because they develop internally, contribute to the increase in GDP and subsequently stimulate a new wave of innovations. In this type of growth, the economy is driven by internal factors such as research and development, technological advancements, and human capital.

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[11] The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions. (hdr.undp.org)

[12] Jeffrey D. Sachs, *L'era dello sviluppo sostenibile*, 2015, Università Bocconi Editore, Milano, pp. 81-88

The second type of growth is characteristic of "lagging countries" that, for various historical, political, and geographical reasons, have fallen behind compared to the "technological leaders." This type of growth differs from the first type in that instead of developing technologies internally, these countries import them from abroad and subsequently adapt them to suit local conditions. It is often referred to as "catch-up" growth because it represents a process of closing the development gap, and as a result, it can progress at a significantly faster pace than the first type. A prime example of this can be seen in China, which did not undergo industrialization in the 19th century. However, at a certain point, it commenced a period of remarkable annual GDP per capita growth rates ranging between 5 and 10 percent (in contrast to the 1-2% typical growth rates of technological leaders). (Sachs, 2015)

From this analysis, it is evident that technological progress is closely linked to economic growth. On these waves of innovation, numerous theories have been established, among which perhaps the most famous is that of Nikolai Kondratieff. According to Kondratieff, economic development is driven by waves of significant technological change that date back to the Industrial Revolution. According to Kondratieff, technological cycles manifest as waves of innovation and technological change that occur over time. Each wave of innovation is characterized by a period of accelerated economic growth, followed by a decline.
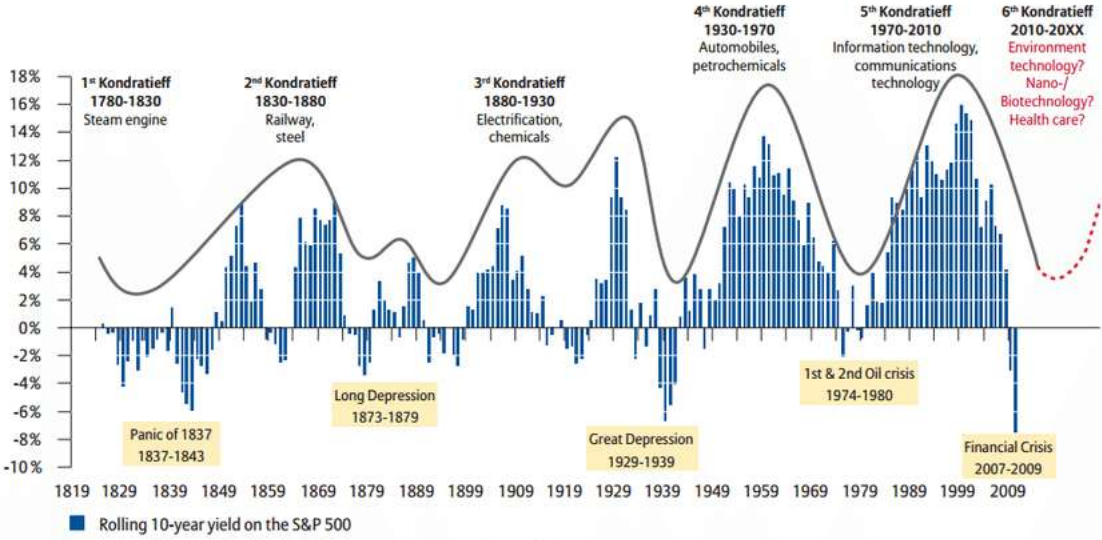

Figure 3 Kondratieff cycles. (Researchgate)

They can have different names and durations depending on the researcher who studied them

Without going into too much detail, for the purpose of this thesis, incorporating Kondratieff's theory is useful for emphasizing the importance and close relationship between technological progress and economic growth, by understanding how these technological cycles have played a key role in promoting globalization: "*For the most part of the world, economic growth has meant paring with the technological leaders*" affirms J. D. Sachs (2015).

During the phases of economic growth, new technologies are developed and adopted at the national level. However, once a country has fully exploited the opportunities offered by the new technology, economic growth may slow down. At this stage, businesses seek to expand beyond national borders to tap into new markets and benefit from economies of scale[13].

Scaling is particularly important when talking about globalization because it is one of the main drivers of growth, if we think about the history of humanity, we can acknowledge the correspondence between the augmentation of the population and the pace of change. As reported by J.D. Sachs in another of his study, one can see "globalization as a series of scale-enlarging transformation" (Sachs, 2020).

Globalization has been facilitated by the fact that companies can leverage new technologies to communicate, collaborate, and coordinate their activities internationally. The advent of information and communication technologies, such as the Internet and telecommunication networks, has made it possible to create global networks of production, trade, and information exchange.

Therefore, globalization, as a complex phenomenon that brought significant changes in the world economy, culture, and politics, over the past two decades, has generated global interconnectedness and interdependence among states. That has led to the growth of international trade and investment, the spread of technology and knowledge, and the movement of people across borders. In this process geography has been often decisive in determining scale and places that are remote

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[13] Economies of scale refer to the cost advantages a company gains with the increase in production. This happens because production costs can now be spread over a large number of goods. The bigger the size of a company, the bigger the more the cost savings with the increase in production (https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/defaultinterstitial.cms)

or more isolated will not benefit as much from trade and the diffusion of ideas and technologies as places that are more accessible.

As expected, the resulting unbalanced situation generated polemics and controversies, including concerns over job displacement and wage inequality, environmental degradation, and cultural homogenization. Promptly debates about the benefits and drawbacks of globalization started to arise and calls for greater regulation and protection of workers, the environment, and cultural diversity began to be louder.

2.3 Sustainable development in a globalized world

In view of the above, if on one hand globalization has led to great imbalances, on the other hand, precisely because of the global scale of communications and constant comparison on a worldwide level, has also opened up opportunities to collaborate and work towards common goals providing an ongoing dialogue between countries.
In recent years, international organizations such as United Nations, have facilitated numerous international agreements and declarations for sustainable development, human rights, and addressing global challenges such as the well-known climate change or the very recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Focusing on sustainable development, for the topic of this thesis, an important result was achieved in 2015 when 193 Member States (of ONU), signed a global agreement called "2030 Agenda". Quoting the UN: "This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity"[14] where all countries and stakeholders must collaborate in order to implement the plan only possible through cooperation and awareness of the mutual benefits generated by working toward a common goal.

Grassroots of this intervention must be found in the shared recognition that development can no longer go separate from sustainability, and sustainability implies social equity, economic viability, and environmental protection.

Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, prime minister of Norway in the 1980s, brought the concept of sustainable development to the world's attention through the Commission on Environment and Development she chaired. In subsequent years the definition has been revised and interpreted, but

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[14] Trasforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development-*Preamble*. (sdgs.un.org)

the concept has never been abandoned; rather, it has been increasingly included in global governance.

In 1992, the new concept was adopted by the UN Conference on Environment and Development during the so known Rio Earth Summit and produced the first international Agenda (Agenda 21) on global challenges. Agenda 21 started from the premise that human societies cannot continue in the direction they have been going so far - increasing the economic gap between nations and between population groups within nations, increasing poverty, hunger, disease, and illiteracy, and causing the continued deterioration of the ecosystems on which the maintenance of life on the planet depends – willing to find a balance between environment and development questions (United Nations, 1992).

Further declarations led to the adoption of the so-called eight "Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)" in September 2000, which main objective was to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. Meanwhile, in June 2012 during another United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, placed in Rio de Janeiro, member states adopted the outcome document "The future we want" [15], a declaration on sustainable development and green economy reaffirming and implementing the past action plans.
The text has been the baseline for 193 member states to sign the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDGs at its core, during the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.[16]

Indeed, the conference held in 2012 (Rio de Janeiro), participating countries agreed that the concept of sustainable development was more urgent than ever, and new means had to be found to bring it to the forefront of public policy. To achieve this objective, they launched a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): a call to action that would be a road map to walk in this journey. As a blueprint, they established five areas of intervention, which correspond to the so-called "5 P" of sustainability:

> - People: contrast poverty and social exclusion and promote health and well-being to ensure conditions for human capital development.

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[15] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html

[16] *Ibidem*

- Planet: ensuring sustainable management of natural resources, countering biodiversity loss, and protecting environmental and cultural assets;

- Prosperity: affirming sustainable patterns of production and consumption, ensuring quality employment and training;

- Peace: promoting a nonviolent and inclusive society without forms of discrimination. Countering lawlessness;

- Partnership: intervene in the various areas in an integrated manner.

Between 2012 and 2015, took place the negotiation between the UN member states culminated in the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which claim to involve all the states members, without distinction between developed and developing ones, nor between the global south and the global north.

The 17 SDGs in fact, are designed to be universal, as is written in its declaration:

> *"This is an Agenda of unprecedented scope and significance. It is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development."*[17]

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[17] www.sdgs.un.org

2.3.1 From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals

As we delve deeper into the intricate tapestry of these global projects, it becomes evident that their successful navigation demands not only a profound understanding of intricate interdependencies but also a readiness to adapt, learn, and pivot as circumstances evolve.

The path to sustainable development is not static; it's a continuous journey marked by evolving insights, newly gained awareness, and the discovery of innovative avenues for change. Negotiations, agreements, and policy alignments, often within the framework of international organizations, showcase the intricate dance of political will and compromise required to advance these global aspirations.

As we saw previously, several declarations and commission were needed to redact projects like Agenda 21 and the 2030 Agenda. The complexity of these undertakings is intricately tied to the need for regular realignment and updating of global agreements. The pace of change in our interconnected world demands that these agreements be responsive to new insights, emerging challenges, and innovative solutions. As our collective knowledge deepens and fresh perspectives emerge, the global community must come together periodically to ensure that our efforts remain relevant and effective. This process of revision and renewal reflects the ongoing commitment to staying informed, engaged, and proactive in addressing the multifaceted issues at hand.

For what concern the transition from MDGs to SDGs, it represented a turning point, a change in perspective from an Anthropocentric to an eco-centric era. [18] In a time when the primary focus was on human development and placing a high value on life, education, and well-being, Agenda 2030 wanted to emphasize the interdependence of all life forms and ecosystems and acknowledge that there is a direct connection between human well-being and the health of the planet. The SDGs embrace a more holistic and inclusive approach by recognizing the interdependence between humans and the environment. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the need to address environmental sustainability and ecological concerns alongside social and economic development,

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[18]Naturalist and ecologist of 19th century helped the schism between the anthropocentric conservationists on one hand, who prescribe conservation of natural resources for sustainable consumption, and the biocentric preservationists, who call for preservation of nature due to its inherent worth. Ecocentrism go beyond biocentrism and emphasizes the importance of all living things including humans but also animals, plants, water, soil, etc.

introducing a new awareness on the undeniable impact of climate change on both our lifestyle and mindset, that we can no longer overlook.

As it is declared by the UN:

> "They (the United Nations Member States) recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests"[19]

The 17 SDGs serve as a collective call to action, engaging all global partnerships, or, as J. Sachs says, employing a *multistakeholder* approach that mobilizes all parts of society (Sachs, 2015). This implies that individuals and nations, irrespective of global divisions between North and South or developed and developing countries, are urged to contribute towards achieving the 169 established targets and each government will establish its own national targets, considering their unique national circumstances.

To sum up, here reported the key differences between the MDGs and the SDGs:

- Whereas the MDGs maintained a narrow focus on poverty reduction, the SDGs include new themes such as environment, economy, and society entangled by a more systematic approach. They reflect the continuity and consolidation of MDGs while promoting inclusiveness, equity, and urbanization and further strengthening global partnerships by including CSOs and the private sector.
- Numbers: from 8 goals to 17, from 18 targets to 169, from 48 indicators to 231.
- While the MDGs were developed by experts at the UN headquarters. The SDGs are the result of an extensive consultation process involving all 193 member states, 70 Open Working Groups, Civil Society Organizations, thematic consultations, country consultations, active public participation through face-to-face meetings, online mechanisms, and door-to-door surveys (Kumar et al., 2016).
- Remove the "developing" versus "developed" dichotomy: all the state members are expected to work towards achieving the SDGs.

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[19] https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Overall, while the MDGs provided an initial framework for addressing global challenges, the 2030 Agenda, with its 17 SDGs, represents a more comprehensive and ambitious approach to achieving sustainable development.

2.3.2 Structure of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals encompass a total of 169 predetermined targets, each accompanied by various indicators, amounting to a collective count of 230.
The SDGs' targets and indicators offer precise and quantifiable goals for tracking development toward achieving the goals. Governments, organizations, and other stakeholders can adopt them to annually monitor their progress and eventually rearrange their own targets.

Here the list of the 17 goals as reported by the United Nation[20] is the following completed with a short explanation based on Delli Paoli et al., (2019) analysis:

SDG1 – The goal "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" is a comprehensive and ambitious objective that seeks to address poverty from multiple angles. It aims to not only lift people out of extreme poverty but also ensure equality of economic rights, access to essential services, and the development of policies and strategies that prioritize the well-being of the poor and promote gender equality.

SDG 2 – "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" is a comprehensive goal that addresses the complex challenges related to food security, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture. It seeks to ensure that everyone has access to nutritious food, eliminate malnutrition, support small-scale food producers, promote sustainable farming practices, and conserve genetic diversity.

SDG 3 – "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" aims to improve overall health and well-being, reduce mortality rates, combat epidemics, and ensure that everyone has access to essential healthcare services and medicines. With a specific emphasis on reducing maternal, neonatal, and child mortality rates, addressing mortality caused by illnesses linked to hazardous chemicals and pollution in air, water, and soil, the goal is also to enhance efforts related to the prevention and treatment of substance abuse.

SDG 4 – "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" where the objective is to guarantee worldwide literacy and numeracy,

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provide fair and high-quality primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and achieve successful learning outcomes. This includes enhancing the number of young people and adults equipped with pertinent skills, including technical and vocational expertise.

SDG 5 – "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" focus on creating a more equitable and inclusive society where women and girls have equal rights, opportunities, and protection from discrimination and violence (such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation). The goal is to enable women's complete and impactful involvement and equal chances for leadership across all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public spheres. Furthermore, it involves acknowledging and appreciating unpaid care and domestic work by implementing public services, infrastructure improvements, and social protection policies.

SDG 6 – "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" addresses the issue of universal access to safe and affordable drinking water, promotes equitable access to sanitation and hygiene facilities while eliminating open defecation, improves the quality of available water sources, and addresses the challenges posed by water scarcity.

SDG 7 – "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all" reflects a commitment to boost the proportion of renewable energy sources in the energy mix and enhance energy efficiency.

SDG 8 – "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for allmaintain per capita economic growth, increase economic productivity, foster productive activities, create decent job opportunities, encourage entrepreneurship, stimulate creativity and innovation, reduce the percentage of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), safeguard labor rights, and ensure safe and secure working conditions for all workers. *SDG 9* – In "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation" The objective is to develop robust infrastructure, promote industrialization that is inclusive and sustainable, and stimulate innovation. This includes strengthening scientific research, improving technological capabilities, facilitating innovation, increasing access to information and communications technology, and modernizing infrastructure systems.

SDG 10 – "Reduce inequality within and among countries" focus on minimize inequalities both within individual countries and among different nations. This includes narrowing the gaps in income growth within countries and working towards more equitable outcomes.

SDG 11 – "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" involves ensuring access to suitable, secure, and affordable housing and basic services (such as transportation system). Additionally, it aims is to promote inclusive and sustainable urban development by offering accessible green and public spaces and fostering positive economic, social, and environmental connections between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas.

SDG 12 – "Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns" aims to encourage a lifestyle that use natural resources efficiently and sustainably while minimizing waste generation. Additionally, it focuses on preventing waste, reducing, recycling, and reusing materials. It also aims to rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies.

SDG 13 – "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts" reflects the urgency to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity at global level, in order to face climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries. This entails integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies, and planning processes.

SDG 14 – "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" focuses on prevention and reduction of marine pollution. It considers the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems while minimizing and addressing the impacts of ocean acidification by effectively regulating harvesting and eventually ending overfishing.

SDG 15 – *"*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss" aims to protect and revitalize terrestrial ecosystems sustainably. This includes managing forests sustainably, ending deforestation, restoring degraded lands, combating desertification, preserving mountain ecosystems, and reducing the degradation of natural habitats.

SDG 16 – "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels" refers to the goal of promoting the rule of law on both national and international levels, ensuring equal access to justice, recovering stolen assets, combating organized crime, and reducing corruption. Additionally, it involves building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all governance levels.

SDG 17 – "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development" seeks to reinforce the tools and mechanisms needed to implement sustainable development and rejuvenate global partnerships, enhancing

international cooperation in fields such as education, science, technology, and innovation, as well as mobilizing domestic resources through development assistance.

2.3.3 Indicators for the 17 SDGs

In one of his statements David Thorsby remarks: "*Sustainable development, like some other phenomena in the public policy arena such as security, justice, equity and freedom of expression, tends to be more readily noticeable when absent*" (Throsby, 2017), thus instantly raises questions concerning the processes and procedures for quantification. As in everyday life, besides how much we try to accurately predict or model an effective solution or a plan, it may not always work out the way we expect due to unforeseen events or external factors.

The theory-reality gap must be closed by adapting theories and approaches in response to data and user feedback, thus developing indicators is essential. In research and statistics, an indicator is an observed value of a variable, or in other words "a sign of a presence or absence of the concept being studied" (Babbie, 2012).

Indicators permit to track advances toward achieving specific goals or targets by constantly monitoring and evaluating. This condition permits them to either be dictated by the performance of the organizations and participating nations, to influence the future course by participating in decision-making.

Speaking about Agenda 2030, employing the 231 indicators is relevant to complete annual reports that aid in tracking worldwide progress. In particular, the UN Secretary-General, jointly with the UN System, releases a report on SDG Progress every year based on the global indicator framework, data from national statistical systems, and regional data.

2.4 The three pillars of sustainability and the SDGs

Decentering man as the center of the universe and shifting the focus on the means and techniques by which he operates has led to the emergence of a new paradigm: it is crucial to start reflecting on the consequences of everybody's actions in the present in order to both envision future possibilities and prevent irreversible damages.

The definition of sustainability given by the United Nations Brundtland Commission in its 1987 statement consists of "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".[21]

In light of present circumstances, where the extreme consumption of developed countries has led to a paradoxical disproportionate use of natural resources, while in other parts of the world, they barely reach subsistence, this notion might wrongly entail a scenario where the global South gradually converges with the global North with consumption levels and habits. Once again, Daly provides us a reflection on the fact that attempting to extend the current consumption levels and patterns of the Global North to the entire world, even with technologies that remotely resemble the best ones presently available, would require unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. This would eventually diminish the Earth's capacity to support life and generate wealth in the future. Moreover, bringing the example of China, the most populous country in the world to date, if the "needs of the present" include an automobile for each Chinese family of three, then sustainable development is impossible (Daly,2001).

From this observation, it becomes evident how the terms "growth" and "development" in the economic context are both highly relevant topics and a source of significant confusion. In this regard, it has been necessary to contemplate what growth means and how it distinguishes itself from development. On the one hand, it is clear that after the Second World War, when the discourse on economic development emerged, the primary objective was to expand economic growth to all countries in order to extend better living conditions for everyone (Sen, 1998). However, it is equally true that, after the initial emergency had passed, other needs arose, including the crucial identification of necessary changes in the economic structure of society. These changes,

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[21] Sustainable development goals, *Sustainability*, United Nations (un.org)

encompassing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of growth, undeniably form an integral component of the broader concept of economic development (Sen, 1998).[22]

Considering that:

> ""Growth" refers to expansion in the scale of the physical dimensions of the economic system, while "development" refers to qualitative change of a physically nongrowing economic system in a state of dynamic equilibrium maintained by its environment. By this definition, the Earth is not growing, but it is developing. Any physical subsystem of a finite and nongrowing Earth must itself also eventually become nongrowing. Therefore, the term sustainable growth implies an eventual impossibility, while the term sustainable development does not. It is development that can have the attribute of sustainability, not growth. What is being sustained is a level, not a rate of growth, of physical resource use. What is being developed is the qualitative capacity to convert that constant level of physical resources (throughput) into improved services for satisfying human wants" (Daly, 2023)

A further issue became part of the debate that arose together with the Brundtland Commission's (1987) statement. Indeed, the report has been criticized for its fuzzy definition of sustainability: the "needs" intended as the available resources prove challenging due to their depletion, while the term "future" lacks references, considering the need to completely rethink what we should aspire to in our future and for the future generations in terms of our consumption habits and expectations of growth.

However, in alignment with the declaration's original intent and meaning, the fundamental argument revolves around welfare, seen in the context of inter-generational equity (Kuhlman et al., 2010). The underlying idea was that the environment must be protected not only for its intrinsic value but also to preserve resources for future generations and extend a good quality of life regardless of nationality (remembering that the primary goal with which these global agreements, between MDGs and SDGs, came into being was precisely to end extreme poverty and ensure minimum welfare for all people on the planet).

Based on the matters disclosed so far, then sustainability may be defined in the words of Tom Kuhlman and John Farrington (2010) as *maintaining well-being over a long, perhaps even an*

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[22] *Ibidem*

indefinite period". Where 'economic sustainability' refers to the capacity of an economic system to persist over time while considering both natural and social dimensions, thus emphasizing its long-term viability and resilience within its relevant context.

As Stefan Baumgärtner and Martin Quaas pointed out:

> "Sustainability economics is ethically founded in the idea of efficiency, that is non-wastefulness, in the use of scarce resources for achieving the two normative goals of (1) the satisfaction of the needs and wants of individual humans and (2) justice, including justice between humans of present and future generations and justice towards nature, in the setting of human–nature relationships over the long-term and inherently uncertain future." (Baumgärtner & Quaas, 2010)

Hence, as acknowledged by the WCED (1987),[23] sustainability has evolved into a vital guiding principle in today's society. It encompasses an enduring ethical connection between the present generation and the future, representing a developmental concept that prioritizes morality and social justice. It is an integrative concept compounded by three major elements -environment, society, and economy- which have been traduced in the so-called three "pillars of sustainability" (Figure 4) and reflect the requirement that responsible development should consider respectively: environment, people, and profits (Hansmann et al., 2012).

Following Low and Gleeson's statement:

> *"Sustainable development […] is about the achievement on a global scale of three principles: economic development, social justice, and ecological responsibility. These principles exhibit a dialectical tension. Sustainable development is in practice always likely to be a shifting compromise among them. The weight given to each of these principles in different philosophical approaches varies greatly and it may be argued that in some variants only two are present: for instance, economic development and ecological responsibility in market environmentalism, and ecological responsibility and social justice in the eco-centric model"* (Gleeson & Low, 2015)

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[23] WCED is the World Commission on Environment and Development

The mentioned, "three pillars of sustainability" are always in conversation with one another and must be considered equally important for promoting sustainability.

They are commonly depicted as intersecting circles or like a temple (symbol of solidity), where the columns supporting the tympanum together provide a building. Considering the representation
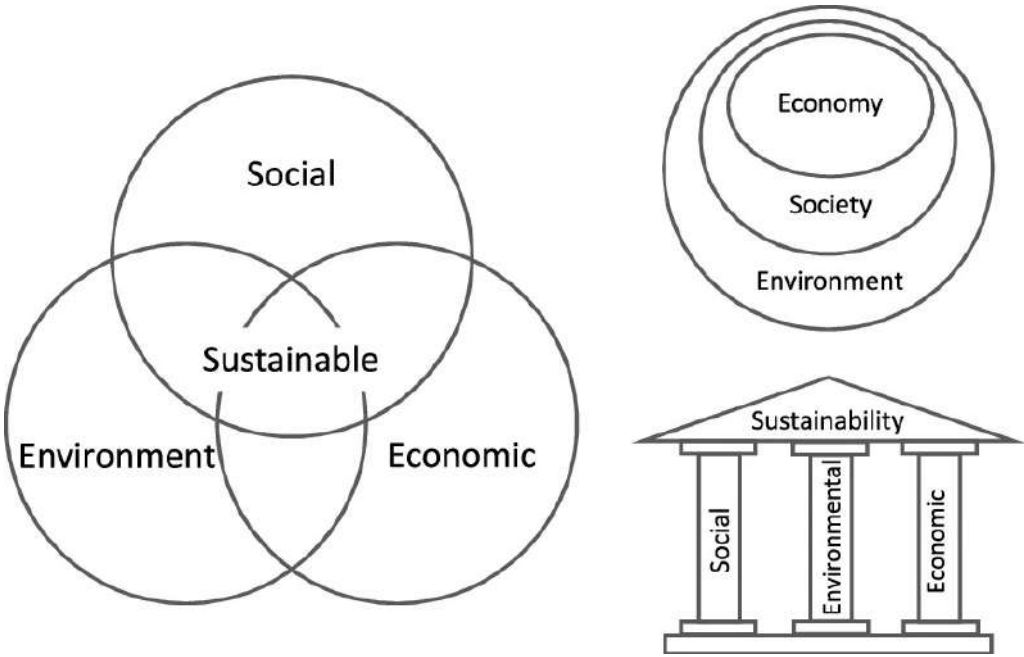

Figure 4 On the left the typical representation of the three pillars as intersecting circles, on the right the literally "pillars" approach and the concentric one (Purvis et al.2018).

on the left (figure 4), it is evident how blending these elements generates fresh avenues for exploration, encompassing socio-economic, environmental-economic, and socio-environmental dimensions.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the three principles of sustainability are interconnected and complementary. The firsts provide a comprehensive framework for achieving sustainable development, while the latter – social, economic, and environmental pillars – provide a foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of human activities and the natural world. Intersecting SDGs with the three pillars of sustainability underscores the intricate web of relationships between social, economic, and environmental dimensions in the pursuit of global well-being and longevity. This intersection emphasizes that progress in any one area cannot be fully achieved without considering its impact on the other ones.

Examining the visual representation below (Figure 5), the three circles symbolizing the pillars of sustainability intersect and create shared spaces where the corresponding Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) are placed. Their emergence is a direct consequence of the amalgamation of the major research domains, all converging to foster equitable, viable, and bearable living conditions.

Due to their interconnected nature, a comprehensive approach is necessary to evaluate the potential risks and opportunities associated with any sustainability-oriented action. This implies that advancements in one goal can either positively or negatively affect progress in other goals, ultimately leading to the emergence of both synergies and trade-offs among them.

In this context, it's essential to briefly digress and provide a clear explanation of the concept:

Synergies occur when progress towards one goal contributes positively to progress towards another goal. For example, from the study that would be illustrated below, "reducing poverty is statistically linked with progress in SDGs 3 (Good health and wellbeing), 4 (Quality education), 5 (Gender equality), 6 (Clean water and sanitation), or 10 (Reduced inequalities)" (Pradhan et al., 2017).

On the other hand, trade-offs occur when progress toward one goal may come at the expense of progress toward another goal. As reported by the mentioned study: "For instance, SDGs 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure) are negatively

correlated with 12 goals (SDGs 1–7, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17) and nine goals (SDGs 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11–13, 15)" (Pradhan et al., 2017).

Quoting from the article *Map of the Interactions between Sustainable Development Goals* by Måns Nilsson, Dave Griggs, and Martin Visbeck, published in 2016, just a month before the inaugural annual report review of SDGs: "The Sustainable Development Goals depend on each other, and only if mutually reinforcing actions are taken and trade-offs minimized, the agenda will be able to deliver on its potential" (Nilsson et al., 2016)

Specifically, the "Map of interactions between SDGs" (depicted in Figure 7) stands out as one of the initial endeavors to offer policymakers a framework for guidance. Policymakers, in many cases, face a dearth of tools that enable them to compare and pinpoint crucial interactions. They need to identify which interactions are of paramount importance to address, or those that might necessitate additional regulation due to conflicts with other goals, thereby impeding their achievement.

In this map, seven categories of interactions were evaluated, ranging from highly positive (with a score of +3) to extremely negative (with a score of -3). This framework allowed for the comprehensive assessment of any goal, action, or policy, always considering its interconnectedness with other goals and other member states' perspectives.

GOALS SCORING
The influence of one Sustainable Development Goal or target on another can be summarized with this simple scale.

Interaction	Name	Explanation	Example
+3	Indivisible	Inextricably linked to the achievement of another goal.	Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is indivisible from ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership.
+2	Reinforcing	Aids the achievement of another goal.	Providing access to electricity reinforces water-pumping and irrigation systems. Strengthening the capacity to adapt to climate-related hazards reduces losses caused by disasters.
+1	Enabling	Creates conditions that further another goal.	Providing electricity access in rural homes enables education, because it makes it possible to do homework at night with electric lighting.
0	Consistent	No significant positive or negative interactions.	Ensuring education for all does not interact significantly with infrastructure development or conservation of ocean ecosystems.
−1	Constraining	Limits options on another goal.	Improved water efficiency can constrain agricultural irrigation. Reducing climate change can constrain the options for energy access.
−2	Counteracting	Clashes with another goal.	Boosting consumption for growth can counteract waste reduction and climate mitigation.
−3	Cancelling	Makes it impossible to reach another goal.	Fully ensuring public transparency and democratic accountability cannot be combined with national-security goals. Full protection of natural reserves excludes public access for recreation.

Figure 6 . Scale for mapping the Goals Interactions, Nilsson, M., Griggs, D., & Visbeck, M. (2016)

On the same trend, a more recent article published in 2017 by AGU Publications, featured in the journal "Earth's Future," Prajal Pradhan, Luís Costa, Diego Rybski, Wolfgang Lucht, and Jürgen P. Kropp introduced a statistical approach to gauge these synergies and trade-offs. They defined synergies as the presence of substantial positive correlations among the goals, signifying mutually reinforcing progress, while trade-offs were identified as substantial negative correlations, indicating conflicting pathways between SDGs (Pradhan et al., 2017).

The research has significantly advanced our understanding of the intricate connections between Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) thanks to a systematic examination and a comprehensive quantitative analysis of both the synergies and trade-offs inherent within and among the SDGs, encompassing both the national and global levels.

In fact, the analysis considers unique pairs of indicator time series, country, and country-disaggregated data. Combining these three types of data, it is possible to examine specific pairs of indicators tracked over time for individual countries or disaggregated regions within countries.

This allows for a more detailed understanding of how indicators are changing over time at various levels, providing insights into both national and sub-national trends and patterns. It helps identify unique patterns, trends, and disparities within and across countries, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the data. After collecting data, they assessed a monotonic relationship between all possible combinations of the unique indicator data pairs for each country by using a Spearman's rank correlation[24] (ρ).

As expected, the analysis revealed a majority of synergies rather than trade-offs, among and between countries, which suggests a solid basis for the SD agenda's successful implementation. Yet also pointing out strengths and weaknesses in each goal and between different ones. For example, it reveals that SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) is generally linked with the most troublesome trade-offs among others while SDG 3 (Good health and well-being) is mostly associated with synergistic co-benefits.

Ultimately, the discovered synergies – best pairs synergies illustrated in Figure 8 (Pradhan et al., 2017) – demonstrate the broad compatibility of the SDGs, whereby advancements in one goal may

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[24] The Spearman rank correlation coefficient is a statistical tool used to gauge the degree of association between two variables when the data is presented as rank orders. The coefficient can range from -1 (perfect negative correlation) to 1 (perfect positive correlation), with 0 indicating no correlation. It is a valuable tool when the data doesn't meet the assumptions of other correlation methods, such as the Pearson correlation coefficient, which require continuous and normally distributed data. (https://www.britannica.com/science/Spearman-rank-correlation-coefficient)

Figure 7. Global ranking of SDGS pairs with high shares of synergies (left) and trade-off (right) from top to bottom. SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and 6 (Clean water and Sanitation) dominate the global top 10 pairs with synergies. The global top 10 pairs with trade-offs either consist of SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and Production) or 15 (Life on land).

facilitate the accomplishment of others and offer a strong foundation for policymaking and resource allocation. By recognizing how advancements in one area can facilitate progress in others, policymakers can design more specific and integrated strategies to tackle multiple challenges simultaneously. Finally, determining which trade-offs are important obstructions that need to be avoided and whether leveraging the found synergies may tilt global megatrends (large-scale global developments) into the just operational area envisioned by the 2030 Agenda.

Chapter 3

The Role of Culture and NPOs in Sustainable Development

The previous chapter examined the concept of sustainability and its characteristics within the global context, considering the changes to which we are all required to respond internationally. In the following chapter, we will focus on the importance of broader culture and nonprofit activities as key components of this process of transition to a sustainable future. Arguments will be presented for the positive influence these entities have on sustainable development, emphasizing how without them, such development would not be possible.

On one hand, culture is an integral part of society and the life of every individual. It encompasses traditions, values, beliefs, arts, and the history of a community or nation, all of which collectively shape human behavior and, consequently, life choices. Therefore, the promotion of a culture oriented towards sustainability can significantly contribute to changing societal habits and practices towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Nonprofits, on the other hand, are organizations that operate between the public and private sectors and are often engaged in a wide range of social, environmental, and cultural causes. They demonstrate exceptional flexibility in responding to the specific demands of their environment, making them an indispensable resource within their operational framework.

3.1 Culture in Sustainable Development

3.1.1 Defining Culture

From what concerns the cultural point of view, the debate started with the definition itself. In the final report of the World Conference on Cultural Policies, (UNESCO, 1982) it can be found various concepts related to culture, such as the right to culture, cultural democracy, and cultural development as vital aspects of overall development. Delegates emphasized the growing awareness of cultural identity and the importance of mutual respect for diverse cultures, including those of minorities. Culture was understood not only in terms of the arts and literature but also as the distinct characteristics, ways of thinking, and expressions of individuals and communities. It encompassed artistic creation, physical culture, sports, scientific endeavors, and more. Some delegates described culture as the ability to reflect on oneself and the right to define oneself as a human being.[25]

Besides its philosophical and anthropological point of view, as reported by Ghirardello et al. (2022), in their analysis, other definitions of culture focus instead on the so-called "cultural expression", determined by both material and immaterial factors. This encompasses creative activities, such as artistic endeavors, as well as the notion of cultural heritage (Ghirardello et al., 2022). Cultural heritage denotes a legacy passed down through generations, often holding significant value for the identity of a specific society or community. In accordance with UNESCO, cultural heritage comprises concrete elements like structures, landmarks, literary works, artifacts, and artistic creations, as well as intangible facets like customs, craftsmanship, language, oral traditions, social rituals, and traditional wisdom. [26]

This extensive set of visions encompasses a very broad conceptualization of culture, providing some reasons why the integration of culture into sustainable development has been an ongoing research topic.

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[25] UNESCO, World Conference on Cultural Policies: Final Report, 2nd, Mexico City, 1982

[26] https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/cultural-heritage

3.1.2 The growing relevance of culture in sustainability

Starting from the following statement of UNESCO:

"Protecting and safeguarding the world's cultural and natural heritage and supporting creativity and dynamic cultural sectors are fundamental to addressing the challenges of our time, from climate change to poverty, inequality, the digital divide and ever more complex emergencies and conflicts. UNESCO is convinced that no development can be sustainable without a strong culture component. Indeed only a human-centred approach to development based on mutual respect and open dialogue among cultures can lead to lasting peace."[27]

The growing importance of cultural factors for local development has been a significant recognition in contemporary literature.

Traditionally, development initiatives have primarily focused on economic and infrastructural aspects, but there has been increasing recognition of cultural factors playing a crucial role in shaping the social fabric and identity of communities.

Sacco et al. (2009) investigated contemporary development process, with a particular focus on local development, highlighting how the transition from the modern to the post-industrial era has brought about significant changes in economic growth and production dynamics.
One of the key funding underscores the profound impact of cultural elements on consumer choices and trade dynamics, highlighting the pivotal role of culture and creative industries in shaping the economic landscape of communities as they progressed in the post-industrial era.

In the modern era, they explain, there was a prevailing emphasis on quantity, where industries aimed to maximize output and productivity, often at the expense of product quality. However, as the world moved into the post-industrial era, the "*countries that have achieved a particular high standard of material well-being are becoming quantitative (number of goods and services), rather than qualitative, consumers*" (Sacco et al., 2009), hence businesses have started placing more value on producing high-quality goods and services that meet the specific demands and preferences of consumers.

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[27] https://www.unesco.org/en/culture

Moreover, many companies have chosen to outsource their production processes to developing countries, where labor costs are lower. This allowed them to reduce expenses and increase profits, but this practice over time has contributed to raising ethical concerns regarding fair labor practices and workers' rights in these countries.

Within this changing economic framework, culture has emerged as a significant element influencing consumer behavior and the perception of goods. Consumers have increasingly based their purchasing decisions on factors related to their sense of identity, buying products that align with their cultural values, beliefs, and lifestyle, or in other words: which can contribute to a sense of personal identity and belonging (Sacco et al., 2009).

Similarly, in the post-industrial era, consumers are placing greater importance on acquiring intangible benefits – rather than tangible benefits –such as experiences, personalization, and emotional connections with the products or brands with the aim to *"increase individual's "identity capital," thus achieving a return on the investment in terms of new identity and social positioning"* (Nurse, 2006).

The phenomenon described above is one of the underlying reasons behind the increasing prominence of cultural goods, services, and intellectual property in global trade. It also underscores the threats posed to cultural diversity and identities due to contemporary globalization, and thus the international concern on global development issues.

In summary, based on this background, the globalization of trade and information has created both opportunities and challenges for cultural diversity. While there's potential for cultural exchange and enrichment, it's crucial to address the potential negative consequences such as cultural homogenization, identity loss, and environmental degradation. Valuing and protecting cultural diversity, means not only ensuring the preservation of unique human experiences but also actively contributing to sustainable development, ecological conservation, and the safeguarding of human rights.

Due to these attributes, some scholars have explicitly identified culture as one of the three essential capitals that entail a country. It has already been mentioned the pivotal aspect of sustainable development in comprehending and consciously employing the Earth's resources, on this purpose

Berkes and Folke's research on *Cultural Capital and Natural Capital Interrelations* [28] and later Cochrane's analysis in *Exploring cultural capital and its importance in sustainable development* [29] offer an interesting point of view.

Although there is still no agreement on a clear distinction between the types of capital, Berkes and Folke individuated Human-made Capital, Natural Capital, and Cultural Capital that they distinguished as follows:

- *" Human-made capital is capital generated via economic activity, through human ingenuity and technological change; the produced means of production*
- *Natural capital consists of three major components 1) non-renewable resources such as oil and minerals that are extracted from ecosystems, 2) renewable resources such as fish, wood and drinking water that are produced and maintained by the processes and functions of ecosystems, 3) environmental services such as maintenance of the quality of the atmosphere, climate, operation of the hydrological cycle including flood controls and drinking water supply, waste assimilation, recycling of nutrients, generation of soils, pollination of crops, provision of food from the sea, and the maintenance of a vast genetic library.*
- *Cultural capital refers to factors that provide human societies with the means and adaptations to deal with the natural environment and actively modify it. Different societies have evolved different ways to deal with the environment."*

They introduce this conceptualization starting from the assumption that ecological economists have established a distinction between natural and human-made capital and have come to consider the two as essentially complementary. Yet, analyzing sustainability by concentrating just on these two elements—natural and human-made capital—is not attainable. A third component is required for a more thorough view of economy-environment linkages, so they suggested cultural capital (Folke et al., 1992).

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[28] Beijer Discussion Paper Series No.8 Cultural Capital and Natural Capital Interrelations, Carl Folke and Fikret Berkes, The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, ISSN 1102-4941, 1992

[29] Phoebe Cochrane, Exploring cultural capital and its importance in sustainable development, Ecological Economics, Volume 57, Issue 2, 2006, Pages 318-330, ISSN 0921-8009, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2005.04.012.

Through an in-depth examination undertaken by Cochrane, it becomes evident how these different forms of capital interact and contribute to the generation of welfare. This interaction leads to the creation of streams of goods and services, as well as the accumulation of wealth. Notably, the production processes are significantly shaped by cultural capital which capital resides at the nexus of both natural and human-made capital, serving as a mediator for their interactions.

In essence, it can be asserted that "*human-made capital is never value-neutral, but a product of evolving cultural values and norms*" (Cochrane, 2006)

Fig. 8 demonstrates the interactions between the three forms of capital. Natural capital serves as a source of raw materials and environmental services that are used to create human-made capital. Although depletion can be mitigated by substituting renewable natural capital, such as planting trees or composting organic waste, both procedures often degrade natural capital reserves.
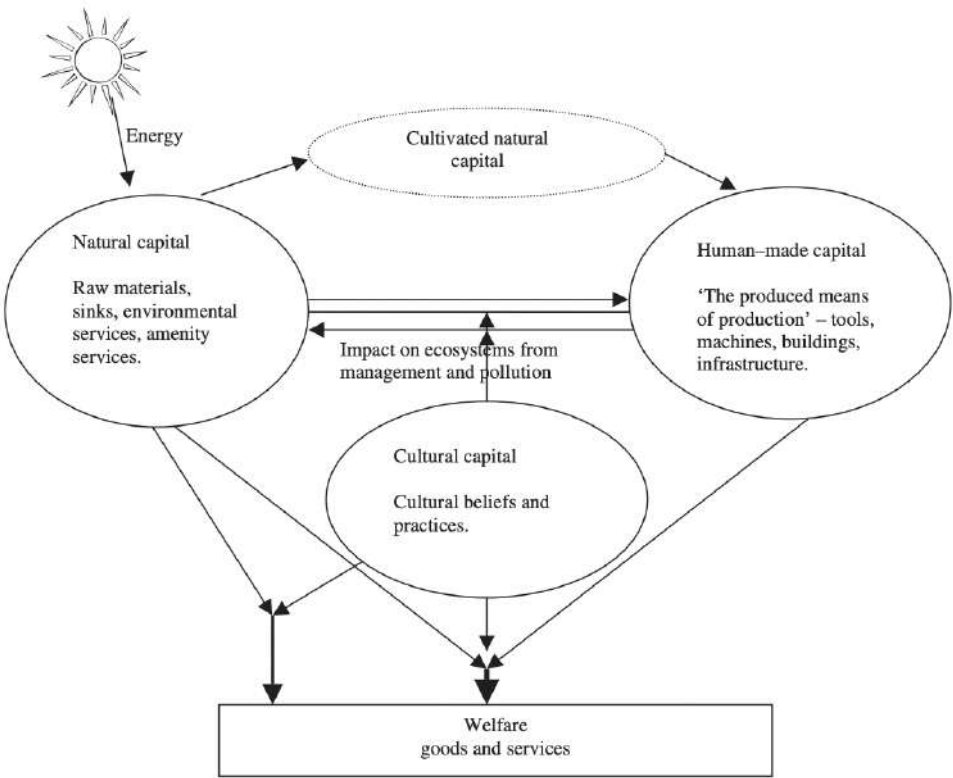

Figure 8. The interaction between forms of capital and production welfare (P. Cochrane / Ecological Economics 57 (2006) 318–330)

After analyzing the interaction of capital resources with each other, the study highlights three main areas where culture influences the management and utilization of natural capital in the sustainable development process:

1- Management Objectives: The management goals for natural capital are significantly shaped by cultural values. These ideas affect how different uses of natural resources are evaluated and considered significant. Cultural aspects impact the relative importance of economic, environmental, and social goals as well as equity-related concerns, such as the commitment to long-term capital reinvestment and the well-being of local or underprivileged communities. It is important to investigate the extent to which the cultures of the various management bodies involved in managing natural capital interface.

2- Efficiency in Natural Capital Use: The cultural characteristics of the organizations responsible for transforming natural capital into human-made capital and final products and services impact the efficiency of the natural capital employed. The conduct of these groups in managing processes and designing goods, as well as their cooperation and creativity, affects conversion efficiency. Measuring and maximizing this efficiency becomes challenging due to the complexity of the several tasks that natural capital supports and the engagement of numerous organizations from different sectors.

3- Demand: Consumer values and preferences, which are shaped by culture, drive the demand for products and services derived from natural capital. Natural capital is administered and employed in response to public demand for manufactured goods and aspects affecting the quality of life such as recreation, aesthetics, and spiritual well-being. Additionally, the level of public acceptance of alternative management strategies and uses of natural capital will depend on the convictions held by individuals.[30]

Through the above analysis, once the urgency of preserving and enhancing the natural capital available on Earth is established and some ways in which cultural capital can benefit from this development are considered, it becomes clear how the cultural aspect can indeed provide an intriguing perspective that should not be underestimated. Hence the importance of promoting cultural policies.

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[30] *Ibidem*

3.2 Cultural sustainability and cultural policies

The overall ideas and structures that have developed to position culture within contexts of sustainability have displayed multidisciplinary nature, considerable adaptability, and an expanding diversity of perspectives over time.

In the contemporary context, cultural sustainability is commonly defined in two distinct ways. Firstly, it encompasses the enduring nature of cultural and artistic practices and patterns, which include aspects such as shaping and expressing identity, conserving cultural heritage, and fostering a sense of cultural continuity. Secondly, cultural sustainability also encompasses the involvement of cultural attributes and actions in shaping and forming a portion of the pathways leading to more sustainable societies.

During the 3rd World Congress of UCLG[31], held in Mexico City, the Executive Bureau of UCLG endorsed the Policy Statement "Culture is the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development" on 17 November 2010. This declaration urges cities, local, and regional governments worldwide to (a) establish a robust cultural policy and (b) incorporate a cultural aspect into all public policies.

The document did not perceive culture as merely the "fourth" pillar, or dimension, within a hierarchical structure. Instead, it advocates for culture to be explicitly recognized as a distinct and stand-alone pillar of sustainable development, on par with, and equally vital, as the other three (economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental balance).[32]

Indeed, if we acknowledge that culture resides at the very heart of practices and convictions capable of underpinning the essential societal shift toward more sustainable ways of existence, cultural policy becomes the arm of governance that holds the potential to not only safeguard and foster cultural heritage, but also to guide profound societal transformations (Rayman-Bacchus et al., 2020).

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[31] UCLG is the acronymous of United Cities and Local Governments, cited from their website: "as a global network of cities and local, regional, and metropolitan governments and their associations, is committed to representing, defending, and amplifying the voices of local and regional governments to leave no-one and no place behind. Together we are the sentinels of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations held by individuals in communities around the world -- searching for a life in which the ideals of the SDGs are a lived reality." (old.uclg.org)

[32] Culture, the fourth pillar of sustainable development, UCLG, Culture 21, (www.agenda21.net)

Together these narratives, values, and initiatives contribute to the emergence of heightened cultural awareness in comprehending sustainable development and clarify the roles of art, culture, and cultural policies in advancing this aspiration (Duxbury et al., 2017).

On this foundation, Dessein et al. (2015) introduced three theories, as depicted in Figure 10, which emerged from their investigation into Cultural Sustainability. Spanning four years from 2011 to 2015, the research was organized into three distinct thematic clusters: Concepts, Policies, and Assessments.
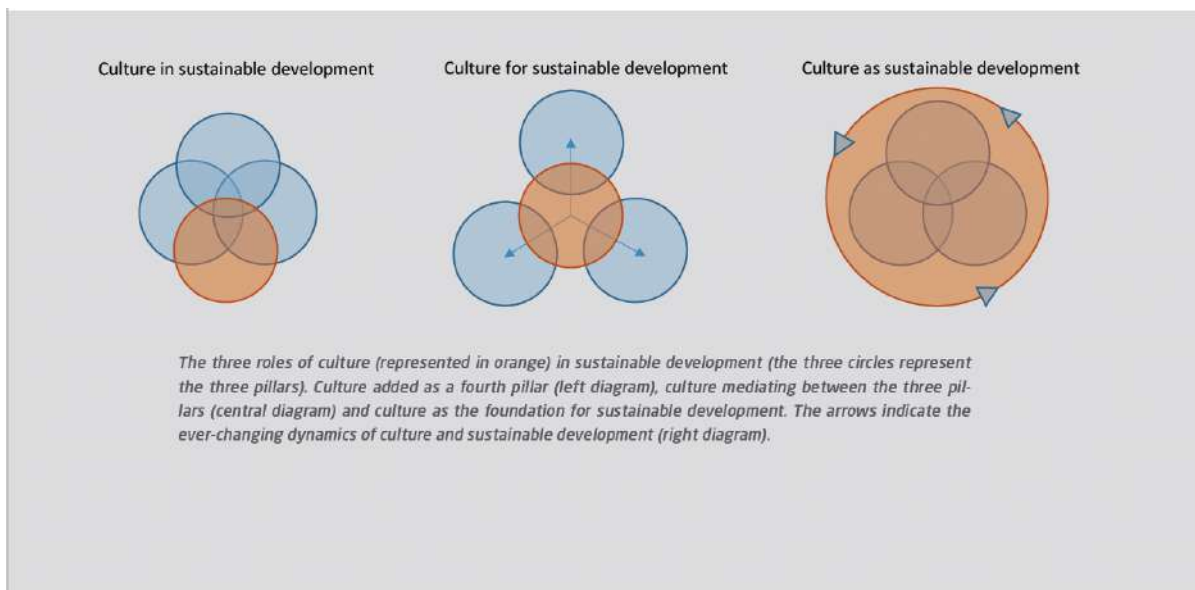

Figure 9. Dessein, Joost & Soini, Katriina & Fairclough, G. & Horlings, Lummina. (2015). Culture in, for and as Sustainable Development; Conclusions from the COST ACTION IS1007 Investigating Cultural Sustainability.p.29

The diagrams depict the placement of culture with the three pillars of sustainability and underscore its overarching significance across diverse scenarios (Dessein et al., 2015):

- Culture "in" sustainable development involves providing support and self-promotion (referred to as 'culture in sustainable development'), which essentially and quite uncontroversial extends the conventional discourse on sustainable development by incorporating culture as an additional, relatively independent fourth pillar.
- Culture "for" sustainable development portrays culture as a more influential force that transcends its boundaries. In this role, culture functions as a framing, contextualizing, and mediating agent that can harmonize the three pillars and steer sustainable development amidst economic, social, and ecological pressures and necessities, which naturally stem from human cultural aspirations and activities.

- Culture "as" sustainable development sees culture as "the necessary overall foundation and structure for achieving the aims of sustainable development". This last view acknowledges that culture underlies all human choices and behaviors and serves as an encompassing concern within sustainable development perspectives. Here, the relationship between culture and sustainability becomes closely intertwined and the distinction between the pillars starts to fade.

Noticing that each of the overviews offered does not invalidate the other, instead, they complement and enhance one another. Finally, they embody diverse methods of conceptualizing and arranging values, significance, and norms in a strategic and versatile manner, which can be extremely valuable in achieving a more comprehensive understanding and perspective of the subject.

Yet, achieving this balance is not a matter of chance but a result of deliberate planning and strategic action where at the heart of this transformative process lies the crucial role of cultural policies, namely regulations and laws capable of overseeing and nurturing cultural growth.
It is paramount to implement cultural policies to safeguard and ensure the cultural practices and rights of each country, or rather, as declared during the conference "Our Creative Diversity"[33]: the coexistence of diverse cultures within each country.

During the initial years of the 2000s, the notion of transforming a selection of these challenges into legally binding documents gained traction. This progression ultimately led to the establishment of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, commonly referred to as 'the Convention'. Through this historic agreement, the global community formally recognized the dual nature, both cultural and economic, of contemporary cultural expressions produced by artists and cultural professionals.

Within this framework, the concept of 'cultural development' was introduced as a means of harmonizing cultural and economic policy goals. This encompassed intentions to promote cultural

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[33] The conference "Our Creative Diversity" defined the concepts of 'culture', 'cultural development', and 'culturally sustainable development' (Nancy Duxbury, Anita Kangas & Christiaan De Beukelaer (2017) Cultural policies for sustainable development: four strategic paths, International Journal of Cultural Policy, 23:2, 214-230, DOI: 10.1080/10286632.2017.1280789).

diversity, provide local communities with chances for cultural expression, and stimulate cross-sectoral collaborations as strategies to bolster sustainable cultural engagement.

Additionally, in the late 2000s, the concept of culture and, even more, the importance of creativity as a catalyst for economic growth in urban areas, regions, and developed capitalist economies, gained prominence with the global emergence of aspirations tied to the concept of the 'creative city'.[34]

In the realm of cultural policy, explicit instrumental strategies, aiming to leverage culture in addressing societal challenges, have been developed to justify public spending on culture. Following the analysis of Kangas et al. & Christiaan (2017), this expansion of cultural policy has occurred in two main directions:

- First, the potential of arts, culture, and heritage has been harnessed to rejuvenate cities and peripheral areas. Cultural industries, creative arts, and heritage have been utilized to attract investment into urban and regional settings, helping urban regeneration – so, creating favorable ground to attract the so-called "creative class" [35], a term coined by Richard Florida[36], who asserts that, due to its distinctive attributes, it plays a crucial role in shaping a city's development. Indeed, several studies ascertained that successful cultural projects could benefit local governments by altering the region's image, attracting affluent residents and taxpayers, and increasing property values. A typical example of the literature so far is the phenomenon that occurred in the city of Bilbao, where the erection of the Guggenheim

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[34] *Ibidem.*

[35] The creative class is defined as the collection of occupations that specialize in the novel combination of knowledge and ideas to solve problems or create value. It consists of individuals engaged in occupations that require creativity, knowledge, and problem-solving skills. This group includes professionals in fields such as technology, science, arts, design, media, entertainment, research, and education. (Wojan, T. (2014). Creative Class (Richard Florida). In: Michalos, A.C. (eds) Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_3332)

[36] He is a writer and journalist, having penned several global best sellers devoted to cities and urbanism, including the award winning *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) and his most recent book, *The New Urban Crisis* (2017). (https://creativeclass.com/richard_florida/)

Museum designed by Frank Gehry gave rise to what is now known as the Bilbao effect,[37] including reinforcing the image of a city facing decline and revitalize its economic development.

- Second, cultural initiatives have been employed to enhance social inclusion, provide social welfare, and foster social cohesion.

While certain organizations and commentators argue that cultural and creative industries inherently possess the capacity to contribute to sustainable development, it's imperative to recognize that their potential impact is not automatic but contingent upon a conducive policy framework and a nurturing environment.

Primary objectives	Roles of cultural policy	Culture concept	Sustainability concept
To safeguard and sustain cultural practices and rights	Regulator and Protector	Cultural practices and rights of groups	Sustaining diverse cultural practices and environments into the future
To 'green' the operations and impacts of cultural organizations and industries	Translator and Politicking	The production and dissemination of cultural expressions through events, products, services, etc. as well as modes and habits of cultural consumption	Environmental sustainability, possibly also linked to social, cultural, and economic sustainability (includes reducing economic costs by focusing on resource efficiency)
To raise awareness and catalyse action about sustainability and climate change through arts and culture	Animator and Catalyst	Artistic and creative expressions – as works of art in themselves and explicitly (or sometimes) implicitly instrumentalised	Environmental sustainability dominant, possibly linked also to social, cultural, and economic sustainability
To foster global ecological citizenship to help identify and tackle sustainability as a global issue	Educator and Promoter	Identity and creative expression	Integrated social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions

Figure 10. Duxbury et al (2017:222)

In this regard, they proposed four strategic paths (reported in Figure 10) that emphasize the role of cultural policies in shaping trajectories toward sustainable development and finally envision the principles of the 2030 Agenda.

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[37] A phenomenon whereby cultural investment plus showy architecture is supposed to equal economic uplift for cities down on their luck. It is the father of "iconic" architecture, the prolific progenitor of countless odd-shaped buildings the world over. (theguardian.com)

3.3 Culture in the Agenda 2030

Since the birth of the sustainable development discourse in the cultural policy of the 1980s culture has always been held separately (Dobrosława, 2010).

Although critical academic research emphasized the growth of interest in culture (see the contributions of some notable authors such as Bourdieu, Thorsby, Appadurai, etc…), the role of culture remained limited to an instrumental role as a guiding principle for economic, social, or environmental growth. (Duxbury et al, 2017)

However, as elucidated in earlier chapters, the acknowledgment of culture's significance in development discussions is intimately tied to its existence and the formulation of cultural policies that can assert, both in terms of regulation and efficacy, the underlying assumptions that are periodically established.

CULTURE AS A TOPIC IN INTERNATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK: SELECTED LANDMARKS

Year	Agency	Event or Publication
2003	UNESCO	Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - ratified by +150 countries
2004	United Cities and Local	Adoption of 'Agenda 21 for Culture'
2005	UNESCO	Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions - ratified by +130 countries
2007	UN	UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
2007	Fribourg Group	Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights
2009	UN Human Rights Council	Established a post of Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights for a 3-year period (extended)
2010	UN General Assembly	Resolution re: connection between culture and development - adopted
2010	United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)	Policy statement on 'Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development' - adopted
2011	UN General Assembly	Resolution 2 re: connection between culture and development - adopted
2011	UNESCO	Adoption of new UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape
2012	UN Conference on Sustainable Development, endorsed by UN General Assembly/High-level	Outcome Document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development
2013	UNESCO International Congress 'Culture: Key to Sustainable Development'	Final declaration – 'Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies', the Hangzhou Declaration
2013	UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO	Creative Economy Report 3: Special Edition – Widening Local Development Pathways
2013	International Federations of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (IFCCD), Agenda 21 for Culture and Culture Action Europe	Culture as a Goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda – published. The '#culture2015goal' campaign launched
2013	UN General Assembly	Resolution on Culture and Sustainable Development A/RES/68/223 - adopted
2014	UN General Assembly	Thematic Debate on 'Culture and Sustainable Development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda' (NYC); Panel Discussion 'The power of culture for poverty eradication and sustainable development'
2014	3rd UNESCO World Forum on Culture and the Cultural Industries: 'Culture, Creativity and Sustainable Development'	Forum concluded with the adoption of the 'Florence Declaration' - recommendations on maximising the role of culture to achieve sustainable development and effective ways of integrating culture in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
2015	United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)	'Culture 21 Actions: Commitments on the role of culture in sustainable cities' (approved in Bilbao, first UCLG Culture Summit)

(Nancy Duxbury, Jordi Pascual, Jyoti Hosagraha)

Figure 11. Dessein, Joost & Soini, Katriina & Fairclough, G. & Horlings, Lummina. (2015). Culture in, for and as Sustainable Development; Conclusions from the COST ACTION IS1007 Investigating Cultural Sustainability

The inclusion of culture and the promotion of cultural diversity within the framework of development owe a significant portion of their inception to the efforts of UNESCO, driven by its advocacy and capacity to foster substantial international endeavors for its vision (Dobrosława, 2020).

The table above (Fig.11) resumes the principal landmark in the ongoing process of integrating culture in international arguments from the early 20th century when the need to safeguard cultural heritage and promote intercultural understanding gained international recognition.

Nevertheless, the general consensus among experts is that the inclusion of cultural references in the SDGs is limited and, as a result, not adequately represented. To find culture in the 2030 Agenda must researched between the 17 goals as an enabler or a driver, the only target where culture is explicitly mentioned is Target 11.4, 'Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.[38]

For these reasons, UNESCO decided to create its own set of indicators (Fig.13) that can cope with the global challenge of the 2030 Agenda, alongside monitoring and measuring the influence of culture in its advancement.
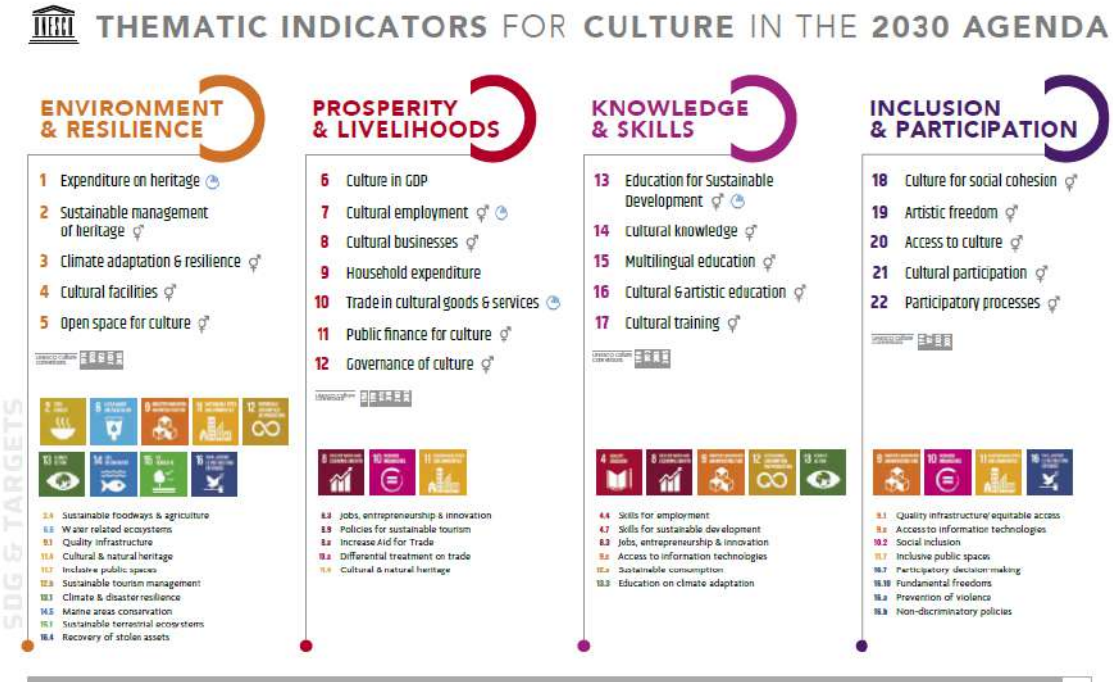

Figure 12. Thematic Indicators for culture in the 2030 Agenda published in 2019 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris (France)

Since "The lack of reliable data collection, measurement and monitoring processes have represented a significant and critical obstacle in pushing forward the importance of cultural

[38] https://whc.unesco.org/en/culture2030indicators

heritage and creativity"[39] they have recurred to a data-analysis approach, collecting various types of data from different sources (ministries, local surveys, agencies, professional volunteer organizations, etc..) thus offering poof of culture's transformative impact by making it more apparent and concrete.

Instead of individually monitoring how culture contributes to each relevant SDG Target and globally accepted indicator, the UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators assess the contribution of culture across multiple Goals and Targets, aiming to establish connections between them and *build a coherent and strong narrative on culture and development that is evidence-based and would help decision makers*.[40]

3.4 The Role of Nonprofits in sustainable development
3.4.1 Economic theories on the existence of nonprofit sector
Starting in the late 1990s, various scholars, including Lester Salamon, whom we will talk about shortly, were motivated to conduct research in the nonprofit field for several reasons. One significant factor was the fact that this sector was experiencing significant growth, yet there was limited material available to truly understand the underlying motivations. Quoting directly from the title of a paramount writing of that time, among the various questions that surfaced, one particularly stood out: "If not for profit, for what?"[41]

Scholars were struggling to comprehend the reasons behind the success of nonprofit organizations, leading to the emergence of numerous writings and theories among which arose the following six outlined by Lester Salamon in "Social Origins of Civil Society: Explaining the Nonprofit Sector Cross-Nationally"[42]:

1　Heterogeneity Theory:

The "heterogeneity" theory or the "market failure/government failure" developed by Burton Weisbord, has historically been the predominant framework in the nonprofit sector. This perspective derives from the recognition that markets have limitations in providing

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39 Ibidem

[40] *Ibidem*
[41] D. R. YOUNG, If Not for Profit, for What?, Lexington, Lexington Books, 1983.

[42] Salamon, L.M., Anheier, H.K. Social Origins of Civil Society: Explaining the Nonprofit Sector Cross-Nationally. VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations 9, 213–248 (1998). https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022058200985

"public goods" available to all, regardless of payment. In classical economics, this market failure justifies government intervention to provide such goods. However, Weisbord points out that government can play this role in a democracy, where a considerable number of different opinions exist, only when the majority supports a particular public good. Otherwise, because of the significant disagreement, it may be difficult to create such support, eventually leading to an unsatisfied demand for public goods. It follows that this "failure of government" is even more pronounced in a context of great heterogeneity within the population.

Following these theories, nonprofit organizations step in to fulfill the unmet demand for collective goods that result from shortcomings in both the market and government sectors.

2   Supply-Side Theory

Compared to the "Heterogeneity Theory", the "Supply-Side Theory" introduces an additional condition for the emergence of nonprofit organizations, namely the presence of social entrepreneurs. These individuals are recognized for their motivation to create nonprofit organizations in response to the need for public goods and thus driven by a great altruistic spirit and strong social values. These social entrepreneurs are more likely to appear in specific situations, such as when there is religious competition, where various religious groups are competing to gain followers. In such competitive scenarios, individuals with strong religious convictions create nonprofit organizations as a means to attract adherents by offering appealing services like healthcare or education. Ultimately, this theory implies that the nonprofit sector tends to flourish in regions marked by intense religious competition, particularly in fields like education where such competition is often pronounced.

3   Trust Theories

Another theoretical perspective looks at the origin of nonprofit activities not because of market or government failures in providing a sufficient quantity and variety of collective goods, but rather as a response to "contract failures." These contract failures stem from information asymmetries that consumers often encounter in transactions. In many cases, consumers lack the necessary information to assess the quality of the goods or services they are purchasing. This can happen when the purchaser is different from the consumer (e.g., children purchasing nursing home care for their elderly parents) or when the service is inherently complex and challenging to evaluate. In such scenarios, buyers look for

alternative sources of confidence in the quality of the services they are obtaining, precisely, for example, in nonprofit organizations. Following this theory, nonprofit organizations, due to their "non-distribution constraint" (prohibition on distributing profits to owners), are perceived as more trustworthy and more likely to prioritize the needs of their clients over profits.

4 Welfare State Theory

While the previous theories assume that the expansion of state-provided welfare services replaces nonprofit organizations, they fail to explain the expansion of state-provided social welfare services in the first place. By investigating the literature that emerged on the modern welfare state, it turns out that such theories regard nonprofits as a residual sector, related to the premodern times, a mechanism akin to the family, the Church, or feudal lords for addressing societal issues. In this perspective, economic development becomes closely intertwined with the scope of state-provided social welfare services. As a nation's economy advances, the state's engagement in delivering welfare services intensifies, while the nonprofit sector's significance diminishes. In other words: "Traditional welfare state theory would thus lead us to expect that the greater level of economic development, the more extensive the state provision of social welfare services; and the more extensive the state provision of social welfare services, the smaller the nonprofit sector" (Salamon et al., 1996)

5 Interdependence Theory

In contrast to previous theories, this alternative perspective suggests that nonprofit organizations and the government can work together collaboratively and interdependently. Nonprofits often operate in fields before the government gets involved, gaining expertise and structures that the government can utilize later. Nonprofits also mobilize political support that can encourage government participation and ensure a role for nonprofits in areas where they are already active. Nevertheless, these types of organizations have their own limitations that can restrict their ability to effectively address public issues, which, referred to as "voluntary failure," include challenges such as difficulty in raising enough resources to scale up operations and the inability to establish rights to benefits, hindering self-reliance. This collaboration can develop under specific circumstances, for example, it may become necessary when there is strong opposition to direct government intervention, driven by ideological motivations or other factors, or when individuals with connections to

the nonprofit sector play a crucial role in strengthening the government's position and impact in addressing social or economic issues.

6   Social Origins Theory

The interdependencies theory recognizes the idea of cooperation between nonprofits and the government, but it doesn't explain when and why nonprofits and the government might work together effectively. Social origin theories have the potential to serve as a link between the straightforwardness of economic theories listed above and the intricate realm of comparative historical research. It argues that decisions about whether to rely on the market, nonprofit sector, or government for social services are not solely based on individual choices in an open market. Instead, the historical context and existing institutions play a significant role in shaping how social services are provided. Based on the work of scholars like Gøsta Esping-Andersen and Barrington Moore Jr., who studied the origins of modern welfare states and political systems, these complex social phenomena cannot be attributed to a single factor but are the result of intricate relationships among social classes and institutions. In summary, the social origin theory intends to underpin the complexity of decision-making in social service provision, emphasizing that historical context and social relationships among different entities like nonprofits, government, and markets play a crucial role in shaping the nature of welfare states and political systems.

Beyond merely offering a descriptive perspective on the place of non-profit organizations within our economic landscape, the theories illustrated above, serve as a foundational basis for assessing their efficacy and impact. These theories delve into the motivations, structures, and purposes behind non-profit organizations, enabling a deeper understanding of their role in addressing societal challenges.

By examining these theories, it is possible to gain valuable insights that allow us to identify the key drivers of success and the potential stumbling blocks that non-profits may encounter.

3.4.2 Role of nonprofits in local development, considering the Italian situation

Considering that the nonprofit sector holds significance in the context of sustainable development, this chapter aims to investigate in detail how this can be realized within the framework of a local strategy, because as stated by ASVIS (Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development):

"The local dimension is where interactions between institutions, organizations and citizens occur most immediately and where inequalities, forms of exclusion, imbalances in power and vulnerabilities are perceived most strongly by citizens. It is therefore the level at which sustainable development strategy can be defined in order to reflect the actual needs and opportunities specific to the area. By empowering them to play an active role in policy making, local actors can become the real players in the enhancement, sustainable use, and protection of shared economic, social and environmental resources."[43]

Although exist a strong tradition, historically, in Italy, non-profit organizations have been closely associated with social and welfare activities, and they have been kept distinct from the economic activities of the country (Bravo, 2004). This separation is rooted in the misconception that the concept of "non-profit" erroneously distinguishes itself from economic activities, which are inherently driven by profit-oriented motives:

"Nonprofit organizations can indeed play a significant role in all those sectors of the economy where, due to the characteristics of the goods and services produced (high cognitive content, excessive entrepreneurial risks, etc.) or due to industrial nature (clustered systems of small businesses), greater coordination among local stakeholders is necessary than what can be achieved through the market and/or high levels of cooperation to achieve collective objectives. Furthermore, since nonprofit organizations represent an important component of social capital within a given geographical area, and since social capital possesses the property of not depleting with use [...] nonprofit entities constitute a fundamental element in maintaining the social foundations underlying productive models such as industrial clusters. Therefore, they

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[43] The translation of the text was provided by the author of this thesis (https://asvis.it/approfondimenti/22-7503/definire-le-strategie-locali-per-lo-sviluppo-sostenibile-unanalisi-comparativa)

should be considered as a significant player in a growth process that aims, in addition to short-term economic capital accumulation, at achieving genuine social and economic sustainability in the long term" (Bravo, 2004)

If we consider that, as we have discussed in the previous chapters, a country's sustainable development should be assessed not only in terms of its GDP but also based on its levels of well-being, international institutions like the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and the World Bank recognize that underdevelopment encompasses not only income disparities but also issues related to social vulnerability, exclusion, weak governance institutions, and violence, among other contributing factors (Peiró-Palomino et al., 2020).

Thanks to its contribution to the "social economy", the nonprofit sector plays a fundamental role in the context of local and sustainable development and, consequently, in Agenda 2030.

In particular, if we consider the case of Italy according to the study by Giuseppe Terzo et al. (2023), it becomes evident that there is a clear correlation between the presence of non-profit activity and regional well-being.

The study investigates the role of non-profits, with a focus on their primary characteristic as a source of social and relational capital. It builds upon the findings obtained from recent research conducted by Calcagnini et al. (2019b), which suggest that certain socio-cultural and institutional factors, including the quality of both formal and informal institutions, can have a positive influence on multidimensional well-being.

As expected, the cross-analysis has highlighted significant disparities among Italian regions, with a clear division between the North and the South of the country. However, what emerges from this research is the potential correlation between the distribution of non-profit organizations across the Italian territory and how these organizations could contribute to improving well-being in areas with lower scores (Terzo et al., 2023). In other words, it suggests that the presence and activities of non-profit organizations could have a positive impact on enhancing well-being in these regions, where economic, social, or infrastructural conditions are less favorable.

To obtain a more in-depth insight into the significance of the nonprofit sector within the Italian context, it follows some relevant ISTAT data extracted from the latest census (2021)[44]:

In Italy, the latest data from ISTAT (2021 census) shows continuous growth in the nonprofit sector. Although there was a more significant increase of 0.9 percent from 2018 to 2019, the total number of nonprofit organizations in the country reached 363.499 by December 31, 2020, still reflecting an increase of 0.2 percent, compared to the previous year. The regional concentration becomes even more pronounced if we look at the distribution of employees: the total number of 870.183, 57.2 percent are employed in the northern regions, in contrast to 20.0 percent in the southern.

Regarding the geographical distribution, the data report a clear predominance in the North, recording in fact more than half of the institutions compared to the total number in the country, followed by 22.2 percent in the Center, 18.2 percent, and 9.4 percent in the South and Islands respectively. The regional concentration becomes even more pronounced, if we distribution of employees: 57.2 percent are employed in the northern regions, in contrast to 20.0 percent in the southern regions.
Although the statistics report a clear imbalance in concentration between north and south, it must be considered that, while the north remains stable, the *Mezzogiorno* is growing strongly reporting an increase of 1, 2 percent, and it also includes the highest number of younger organizations (established after 2010).

Finally, focusing on the details of the activities carried out by the most performing organizations (Figure 15), we find how the sports sector collects 32.9 percent of the NPOs, followed by the sectors of Cultural and Artistic Activities (15.9 percent), Recreation and Socialization (14.3 percent), and Social Assistance and Civil Protection (9.9 percent). By contrast, the largest concentrations of personnel are found in a few sectors: Social Assistance and Civil Protection (48.4 percent), Education and Research (15.0 percent), Health Care (11.9 percent), and Economic Development and Social Cohesion (11.4 percent).

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[44] https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/05/Censimento-non-profit-primi-risultati.pdf

Additionally, within this framework, the census highlights a rise in contributions from the "cinque per mille"[45]: in 2020, 65,439 nonprofit institutions were listed as beneficiaries of the "cinque per mille," making up 17.0% of the total. During the 2020 income tax declaration year, both the number of beneficiary organizations (+5.8%) and the received amount (+1.6%), totaling around 455.6 million euros, increased compared to the previous year.

PROSPETTO 5. ISTITUZIONI NON PROFIT E DIPENDENTI PER SETTORE DI ATTIVITA' PREVALENTE.
Anno 2020, valori assoluti, composizioni e percentuali

Settori di attività prevalente(a)	Istituzioni		Dipendenti(b)	
	v.a.	%	v.a.	%
Attività culturali e artistiche	57.615	15,9	20.038	2,3
Attività sportive	119.476	32,9	18.747	2,2
Attività ricreative e di socializzazione	51.954	14,3	10.827	1,2
Istruzione e ricerca	13.839	3,8	130.392	15,0
Sanità	12.578	3,5	103.215	11,9
Assistenza sociale e protezione civile	35.868	9,9	421.356	48,4
Ambiente	6.316	1,7	2.145	0,2
Sviluppo economico e coesione sociale	6.351	1,7	98.918	11,4
Tutela dei diritti e attività politica	6.684	1,8	3.350	0,4
Filantropia e promozione del volontariato	4.126	1,1	2.667	0,3
Cooperazione e solidarietà internazionale	4.635	1,3	3.868	0,4
Religione	17.249	4,7	9.396	1,1
Relazioni sindacali e rappresentanza interessi	24.610	6,8	40.686	4,7
Altre attività	2.198	0,6	4.578	0,5
TOTALE	**363.499**	**100,0**	**870.183**	**100,0**

(a) Per l'anno di riferimento 2020, al fine di allineare le classificazioni ATECO e ICNPO, alcune istituzioni sono state classificate differentemente rispetto agli anni precedenti. I settori maggiormente interessati dalla riclassificazione sono: sanità, assistenza sociale e protezione civile, sviluppo economico e coesione sociale, attività culturali e artistiche, attività ricreative e di socializzazione.
(b) Nel caso di istituzioni che svolgono più attività, la variazione dei dipendenti può riguardare il settore d'attività secondario e non quello prevalente.

Figure 15 Nonprofit distribution based on activity sector (ISTAT, 2021)

In summary, despite being commonly regarded as a marginal part of the national economy, the evidence demonstrates that it plays a crucial role in the socio-economic dynamics of Italy and is increasingly gaining greater recognition (see also the contribution of "cinque per mille"). Thanks to its unique characteristics, it is capable of addressing challenging situations by adapting to circumstances, thereby contributing to the growth of local communities.

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[45] The "cinque per mille" is the opportunity for taxpayers to allocate 5x1000 of their personal income tax to organizations working in the public interest and for social welfare purposes, such as research, social assistance, culture, sports, and more. (https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/terzo-settore-e-responsabilita-sociale-imprese/focus-on/cinque-per-mille/pagine/default)

3.4.3 Nonprofits as key partners for national and international challenges

As we already highlighted, for the achievement of the 17 SDGS goals, that represent the global commitment to sustainable development, it is imperative the contribution of countries and nations, including governative and non-governative organizations.

In the framework of Agenda 2030, as explained in paragraph 2.3.1 (*From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals*) there has been a notable transition from conventional management practices to a fresh paradigm centered on collaboration and active involvement, underscored by the willingness and necessity to forge global partnerships, as emphasized by GOAL 17.

In this evolving framework, nonprofit organizations have emerged as vital stakeholders in the governance landscape.

The significance, quantity, and visibility of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) are on the rise, both at local and global scales. According to the World Economic Forum in 2013[46], the influence and presence of NPOs have been expanding steadily.

Their reach often transcends national borders, with some NPOs providing services on a global scale, contributing to what is called the "social economy"[47], recognized by the Council of European Union[48] as an alternative approach to conducting business, that combines sustainable economic activities with positive social impacts and contributes significantly to economic, social, and human development across Europe and beyond.

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[46] The Future Role of Civil Society (Rep.). 2013.. World Economic Forum. Doi: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FutureRoleCivilSociety_Report_2013.pdf

[47] Social economy enterprises refer to a universe of organizations based on the primacy of people over capital and include organizational forms such as cooperatives, mutual, foundations and associations as well as newer forms of social enterprises5 and may be regarded as vehicles for social and economic cohesion across Europe as they help build a pluralistic and resilient social market economy. Acting in the general interest, social economy enterprises create jobs, provide socially innovative services and goods, facilitate social inclusions and promote a more sustainable and locally anchored economy. They are based on solidarity and empowerment principles. (https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/council-conclusions-of-december-2015.pdf)

[48] https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/council-conclusions-of-december-2015.pdf

Within this context, NPOs have the ability to make substantial economic and social influence, impacting communities not only at the local and national levels but also on the international stage. Considering this novel approach (Figure 13), nonprofit entities, once perceived as oppositional forces to other sectors, have transformed into institutional entities that both the state and the corporate sector increasingly recognize as indispensable partners for fostering greater collaboration (Dulkadiroglu, 2019).
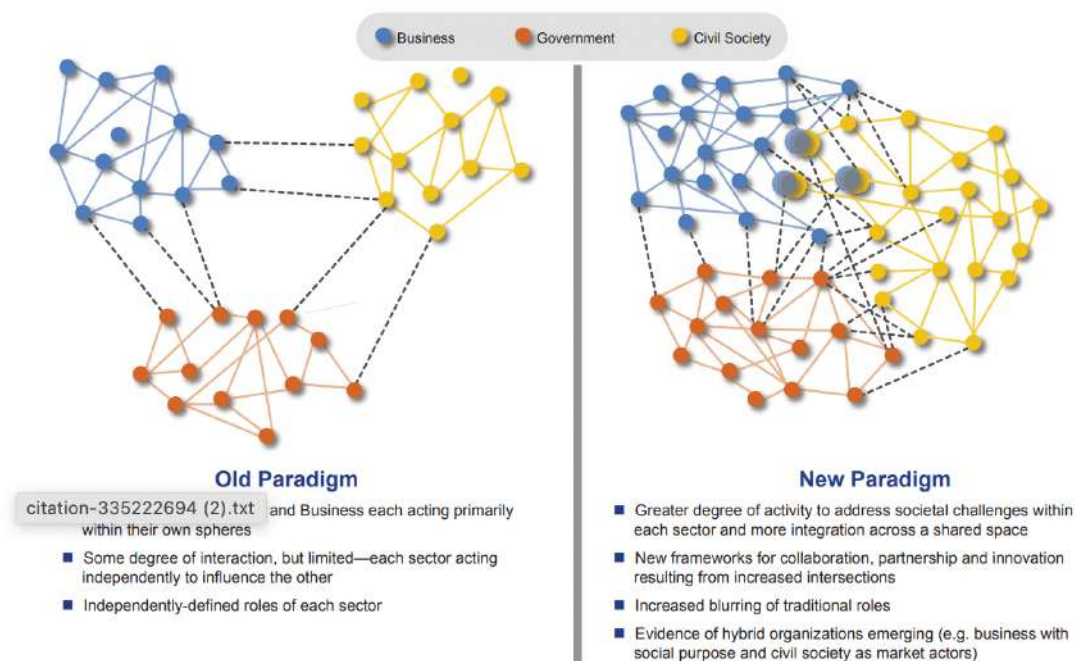
Figure 13. Changing paradigm for sector roles.

The image wants to represent the two paradigms of the intertwined relationship between economics, government, and civil society, whereby the latter is defined as "the area outside the family, market and state" and encompasses a vast range of actors and entities, including non-profit organization. (World Economic Forum,2013)

Moreover, according to the report on *The Third Sector and the goals of sustainable development* released in May 2021: *"in this transition journey, the nonprofit sector enjoys an undeniable advantage compared to the public administration and businesses, as it is inherently oriented towards promoting human development and implementing sustainable development paths".[49]*

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[49] https://www.forumterzosettore.it/2021/05/28/il-terzo-settore-e-gli-obiettivi-di-sviluppo-sostenibile-rapporto-2021/

Within this context, the importance of non-profit organizations has also been recently tested during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their ability to adapt and address emergent needs, whether it be delivering essential goods and services or providing comfort and support, showcases their resilience and responsiveness to social, environmental, and economic emergencies — key components of sustainable development.

Figure 14. Matrix of connection between macro sectors and priority SDGs

(https://www.forumterzosettore.it/files/2021/05/Report-SDGs2021_DEF_grafica.pdf)

In particular, the report published in 2021 on the analysis of the third sector in Italy[50] reveals several noteworthy findings, including the diversity of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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[50] https://www.forumterzosettore.it/2021/05/28/il-terzo-settore-e-gli-obiettivi-di-sviluppo-sostenibile-rapporto-2021/

that various networks are actively engaged with, a widespread commitment to building sustainable communities and reducing inequalities, significant human resources involved in service delivery, and a common practice of forming partnerships for projects.

These findings underscore the central role of the Third Sector in generating multidimensional impacts, establishing networks, valuing individuals (both beneficiaries and volunteers/workers), reducing social conflicts, fostering inclusive economics, and enhancing the value of the territory and natural environment. In essence: highlighting the Third Sector's crucial contributions to achieving SDGs.

Proving the connection between NPOs and Agenda 2030, and thus their paramount contribution to achieving sustainable development, figure 14 illustrates the different NPOs classified for function and the goals to which they relate and support.

Chapter 4

What is the role of *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* in sustainable development?

Through an analysis of *La Laguna nel Bicchiere* and by demonstrating the significance of culture and the nonprofit sector in the broader context of sustainable development, the scope of this thesis has been to position cultural associations as essential contributors to addressing this global challenge. This connection can be highlighted by examining their distinctive attributes and shared initiatives, their peculiarities, and their mutual endeavors.

First of all, as we have seen in the introductory chapter, *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* is a cultural association, which, from a legal point of view, falls within the definition of a "group of individuals gathered and organized to pursue a common purpose, consisting of altruistic goals or advantages for the members (which can be, for example, sporting, welfare-related, social, cultural, or political)".[51]

While from an economic point of view, it is:

> *"A legal and economic entity, whether or not it has legal personality, of a private nature, that produces goods and services for sale or non-sale purposes and, based on current laws or its own statutory regulations, is not allowed to distribute, directly or indirectly, profits or other earnings other than the remuneration for the work provided to the individuals who established it or to its members. According to this definition, examples of nonprofit institutions include: associations, recognized and unrecognized, foundations, social cooperatives, committees. Nonprofit institutions also include non-governmental organizations, volunteer organizations, non-profit organizations of social utility (Onlus), political parties, trade unions, professional associations, and legally recognized ecclesiastical entities.*[52]

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[51] https://www.brocardi.it/dizionario/616.html#:~:text=%C3%88%20un%20gruppo%20di%20persone,sociale%2C%20culturale%2C%20politico)

[52] https://www.istat.it/it/metodi-e-strumenti/glossario

This conclusive chapter will summarize the peculiarities of *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*, taking into account the three pillars of sustainability—environmental, social, and economic. It will encapsulate all the pertinent considerations and clarifications on this topic that have been discussed so far, providing a comprehensive overview of how *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* embodies and contributes to sustainability.

4.1 Context of Reference

The legal and economic characteristics allow us to place the organization within the discourse already addressed regarding nonprofits and their role in local and international sustainability. In this regard, we observe that in the Veneto region, which ranked third in Italy in 2017 after Lombardy and Lazio, according to the latest report, in 2020, the region experienced a 0.9% decrease in institutions per ten thousand inhabitants compared to 2019 (ISTAT, 2021)[53]. While this data represents a slight decrease, it draws attention to the fact that there is a declining trend in the sector in a region that has historically been considered significant.

As reported in the 2021 report on the third sector, one possible cause of this decrease can be attributed to the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As often happens, nonprofit organizations responded to the emergency by implementing a series of actions to try to be of assistance at a time when the public sector alone couldn't cover all the needs. As evidence of this, it is worth noting that, according to the latest ISTAT report (2021), the concentration of active individuals in nonprofits has indeed shifted towards activities related to Social Assistance and Civil Protection (48.4 percent), Education and Research (15.0 percent), Health Care (11.9 percent), and Economic Development and Social Cohesion (11.4 percent).

Although this is the general situation, focusing on cultural associations, we can see that they rank second in terms of numbers, after sports associations (in fact, one in three associations is dedicated to sports activities).

Regarding the cultural sector, this means that the field of nonprofits represents a particularly relevant space to carry out its activities, and it is crucial to maintain a high level of participation. In this regard, despite the challenging times we are going through, which still have lingering effects, and adding the additional element of difficulty due to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, when

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[53] https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/05/Censimento-non-profit-primi-risultati.pdf

observing the performance of *La Laguna nel Bicchiere* (financial report 2017-2022)[54], we can say that the association has not been particularly affected by the surrounding situation. Recording a positive financial balance during the tracked years, it continues to advance its causes, establishing national and international partnerships with other associations (such as the recent collaboration with Slow Food and the creation of the U.V.A)[55].

4.2. Governance, or economic, aspects

Through the analysis of the activities undertaken by La Laguna Nel Bicchiere, it becomes evident that the extent of collaboration it has established with the local community and external partners stands out as a significant strength of the association.

The initial chapters have highlighted how the structure of the activities carried out by *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*, ranging from educational projects to volunteering and their participation in local and international fairs and events, is supported by a strong network of relationships and collaborations. In fact, without these, they would not be able to survive, indeed they would lose their purpose. These connections constitute significant resource reservoirs that can be accessed, which can be either financial (as demonstrated by the agreement established with Palazzetto Bru Zarne) or non-financial (such as the agricultural expertise contributed by professionals who evaluate the vineyards' health). Therefore, it is imperative for organizations of this nature to consistently seek out new sources of funding and potential income streams that serve as the bedrock for sustaining the organization itself. (Dubini et al., 2017)

Nevertheless, the funds raised by the association so far have always been sufficient to cover expenses such as the purchase of corks, bottles, and the tools necessary for the grape harvest. In cases where a surplus of income has been generated, these additional funds have been reinvested and allocated, for example, towards the acquisition of new equipment, consequently contributing to the enhancement of working conditions.

In this regard, the literature recognizes that successful collaborations serve multifaceted purposes, encompassing resource acquisition and the augmentation of each participating organization's capacity to effectively fulfill its respective mission. Specifically, a study conducted by Proulx et

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[54] Financial reports are not inserted in this thesis by the will of the organization, for privacy reasons.
[55] See chapter 1

al. in 2014, identified some key elements that play a determinative role in shaping such interactions:

- effective collaboration thrives on the foundation of trust, where partner organizations have a clear understanding that their counterparts will act in good faith and not exploit the collaborative relationship.
- Shared goals and a common vision are essential, as organizations should align their objectives to complement each other's needs.
- Social relationships among individuals involved play a significant role, fostering stable organizational connections that drive successful collaboration.
- Leadership within each organization is crucial, as it can create an environment conducive to collaboration, making members more receptive to joint efforts.
- Lastly, successful collaboration is an ongoing, learned skill that demands continuous nurturing, ensuring that it achieves its initial goals, satisfies member organizations' needs, and serves its intended audience. (Proulx et al. 2014)

Given its continuous growth, it is evident that the organization has managed to earn the trust and curiosity of other realities. As elucidated, these collaborations and networking activities generally hold immense significance within nonprofit associations, as their existence and longevity are intrinsically tied to their stakeholders, shareholders, or members.

Aligned with the notion that the sustainability of an organization extends beyond the simple accumulation of financial resources, this examination asserts that a comprehensive assessment of sustainability should underscore the importance of embracing wider dimensions associated with sustainable development, encompassing environmental and societal facets. In this specific context, *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* stands as a persuasive illustration, demonstrating the viability of pursuing a mission without the requirement for substantial financial investments or the mandate to maximize production levels. This paradigm presents a challenge to the conventional capitalist doctrine, which traditionally places profit maximization at the forefront as the ultimate objective.

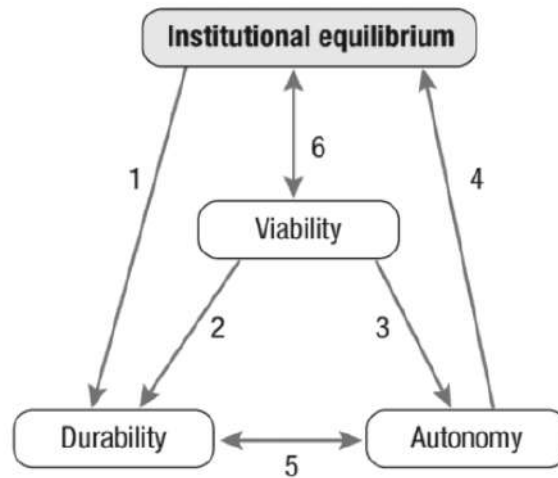## Figure 2.4 The relations between institutional equilibrium and viability

Figure 16. Here illustrated the interdependency between the institutional equilibrium, which encompass all the governance activities, including networking and building collaborations, and the viability, which indicates the economic sustainability of an organization. (DUBINI, Paola, et al. Institutional structure. In: Management of cultural firms. Bocconi University Press, EGEA, 2017.)

Within this framework, concerning the economic aspect of sustainability, *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* operates by adhering to four fundamental criteria identified by Paola Dubini in the cited work, namely durability, institutional equilibrium, viability, and autonomy, where:

1. INSTITUTIONAL EQUILIBRIUM is the ability to design a governance system of relationships, processes, and roles that can keep a balance between powers, control, and responsibilities.

3. DURABILITY is the ability to operate in the long-term regardless of changes and transformations in the environment (and regardless of the presence of specific individuals in the firm).

2. AUTONOMY (of choice) is the ability to set objectives and define appropriate solutions to achieve them, within the limits of the law, and without excessive external influencing pressures.

4. VIABILITY is the ability to exist over time, attracting and mobilizing resources necessary to remunerate all of the conditions of production (and without resorting systematically to external help).

Looking at the elements of economic sustainability presented here, an approach based on resource management rather than exploitation emerges. This contrasts with the traditional mechanism of post-industrial organization, where the logic of minimizing costs to maximize profits wherever possible prevailed. As discussed in the second chapter, this approach included strategies such as relocating production chains to countries with cheaper labor to increase profit margins.

However, such a mindset diverges significantly from the sustainable approach outlined earlier. *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* respects economic sustainability by focusing on creating an atmosphere of maximum cooperation toward a common goal, while fully respecting the surrounding environment and, thanks to its entrepreneurial spirit, it strives to maintain independence and self-sufficiency, hence avoiding potential external pressures that could negatively influence or jeopardize the achievement of its mission.

4.3. Social and Environmental aspects

La Laguna Nel Bicchiere was established to recover the ancient vineyards of Venice with the intention of involving local school students. There was the idea of transmitting a cultural heritage that risked disappearing and offering an opportunity for the new generations to have a hands-on experience on the field. Through its activities and exposure to the cultivation and production of agricultural by-products like grapes and their derivatives, children could have the opportunity to understand the intricate relationship between human activities and the natural world, thus instilling a sense of responsibility towards the environment.
Over the years, the activities have expanded, along with the opportunity to contribute to the association. Today, in fact, a significant portion of the work relies on volunteers, both from the local community and individuals coming from all around the world, and collaborations.

From this perspective, the social and environmental aspects are fundamental components of the cultural association's vision and mission. Furthermore, in terms of sustainable development, two key elements stand out: volunteerism and education.

Even though the association doesn't exclusively focus on environmental or social issues, its promotion of territorial awareness and agricultural education positively contributes to the pillars of sustainable development.

Through volunteering, both at the local and international levels, the association fosters active community participation and engagement in preserving cultural and environmental heritage. Meanwhile, education provides a platform for increasing environmental and social awareness, instructing volunteers and communities on sustainable practices and the importance of preserving our shared heritage.

It has been confirmed by scholars that voluntary activity contributes to shaping the socio-cultural environment thanks to the interactions that occur among different social groups engaged in volunteer experiences. It represents a fundamental renewable resource for addressing social and environmental challenges worldwide (ILO, 2011) or as declared by the United Nations General Assembly (2021):

"an important component of any strategy aimed at...poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management...and the fight against social exclusion and discrimination" (United Nations General Assembly, 2001)

Noting that the attraction of volunteers is enabled by a range of competitive factors that set this cultural association apart, including:

-Experiential Attraction: Venice, with its unparalleled charm, is a city that captures the imagination of people worldwide. The opportunity to take part in volunteer activities within this picturesque setting is a rare and attractive proposition. For many foreign volunteers, it represents a chance of a lifetime to immerse themselves in the Venetian culture and lifestyle.

-Access to Unique Spaces: The association's activities likely grant volunteers access to spaces that are typically off-limits to tourists, such as the cemetery on the island of San Michele, providing a unique opportunity.

-Historical and Cultural Immersion: Venice is steeped in history and tradition, and the association's activities provide an ideal platform for volunteers to delve into this rich cultural tapestry. Engaging in activities like the grape harvest season allows volunteers to connect with the oldest traditions of the region, creating a deep and meaningful cultural immersion and gaining hands-on experience.

-Community Engagement: For foreign volunteers, this presents an extraordinary opportunity to form genuine connections with residents, forging friendships and cultural exchanges that go beyond traditional tourist experiences.

-Educational Value: Beyond the cultural and historical aspects, volunteering in *La Laguna nel Bicchiere* also offers the possibility to learn about traditional winemaking techniques and local customs.

Working in *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*, there are always many international volunteers who choose to contribute to their purpose, taking care of the vineyards and participating in the grape harvest, particularly during the busiest periods. They represent individuals seeking purposeful travel rather than mere leisure, as they aim to make a positive impact while enjoying a destination's beauty. Therefore, these interactions generate benefits for both these "volunteer tourists" and the local population, responding to the need to make a difference and fulfilling their sense of altruism for the first one, and supporting the organization's cause and thus helping to develop the social environment for the latter (Milovanovic, a.y. 2011/2012).

In summary, volunteering and education within the cultural association serve as key elements to effectively link society to the environment. Volunteering promotes active community engagement and attachment to cultural and environmental heritage, while education increases awareness and understanding of environmental issues and encourages more sustainable behaviors. Together, these two pillars create an environment in which society and the environment support each other, thus contributing to sustainable development.

Similarly, from a social perspective, promoting cooperation and association contributes to building a cohesive and inclusive community. In fact, by promoting intergenerational dialogue and valuing local traditions, they actively support SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Creating spaces for dialogue, tolerance, and inclusivity, transcending social, economic, and cultural barriers, the association contributes to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and, also, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), as it actively fosters a more equitable and harmonious society.

In conclusion, it can be said that a cultural association such as *La Laguna nel Bicchiere* operates at the intersection of cultural preservation and community empowerment, serving as an exemplar of how local initiatives rooted in culture can significantly contribute to the global pursuit of sustainable development.

Conclusions

The impact of the cultural association under examination, *La Laguna nel Bicchiere*, within the discourse on sustainable development, has been analyzed by breaking down its elements, identifying its structure and resources, and then integrating them into the broader context of sustainable development, making particular reference to the role of culture and nonprofit organizations in this context.

After examining the association, the concept of sustainable development was introduced and analyzed from its first appearance concerns in the environment-related discourses in the 1960s and 1970s about environmental degradation, to its inclusion in international policies related to the goals stipulated by the 2030 Agenda. The historical overview revealed that achieving sustainable development necessitates embracing a holistic approach that seeks equilibrium among economic growth, societal welfare, and environmental preservation, all with the overarching goal of benefiting both the current and future generations.

In the context of contemporary globalization, individual well-being is interconnected with collective welfare, emphasizing the shared responsibility of everyone in ensuring such conditions. However, contrary to what we have been accustomed to think, promoting this state of well-being goes beyond mere economic growth aimed at acquiring luxury material goods, such as individual car ownership. It's crucial to recognize that true well-being encompasses a broader spectrum of factors, including social cohesion, mental and physical health, environmental sustainability, and equitable access to opportunities and resources.

While economic growth and material possessions can contribute to a certain level of comfort, they should not be the sole indicators of societal progress. Instead, it implies an integrated approach in which economic development is intricately linked to the other two fundamental pillars of sustainable development: social and environmental.

In this perspective, every consumption choice must be made with careful consideration of global implications, taking into account the universal challenges afflicting contemporary society. This includes rethinking our consumption habits, minimizing resource exploitation, and reducing the release of toxic substances into the environment. These challenges encompass issues such as waste

and overproduction, climate change, biodiversity depletion, social inequalities, persistent poverty, and malnutrition, among many other issues.

The study has later pointed out that, thanks to the advocacy efforts undertaken by various institutions, particularly UNESCO, Culture has gained recognition as an essential element in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Eventually designated as the "fourth pillar of sustainable development," culture, in its most comprehensive sense, encompasses not just aspects related to artistic and cultural heritage but also encompasses cultural identity, creativity, and expressions of individuals and communities.

Several studies have highlighted that in the post-industrial era, cultural capital has a significant impact on consumer decisions, business dynamics, and economic growth. More and more consumers express a strong preference for products that reflect their cultural values and seek intangible benefits such as personalized experiences.

Furthermore, it has been found that among the various forms of capital, cultural capital plays an intermediary role in interactions between them. Cultural values exert a profound influence on management objectives, resource efficiency, and consumer goods production. In this context, cultural policies emerge as essential tools to guide these processes and ensure the preservation of cultural practices and associated rights.

Given its dynamic and complex nature, one of the main challenges in analyzing the cultural impact on socio-economic dynamics is measurement difficulty. For this reason, UNESCO has introduced the so-called "Thematic Indicators," which collect various data sources to provide evidence of culture's contribution to sustainable development, helping decision-makers understand its importance.

During the study, which considered the case of a cultural association, legally and economically considered a non-profit organization, the role of such organizations within the context of sustainable development was analyzed. In this direction, one of the first observations was that one of the guiding principles of Agenda 2030 is to promote partnerships and collaborations (Goal 17) between public and private organizations, at both national and international levels, involving every individual responsibly in the global challenge, without distinctions between government or non-government organizations, or between developed and developing countries. Non-profit

organizations, operating in an intermediary position between public and private sectors and working both locally and internationally, fit perfectly into this context of collaboration and partnership.

Through the analysis of economic theories underlying the existence of non-profit associations, it was possible to outline a general framework of their functioning and dynamics within the political-economic and social context in which they operate. Focusing on the Italian situation, where historically these organizations have often been mistakenly considered outside the economic sector, probably due to their non-profit definition, it was highlighted instead that they occupy a significant space within the national landscape. This is particularly evident when analyzing associations operating in cultural sectors, which are the cases of our interest.

Furthermore, it was demonstrated that these types of organizations play crucial roles in times of crisis, such as the emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which several non-profits provided their assistance, demonstrating remarkable resilience. These data underline the significant contribution that non-profit organizations make to society, spanning from cultural and sports fields to healthcare, despite their non-profit nature.

In conclusion, by first examining *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere* and then the concept of sustainable development from various perspectives, it was possible to highlight their points of alignment and, therefore, their complementarity toward a common goal.

Considering the three pillars of sustainability, from an economic point of view, the association demonstrates sustainability through its dense network of collaborations and continuous search for new projects (such as the recent involvement in the U.V.A project), which guarantee the necessary resources (financial and non-financial) for the continuation of their activities. This approach challenges traditional capitalist doctrines, focusing on resource management rather than profit maximization, with a focus on cooperation, independence, and self-sufficiency, emphasizing the concepts of sustainable development as outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, *La Laguna Nel Bicchiere*, with its educational activities aimed at promoting the conservation of cultural heritage and raising awareness in new generations regarding the intricate relationship between human activities and the natural world, positively contributes to the other two pillars of sustainable development (social and environmental). In this regard, it has also been

highlighted that voluntary activity is recognized as a valuable resource for addressing global social and environmental challenges, as it contributes to shaping the sociocultural environment through interactions between different social groups engaged in these experiences.

In essence, cultural associations can be compared to catalysts in biochemical reactions, as they play a similar role in the context of sustainable development within communities. Much like enzymes, these associations facilitate processes of positive social and environmental transformation while preserving the cultural assets they possess. Furthermore, they have the capacity to cooperate with other organizations, generating synergistic effects that enhance the influence of their endeavors in pursuit of their mission. Hence, these associations serve as indispensable agents in the quest for a more sustainable future.

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