

**SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES:  
LOCAL SYSTEMS AND THE SUSTAINABILITY PROSPECT**

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**Abstract**

This paper seeks to contribute to the expansion and the deepening of the spatial development debate with ideas involving the integration of the local development prospect with sustainability priorities. Through the merging of both, local and sustainable development prerequisites, the central point relies upon the emergence of their synthetic approach as a favourable context towards the enhancement of the spatial development perspectives.

Sustainability priorities focus, among others, on the preservation of spatial (natural) resources, as essential advantages for the supporting of the development procedures. Keeping this in mind, the study suggests that the broadening of the regional development approaches towards a new pattern of synthesis based upon the support of local socio-economic priorities along with the resources exploitation in a local based cost – benefit assessment, could strengthen the growth result of the local anthropogenic systems, in a viable and self-sustained manner. Eventually, as broader areas are constructed by smaller spatial entities, a series of positive outcomes locally could enhance the overall development performance of the larger (regional or national) geographical scale as well. The regional economic and social uplift is influenced and determined by the performance of its partial spatial systems, which are dependant to the sustainable usage of their internal resources, natural in particular.

The paper, which is based on the approved doctoral thesis “Sustainable spatial development: the case of Strymonas river basin”, is evolved through three main parts. The first one deals with the local development prospect and its theoretical components. The second one deals with the evolution of the sustainable development debate and its current translation and notions, while the final part summarizes the adjacent features of the above in order to delineate some new understandings towards the expansion of the spatial development question.

**Keywords**

Spatial development, Local development, Sustainability, Spatial systems, Socio-economic growth, Environmental conservation, Natural resources management, Theory

## **1. Introduction**

By the early 1970s, the concepts of spatial development were characterized by the systematic use of economic theory in order to interpret the various phenomena of development and particularly, the extensive analysis of the spatial organization of production, capital, labour, institutional intervention and the programming priorities. While crises followed, put into question many aspects of the welfare state and the mainstream production – consumption model, the core theoretical principals of that period are being reproduced until today, having translated into policies and operational instruments - well rooted in perceptions of planning and decision making mechanisms worldwide.

The econometric models of Isard (Konsolas, 1997: 176,179), the fiscal - oriented explanation of growth and recession according to Myrdal (Myrdal, 1957: 74-82), the importance of a place to be competitive as implied by Perroux (Perroux, 1955: 66-73) and the pursuit of a society's modernization as proposed by Rostow (Aggelidis, 1991: 26), determined processes of development during the post-war years and consist until today milestones for the analysis of the regional development policies. Even earlier theoretical approaches regarding spatial economics, still provide in-depth views, especially in the fields of industrial location, the agricultural land use and the competitiveness of enterprises (Kafkalas, 2004: 20).

However, several economic crises the '70s and the '80s helped the emergence of a favourable environment challenging the dominant theories of development and triggered criticism. These new theoretical approaches set differentiated priorities for the spatial development, focusing on areas such as social conflicts, collective consumption patterns and forms of regulation. Their basic interpretation framework had marxist roots and involved the capitalistic mode of production, accumulation patterns and the effects of restructuring the production process (Dawkins, 2003: 144,145).

Such approaches certainly highlighted the numerous shortcomings of the dominant production model while on the other hand, helped the emergence of the social dimension. This focus can be regarded as a major contribution, putting the human factor in the centre of the debate, as a parameter of a mechanism that produces social antagonisms and conflicts and being produced by them. In contrast however to the previous tradition of positivist approaches, humans and societies seem to be distancing themselves from the character of a production factor single-purposed to maximize profit, being transformed to entities with "consciousness", integrated into systems of social struggle and assertion (Lagos, 2007: 205-209, Moulaert, Mehmood, 2009: 8,9, Brenner, 2000: 363, Harvey, 1985: 89).

Furthermore, that shifting of focus from formalistic approaches to complex issues of social, political and economic processes, led to the progressive emergence of new thoughts, well differentiated from the dominant ones. Such thoughts try to delineate new dimensions and conditions concerning the development issue, highlighting the aspects of local circumstances, innovation, knowledge, flexibility, social capital and the ecological balance. These new approaches enhance the importance of space and point out the role of regional and local specificities in the development process. Key elements are identified, among others, in the institutional setting, the entrepreneur environment, the technological change, the environmental protection and the connection of local structures to the processes of globalisation (Kafkalas, 2004: 25,30).

## **2. The prospect of local development**

Significant place in the current development debate, have approaches that highlight the importance for a balanced development of all territorial units, through the preservation of the settlements' network structure, the breaking of population and activities over concentration in few centres, the use of local advantages and the activation of the endogenous potential. In other words, the context of the approaches that form the conceptual content of local or indigenous development as an alternative, or rather a complementary, proposal to the traditional development theories and practices.

The content of local development however, does not refer clearly to a certain kind of regional development or a distinct development plan of a specific area. It is related to the establishment of development mechanisms at the local scale or else, the independent enhancement of each individual component that creates the local development profile, initiated by the local production, technological and administrative complex. Thus, proposals for a clearer conceptual determination are related stronger to the content of the policy towards this objective, rather than the composition of a solid theoretical framework (Christofakis, 2001: 42).

All spatial entities have resources (financial, physical, human, institutional and cultural) that, as they form their internal potential, they are being transformed into growth factors. Important precondition for that is the efficient coordination of the internal potential under a strategy of new ideas and innovative concepts (Barquero, 1991: 31). After all, the spatial composition of the individual "successful" examples locally, creates an overall positive development footprint in the broader territories, that may well be in accordance to the pursuit of regional development.

Turning point in the strengthening of the relevant debate, were efforts to analyse successful socio-economic examples in the European and North American space. The “Third Italy” for example was perceived as a typical case of creating external and urban economies across a wide geographic area, where there were recorded significant positive results on the social and economic endowment. Third Italy, as introduced by Bagnasco on 1977, placed the success of some regions in Italy in the flexible small-scale capitalism that creates exports, employment and income within a coherent social, cultural and political environment. Since then, this finding has been the benchmark of several new development paradigms and in particular, those related to the parameters of local and endogenous growth (Hadjimichalis, 2006: 82,83). Consequently and even from the first conceptual approaches, local development was perceived as that occurring in a geographic area similar to the regional scale or less, refereeing to the achievement of a continuous economic growth as the result of structural changes in the productive and social environment, in accordance however to the dominant free market system. This process results productivity improvement and increase of the per capita income. Thus, critical elements of a local development process were identified in the exploitation of local comparative advantages, with emphasis on entrepreneurship (Coffey, Polèse, 1985: 86).

But as entrepreneurship is linked with the quality of human resources, training, knowledge, innovation and production flexibility, these parameters were considered essential in pursuing a self-sustaining growth in the local scale. That kind of focus enhances a diversified pattern of relations between production and labour, a sort of a new deal based on continuous learning, absorption and utilization of technological change, product quality and the ability to adjust production results to consumer demands. Such an environment of flexibility is accompanied and supported by networking structures, diverse production partnerships and knowledge dissemination (Komminos, 1990: 84-87).

The successful expression however of flexible and dynamic production - social behaviours in the local level, wasn't accepted as a purely spontaneous and self-managed process that occurs independently in the administrative or the political framework. It depends strongly on the degree of modernization and the coordination efficiency of these structures and mechanisms. The depth of such mechanisms contributes decisively to the support of various actions and adds to any development effort flexibility and extroversion. It is about the level of governance and other forms of management and regulation that are not shaped exclusively by directives arising from the overlying administrative intervention nor are clearly identified by market priorities. It is about the form of governance shaped by the local civic society that is

reinforced by the dynamic part of population and the local administrative schemes (Lipietz, 1993: 14).

However, the boosting of the local potential does not mean that it should rely exclusively upon local powers, strengths or limitations. The connection to the broader spatial systems of flows and the transformation of local assets into comparative advantages, puts eventually local communities in a globalised framework of competition (Kafkalas, 2003: 13). In this sense, key element for a successful repositioning, is considered the reorganization and strengthening of local management structures and institutions. These factors are considered essential for the conversion of local advantages into development opportunities through the optimal use of any external input and influence (Barquero, 2000: 18,19).

Thus, the benefits or the risks of globalisation make quite a dynamic context for the renegotiation of local specificities, while the application of “top-to-down” decisions and choices creates an additional level for the framing of local priorities, either within national constraints, or supra-national commitments. Therefore, the content of a development course in the local level is largely dependent to the spatial specialization of wider development options, such as the national programming framework (Christofakis, 2001: 69).

Through the abovementioned brief arguments, it becomes clear that the conceptual framework of local development aims to bring together a broad range of several responses to specific development issues, attempting through synthesis to come up with an integrated context of proposals and perhaps operational practices. The managerial and institutional framework, the capacity to absorb and interpret messages correctly, ideas and resources that circulate globally, the technology integration, the improvement of innovation and entrepreneurship environment, consist some of the relevant debate’s components. In that context, the requirement for the use of “internal resources” certainly holds a central position, whether these are related to social and cultural assets, the entrepreneurial culture and tradition, or they concern the availability of natural resources and especially those that support economic activities.

### **3. Environment and development**

Natural resources constitute the natural endowment of a certain place and delineate decisively its economic and productive perspective. Traditionally, they have been the driving force of any form of development by contributing to the production of goods, enabling trade, defining the mobility of capital and helping to the creation of skills and knowledge. Hence, they contribute significantly to the concept of local development itself, and especially its part that

integrates the use of local strengths and comparative advantages. Nevertheless, this relationship is not exactly linear as the critical issue lies upon the way of their management and not just the identification of their availability (Costantini, Monni, 2007: 868,869).

The idea however for the exploitation of natural resources as a strategic choice aimed at the socio-economic development is not quite new. In the post-war period, through the comparative advantage theories along with the neo-liberal approaches for the consideration of natural resources as production factor, the usage of reserves in the production were essential for development processes, mainly those derived from the implementation of national plans, as well as those coming from the behaviour of the international investment capital. Thus, local and regional economies were participating to a globalised system of material flows, while incomes created locally triggered cycles of development, the viability of which consist even today a large field of discussion (Bridge, 2008: 390,391).

The difference between the traditional concept for the usage of natural resources and the modern perspective based on the local development debate is the “degree of personalization” of the same, in any case, practices: who does what, why and even more who benefits. In modern aspirations, what first appears to be important is the optimal integration of activities based on the resource’s usage in a local interest’s balance of costs and benefits and secondly, the meeting of a globalised network of needs. In other words, the exploitation of local natural resources should be clearly intended to boost local economic and productive pursuits, but in a way that creates viable and self-sustaining values and also in a way that protects their availability as an asset for future or alternative opportunities (Aznar-Márquez, Ruiz -Tamarit, 2005: 172,173).

This also means greater involvement of local forces, local communities for example in the managerial issues and the “protection” of activities as well (Kumar, 2005: 278,279). Contrary to many traditional practices, where after the reserves exhaustion or the alteration of market needs, the invested capital, distanced from the local representations, was leaving to other places in search of new opportunities. A situation known as the “curse of natural resources” (Bridge, 2008: 391,392).

In the discussion for the type of development and especially in the perspective for a localised approach, the integration of natural resources as part of the local potential, reveals in a clear way the idea of protecting them as an asset for current and future opportunities and activities. Generally, the protection of natural resources is summarized in the wider issue of protecting and preserving the environment, which is now recognized not as an abstract strategic choice, but takes an operational dimension seeking to express itself through concrete actions which

should be coupled with visible development results. This connection, which essentially captures the idea of sustainable development, highlights the importance of environmental conservation and ecological balance as a precondition for growth (Beriatos, Psaltopoulos, 2003: 203).

Realistically speaking however, the concept for the environmental conservation refers exclusively to the “energy exchange” relationship between man and the biosphere of the planet. This means that environmental protection is primarily related to the protection of human existence, rather than the protection of the planet itself, as the timescale in which planet evolves is very different and completely independent from that of humans (Stewart, 2008). Hence, the protection of the environment implies the protection of the reproduction capacity and the maintenance of human systems and therefore, the protection of natural resources that support human activities, might well coincide to the protection of the humanity’s heritage, rather than taking any other moral or altruistic determination. Just because it is the survival instinct, which is so powerful in all organisms on earth, the concerns raised in recent decades, focus on the extent that existing resources could support the future needs and aspirations of human population. Thus, it is quite often the case of “self-regulating” ideas emergence, such as the demographic balance, the economic and production rationalization, the social and institutional reform, as a response to the forthcoming threats (Fairclough, 1997: 3).

Additionally, it has been suggested that both in theory and in practice, it is necessary to address the concepts of economic development, environmental protection and the socio-administrative pattern, as partial aspects of a single development model, with significant overlapping and dependencies (Perman, Anand, 2000: 7). It is necessary for example, the implementation of economic policies targeting social welfare, to take into account the availability of natural resources, since their degradation will probably draw back welfare in the long run. Hence, the linkage between environmental protection and economic growth should be a key component of the development policies. In particular, it is suggested that a framework of practices aimed at environmental protection, as a prerequisite for economic growth, should focus on the local level, have the greatest possible social approval, be environmentally dependent and incorporate technological innovation (Salih, 2003: 153,160).

Through the abovementioned short points, it is indicated that in the mainstream spatial development debate, the dimension of environmental conservation and natural resources protection plays a fundamental role for the interpretation of economic and social phenomena, so that these three components (environmental conservation, social cohesion, economic

growth) to eventually form the central framework for objectives, policy approaches and implementation practices.

#### **4. The concept of sustainability in the development discussion**

Since first introduced the concept of sustainability, meaning the equal emphasis on environmental conservation, social cohesion and economic growth, it is truly impressive the number of interpretations and translations it has received. Derived particularly from the scientific fields of environment, geography and economics, the concept of sustainability has created new arguments and additional or complementary approaches to partial aspects of the development debate. Central point of many studies, both in the general theoretical construction and also during several attempts to highlight specific issues, has been the designation of a more focused conceptual approach (Hull, 2008: 73,74). Alongside however, there has been considerable criticism about the operational feasibility of the possible implementation procedures (Jabareen, 2008: 179). The concept of sustainability, either through multiple integration efforts, or even through the various critical approaches, has dominated the discussion on the desired type of development.

The official beginning of the sustainability concept lies in the text of the World Commission on Environment and Development, United Nations, *Our Common Future* (1987), as the result of a consultation process with specific and significant political importance. This beginning however was actually the turning point. The evolution and the notion of the sustainability concept was the outcome of a long-term procedure and it hasn't stopped being evolved since, taking new translations and being the subject to various criticisms as well.

The theoretical breakthrough however, considering in particular the coupling of development and environmental protection concepts, came with the 1980 World Conservation Strategy report of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Environmental Programme of the UN (UNEP). This report introduced for the first time the term "conservation" as the conceptual umbrella under which concerns about development and the environment become interdependent. The major contribution of this synthesis was the tidying up of several scattered ideas, in a way that first completed a concrete conceptual approach of sustainable development, as finally recorded in the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, United Nations (WCED), *Our Common Future* (Mebratu, 1998: 501).



Since then, sustainable development is defined as the development that meets present needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, based on two axes (United Nations, 1987): The principal of “needs”, referring to the needs of the world’s poor, that must become a priority and the principal of “limitations”, defined however by the level of technological development and social organization, in the planet's capacity to correspond to current and future needs.

It was stressed in this way, the close relationship between poverty alleviation, environmental improvement and social equation, through the achievement of the sustainable economic development (Roseland, 2000: 77). The wide acceptance of these ideas since then wasn’t reflected only in the variety of translations that the term “sustainable development” has received. These ideas were incorporated massively into policy documents and alternatives (Wilbanks, 1994: 543).

The legacy of this work however, considering especially the emergence of the sustainable development concept, was reflected in the proceedings of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio, Brazil in 1992, known as the *Summit of Rio*. Through the release of reports and other documents (i.e. the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, Conventions on desertification, biodiversity and climate change), it was given the chance for the diffusion of the term “sustainable development” and of its partial meanings in all over the planet and thus, to implicate in the debate policy makers and the scientific community. (Deladetsimas, 1997: 33,34).

So, apart from the familiarity occurred, a new generation of approaches was emerged, oriented basically in clarifying focused questions, regarding conceptual, methodological and operational aspects towards the streamlining of the core idea. Just at this point, namely how the “wish” of sustainable development could be transformed into a context of practical applications, an increased production of sceptical thinking already since the early 1990's can be found. Indeed, part of the criticism reflected the awkwardness of the early period, in a way that many authors described the concept as vague and rigid (Deladetsimas, 1997: 41-43).

It was even suggested that it might be impossible to achieve a desired level of reserves protection within the dominant model of economic and social organization, without a significant living standards reduction of the developed countries. A fact that is not easy to be achieved under the existing democratic ways of decision-making at national or local level. Nevertheless, the definition of sustainable development as proposed by the United Nations, contains an important “conceptual strength” because it can be expressed as a “political statement” and set up a new starting point regarding a differentiated economic and social

vision (Wilbanks, 1994: 544). In any case, the broad acceptance of the concept seems to enhance this prospect. An acceptance however so remarkably fast that reveals at least, the need for the emergence of a new framework for tackling the growing environmental and social problems, after the various economic and environmental crises of the 1970s and the 1980s.

### **5. Conceptual approaches during diffusion and the streamlining dimension**

The proposal for a differentiated, compared to the past, model of economic and social organization, based on the recognition of the ecological limits of natural systems, directly raises the issue of environmental protection and thus the preservation of natural resources. The environmental dimension of this modern approach is so central that the various interpretations and translations of the sustainable development concept emerged since, do not differ substantially from that requirement. These streamlining efforts or trends of conceptual refinement, are generally reflected both at the institutional and the academic activity (Mebratu, 1998: 504).

The *institutional approach* to sustainable development is expressed mainly in the work and initiatives of institutions of international importance. These efforts focus on the necessary adjustments of the existing social and economic system (establishment). With the political awareness, the seeking for the development of rural areas and the entrepreneurial interest as prerequisites, the seeking of viable growth, the primary environmental protection and the eco-efficiency are positioned at the heart of sustainability. Stakeholders responsible for the adjustment are governments, local authorities and the business community.

The *academic approach* on the other hand refers to the contribution of specific scientific fields in the conceptual definition of sustainable development such as the sciences of economics, ecology and sociology. According to approaches based on the economic theory, environment economics motivated mainly by the neo-classical views, accepts that environmental values can be integrated into the market economy rules and so, as a trade commodity, to qualify for such protection and conservation. On the other hand, schools of ecology believe that the core problem is the relationship of human domination over nature while solution is the readjustment of the dominant pattern of social and economic organization towards a more eco-centred base. Slightly different, the rhetoric of social ecology emphasizes the need for holistic approach, whereby the redefinition of social priorities will lead to a balanced relationship between man and nature, addressing the importance for the simultaneous development of both “poles”.

Following the general theoretical ideas on the conceptual definition of sustainable development but also through the effort to overcome inabilities in giving practical content to the core meaning, at the late 1990's began to emerge some more focused approaches. Such examples refer to terms like sustainable economic development, urban development, sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable transport, etc. At the same time however, attempts were started towards the sophistication of the overlying theoretical framework with the emergence of the integrated or holistic view of the development issue.

Based on the mainstream conceptual model for the sustainable development, that is the balanced economic, social and environmental development, holistic approach requires an integrated conjugation of institutional, regulatory and programmatic framework, participatory processes and social initiatives, the organization of the economy on standards that serve society and not vice versa, technological incorporation as a mean of improving the quality of life and also as a factor in alleviating several dead ends and all that, under the declared need to protect natural resources and territorial assets, not only as the host for human activities but also as self-existing values (Jebareen, 2008: 185).

This very popular statement contains a basic assumption and a concrete reality. The assumption refers to the possible shortage in natural resources, after their irrational rates of exploitation, which would destabilise the current production and consumption pattern and therefore, degrade human population's quality of life (Jebareen, 2008: 182). The reality on the other hand refers to the understanding that the spatial reference of natural and anthropogenic reserves, administrative forms, systems of governance and programming alternatives, shapes a concrete context of analysis and methodological specification with high operational value. Some basic ideas of how the dimensions of *space* and *natural reserves* shape aspects of the sustainable development question are presented below.

First of all space matters. It consists of topological features, includes natural resources, constitutes the foundation of human development activities, formulates administrative systems, permits or inhibits flows and supports numerous ecosystems. Perhaps in the majority of attempts for the identification and translation of the sustainability core idea, space is not included as a central reference but certainly is implied. Indeed, the vision of this issue through the science of geography can reveal new and useful dimensions. Factors such as *spatial diversity*, *spatial flows* and *spatial scale* form key components to understanding the issue and influence in different ways the basic aspects of sustainability, namely the issues of economy, society and natural resources conservation (Wilbanks, 1994: 546-548).

The dimension of spatial diversity, for example, relates to the fact that similar combinations of social and environmental processes in different places lead to different final results of relationship between humans and nature, because different areas carry different cultural experiences and promote different patterns of relations with the wider geographical context. Hence, any given place is recognized by others and shapes its own distinct system of flows. These flows, whether within natural systems, whether within the man-made systems, or between natural and anthropogenic systems, project spatial dynamics and includes, among others, patterns of spatial, administrative and political interdependencies and the rate of usage and regeneration of natural resources within a given economic-productive system.

While flows help to the systemic understanding of space, the factor of spatial scale highlights the importance of issues such as administration, policy principles and managerial options. The administrative structure is of high importance in the management of natural and anthropogenic reserves while governance models allow the expression of endogenous processes. Especially for the importance of these endogenous (social) processes, it has been pointed out that in the holistic approach of sustainability, social development along with awareness and participation, promote efficiently a successful integration. A typical example comes from the theoretical correlation of the *natural* and *social capital* concepts. According to that, the partial substitution of natural capital from the social one, produces lower “cost of usage” of the first, because the generally limited availability of reserves are replaced from “behaviours” just the application of which constitute good managerial practice.

The development of social capital (knowledge, skills, etc.) is considered to be a decisive help to a better integration of the environmental concerns, a better response to changes and to develop better ways of management and institutional intervention. That creates the basis for changes initiation in order to incorporate the sustainable management of natural capital (as a collective good) and enhances “bottom-up” procedures, complimentary to those derived centrally, regarding policy orientation and implementation actions (Peyrach-Gadeau, 2007: 952,953).

The importance of natural resources on the other hand, as reflected in the traditional economic theories, is related to their acceptance as *reserves*, ready for usage and exploitation. As such they are involved in processes of servicing human needs, either as production factors (i.e. direct or indirect incorporation into a product) or as factors of pleasure (i.e. leisure). Thus, they are transformed into a *natural capital*, which along with investments (i.e. machines, factories, infrastructure) and the human capital (skills, knowledge, etc.) form the axes of interpretation of economic and production patterns. Indeed, when circumstances are

convenient, it is feasible to take place substitution procedures between these two capitals (Collados, Duane, 1999: 445-447). Just over this argument, concerns have been expressed that elements of the natural capital should not fall so easily into the rationale of substitution, since this approach is based solely on the monetary valuation of reserves.

Several concerns on this thought were raised and helped towards a more coherent vision on the sustainable use of natural resources. Ideas and concepts such as *conservation* and *heritage* of natural resources for the benefit of future generations, have guided aspects of the economic theory and shifted the perception of natural resources from reserves to *social goods*. Social goods are related to resources whose availability is uninterrupted throughout the entire population. As such, they cannot enter into the rationale of competitive use or excluded from their usage, population groups. It is required therefore, an exploitation pattern that does not lead to their destruction or their gradual loss. Social goods should be preserved in order for them to get transferred to future generations.

Such cross-generational relationship gives to goods the character of *heritage* and as any kind of heritage, they can be managed to serve today's needs in a way not to get exhausted and to be able to get renewed (Peyrach-Gadeau, 2007: 947,948). At the same time, these goods or reserves or natural capital are transformed into a kind of *natural income*, in which equal access is crucial not only for reasons of social justice, but for their effective protection through the creation of a common consciousness of responsibility.

## **6. Synthesis towards a new area of understanding**

Up to this point, there has been an attempt to capture some milestones towards the mainstream concept creation of sustainable development. Furthermore there has been an attempt to frame some modern conceptual trends and to identify some more specific streamlining ideas. Partial aspects of the development issue such as economic and social specialization, patterns of governance and programming options, are always in the centre of the discussion, while consisting scientific fields with their own independent course. On the other hand, the persisting effort for the integration of sectoral approaches under a single theoretical and conceptual framework delineates the modern vision of sustainability. In that sense, the environmental component is certainly not of less importance. The protection of ecological assets was and is centrally placed to any consideration of sustainability. The realization that the effective protection and conservation of natural reserves requires a more holistic approach, is a fairly important point of focus and contributes decisively to the conceptual clarity of the initial ideas (Steer, Gery, 1993: 24-26).

Although the concept of sustainability is basically a political proposal, it has managed to enable considerable scientific activity towards the clarification of the basic term along with its operational functioning. Question though still remains whether the approach of sustainable development creates a solid theoretical basis for the analysis of the development orientation. In any case, it formulates a new evaluative framework and puts the integration of economic, social and environmental priorities, as the prevailing condition in the viable reproduction of human systems.

Meanwhile, the concept of local development has already created a context with considerable acceptance, strength and legitimacy in both theoretical analysis and as policy proposal. Being actually a context of partial goals and practices rather than a coherent theoretical reference, the approach of local development hopes to answer the development question by enhancing the idea of the “internal” activation of local forces and assets. Thus, the idea of “local”, as positioned centrally to the development strategy, streamlines targets and policy implementation. After all, a series of successful development stories in the local scale, trigger the positive development performance of the broader spatial context, regional or national.

An important component of this approach is the negotiation of ecological priorities and the protection of natural resources as well, since they constitute parts of the local potential and thus, parts of the advantages that a given place has. Therefore, the relevant debate is headed decisively to the aspect of natural resources management, in recognition to their economic dimension and their production perspective. The central question derived by the management approach is the way of their sustainable exploitation. Resources should continue to be considered as potential for alternative uses as well as self-existing values.

So, in the basis of the declared demand for the environmental protection, the issues of local development do largely coincide with the approaches of sustainable development, constituting interrelated concepts (Table 1). This relatively modern approach of the spatial development debate is the result of a long sequence of the developmental theories’ maturation and of the evaluation of implemented economic, productive and administrative choices. It expresses as well, the general trend of challenging traditional theories and operational models, after the various crises of the establishment in previous decades.

Nevertheless, the approach of local development does not seem to constitute an appeal within the traditional theories of regional development, the location of activities or the classical theories of economic growth, but rather complements these well established schools of thinking, towards the dimension of problem solving locally, so that a successful outcome could be achieved in the wider territorial entities. The completion of these considerations with

the environmental dimension, specify further the conceptual content of the development question in the local scale, designating the perspective of the *local sustainable development*. This fact represents a significant evolution pointing out the significance to understand territorial specifications and thus, the limits of the anthropogenic systems. The main consideration relies upon the way these limits should be managed in order to achieve adequate living standards for the human population in the long run.

**Table 1. Modern trends and specializations of spatial development priorities**

Period	Key issue	Spatial correlation and significance for the spatial development debate
1980's until today: Emergence of alternative approaches and focus on local reserves such as natural resources and anthropogenic assets	The approach of <i>local development</i> as the conceptual framework for the enhancement of endogenous development processes through the emergence of flexible mechanisms and practices of economic and social integration	Focusing the local and regional scale. Spatial distinctness and specialization based on local potential, as determined by social, economic, cultural and administrative features
	The emergence of <i>sustainable development</i> as the legitimisation context of economic and productive choices with visible social and environmental impacts. Seeking the balance between economic, social and environmental priorities	Basically space independent. Horizontal view of the development question and effort to answer "how" rather than "where". Secondary introduction of the spatial dimension in the consideration of natural resources

It is understood that the current debate on the spatial development issue is occupied up to a certain degree by attempts to streamline aspects such as the local dimension and the sustainability prospect. Although these approaches do not consist a coherent theoretical proposal, they certainly promote new fields of research with high potential in strengthening the relevant discussion.

Approaches for example, regarding the conditions for the strengthening of the development procedures locally, is a fairly typical area that promotes the discussion. Such approaches attempt to highlight aspects of development processes that traditionally have not been central to the formation of the regional development theories. Components like the local identity, population skills, the level of education, productive specializations, innovation, the

availability of natural resources along with the system of governance, are emerging as factors that create growth opportunities but also possible drawbacks, mainly through their combination and interconnection rather than through the consideration of each one separately. Furthermore, the broad acceptance of the sustainability concept forms a strong grid of conditions and development priorities, as it is attempted to answer new questions and challenges such as the quest for a systemic vision of space and the recognition of its carrying capacity to support various development options.

It is perhaps obvious that the framework of conditions for the development in the local level, as determined by modern priorities in conjunction with the debate on the viability of the dominant development pattern, form a fairly comprehensive approach to modern questions regarding spatial development issue. Exactly this prospect may be set as an additional theoretical point of view, complimentary to those already existing.

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