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Sustainable Europe 2030

To achieve a (more) Sustainable Europe by 2030, all the four dimensions of sustainability including economic, environmental, human and social factors should be developed.

In the first part of my essay, I'll summarize what a(n imaginary) Sustainable Europe should look like in 2030, in the second part, I'll discuss the three biggest challenges for implementing a Sustainable Europe by 2030 and in the third part, I'll analyse the actions that should be taken – with immediate effect – to support the transition towards a Sustainable Europe in 2030.

Sustainable Europe 2030

Technology

After the first three industrial revolutions (1st – mechanization, water power, steam power; 2nd - mass production assembly line, electricity; 3rd - computer and automation), in 2017 we are already living in the beginning of Industry 4.0, the industrial revolution of Cyber Physical Systems, therefore it is not a question that by 2030 technology will reach unimaginable and unpredictable levels.

As Smart Cities are becoming a reality around the world, and a new generation of IT systems based on internet-of-things technologies has already appeared, these things once believed to unreachable can easily be carried from the distant future to the near future.

The development of technology, from smart cities, smart homes and transports to the production, storage and use of energy, can be the means to a more sustainable Europe.

To improve the efficiency of the cities' services, smart cities integrate information and communication technology (ICT) and Internet of things (IoT) technology. These resources can manage transportation systems, power plants, water supply networks, waste management, local departments' information systems and even law enforcement.

As part of the urban development vision mentioned, smart buildings – including smart homes – can play a major role in achieving sustainable cities. Building management systems (BMS) are successfully applied globally for larger investments, these can be the first steps towards smart homes, since these systems can control and monitor the buildings' mechanical, electrical equipment (power system, fire system, ventilation, lighting etc.), and therefore they can make homes more energy efficient. Using these systems, people can incorporate the concept of sustainability into their everyday lives.

While intelligent transportation system is part of the smart cities' notion, it's also key for the quality of life. In most European cities, the lack of quality and safe public transportation, the inefficiency of the public transportation's capacity, poor road conditions are still major issues. These problems should be solved to reach a sustainable Europe. Beside the improvement of the existing infrastructure, the concept of public, alternative transport should be reconsidered: from shared cars to self-driving cars etc.

On the other hand, technological development is also essential in the energy industry, thus solving among others the difficulties of storing energy produced by renewable energies, which is already a key issue nowadays. It's also important to mention that there is a huge gap between the production of the energy provided by the renewable resources, such as solar energy, and the consumption of it: both in the daily and in the yearly cycle.

It's easy to see that this technological development has a clearly positive impact on the ecological and economic aspects of the development of the region as well.

Economic Policy

To reach a sustainable Europe, first a united Europe should be created. One of the biggest problems of the EU nowadays is that it's still too fragmented. Beyond the formulation of common goals, closer economic cooperation is inevitable to reach the specific aims.

A well-defined economic policy can be the solution for the social, human and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Its impact on the human dimension includes the population, education and health, while the influence on society affects inequality, poverty-social exclusion, corruption and good governance. With this, several actual issues can be solved, such as labour shortage and unemployment, caused by either the unstable economic situation or free movement of labour (especially in the eastern countries).

Formulating a common economic policy can create more energy-efficient regions that are independent of country borders, promoting economic development in both individual states and the EU. More efficient use of energy sources can prevent unnecessarily high environmental impacts that lead to natural resource depletion, waste disposal, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, ocean acidification, ozone layer depletion, acid rain, water pollution etc.

Due to the mentioned changes, in 2030 sustainability should be the part of our everyday lives.

Three biggest challenges for implementing a Sustainable Europe by 2030

As I wrote above, all the four dimensions of sustainability should be developed. To be able to meet the economic and ecologic objectives I wrote about in the previous section, social issues must be successfully addressed.

Security Issue

Security is already an issue for the European Union, especially because of the member states' interests diverge. For some countries, the issue of the refugees is much more urgent, than for other countries, therefore their reactions are more radical. Until the EU presents a universally accepted plan for dealing with the refugee crisis, it can be the source of tension in both the countries and the population. Beyond the fundamental issues (reception and placement of refugees, refugee quota etc.), the question of integration should be considered as well, thinking of the previous similar issues in the history of European countries. Seeing terrorism that is slowly becoming a daily phenomenon caused by also second- or third-generation immigrants, neither the segregation nor the violent integration is a good answer to this question.

While security is also a question of Eastern Europe because of an increasingly aggressive Russia, in western countries, terrorism can be the key problem.

Solving these issues is necessary to reach a sustainable Europe, it's also necessary to reach several Goals from Agenda 2030 such as: Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 3 (good health and well-being), Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Ageing society

These demographic changes are caused mainly by three factors in Europe: changing life goals of Europeans, higher life expectancy and declining fertility rates.

According to the mentioned issue of the refugees, many experts say that immigration can alleviate the ageing problem of Europe, despite the fact that previous similar attempts did not produce a clear success. Choosing this option, Europe will have to face significant changes of the population: national, culture, religious etc., therefore the previously mentioned aspects of immigration are even more justified.

The issue of an ageing society has impacts on several Goals from Agenda 2030 such as: Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 3 (good health and well-being), Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Climate change

Climate change is still not fully recognized despite the fact that people can face more and more consequences in Europe as well: drought, forest fires, extreme weather conditions, heavy and lasting rains etc. Not just the undereducated groups of population but also some highly qualified people ignore climate change, including some government officials as well.

As long as governments and leaders around the world do not acknowledge the existence of climate change, average people can not be expected to consider it or follow the proposed or prescribed changes, measures.

To convince the governments, the European Union should have a common policy (such as Agenda), which can contain the guiding principles for EU countries and can be the basis for negotiations and communication with foreign, non-EU countries. In addition, other foreign policy instruments can also be used to influence these countries to change their climate policy views.

One of the biggest problems caused by climate change – among others – is the global water crisis, which has already become a threatening reality: it has environmental, economic, health and social consequences. The number of the water-related catastrophes and the rate of damage has increased considerably recently. Due to droughts, many people have to leave their homes, which has already led to migration.

Solving these issues is necessary to reach a sustainable Europe, including the following Goals from Agenda 2030: Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 3 (good health and well-being), Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), Goal 10 (reduced inequalities), Goal 13 (climate action), Goal 14 (life below water), Goal 15 (life on land), Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Actions – with immediate effect – to support the transition towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030

As I wrote in the previous sections, migration, climate change and ageing society are the most important issues for the EU nowadays. Beyond the above mentioned reasons, it is also important to address these problems immediately because they are intensifying each other: due to climate change more and more people have to leave their homes, resulting in migration. The right answer to the issue of migration can be a solution to ageing society in Europe and overemployment in the mother countries at the same time. To solve these issues, actions should be taken directly on migration and education.

Education can be the means to achieve a Sustainable Europe 2030 as I wrote in the first section, but it is also necessary to reform the EU's energy policy which has indirect impacts on environmental, human and social dimensions due to its unequivocal direct impacts on economic dimension.

Migration

In the area of migration, the following projections are the most important in my opinion:

Refugees

The EU should present a universally accepted plan, including the question of integration, reception and placement of refugees.

Movement of labour

The free movement of labour should be reconsidered, since in some regions it leads to labour shortage, while in other regions it leads to unemployment.

Education

Education can be key in solving the problems of average people:

Different cultures

Education is necessary for both sides: to migrants and to the residents of the host countries as well. By leaving their homes, migrants have to face the loss of cultural norms, religious habits and social support systems, adaptation to a new culture, change of identity and self-concept. The residents of the host countries have to accept the change of the society's composition, the emergence and spread of new cultures, religions. Both sides have to accept the other's habits, therefore it's necessary to become familiar with them.

Climate change and environmental protection

Education can be the solution for the people to understand and address the impact of climate change; it can also help to change their behavior and attitudes. Education can facilitate adaptation of the climate change-related trends; and environmental protection can become the part of everyday life.

Technology and energy efficiency

To reach improvements in technology and energy efficiency, education is inevitable, but later it is necessary for using these new technologies as well. Smart cities, smart homes, smart transport etc. can not be successful without first understanding their significance.

Energy policy reform

The energy policy should be reformed, including the followings:

Production and use of renewable energy sources at regional level, across country borders, which is on the one hand, more energy efficient and, on the other hand, helps cooperation between neighbouring countries, thereby promoting consistency between EU countries.

To achieve independence from external sources (sources of non-EU countries).

Providing resources for energy storage researches.

All in all, to achieve a Sustainable Europe by 2030 all the four dimensions of sustainability, that is economic, environmental, human and social factors should be developed. In my opinion, the most urgent actions are in connection with the human and social aspects, such as migration crisis, ageing society and the lack of knowledge and acknowledgement of climate change. These issues should be solved to support economic and technology development, therefore to improve economic and environmental factors.