

THE ROLE AND COMPETENCES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PROCESS OF STATE PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS: DIGITALIZATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS IMPORTANT TOOLS

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Abstract: In the article, it is claimed that successful SDG implementation requires a systemic approach, in particular, consideration of SDGs implementation at local level and in the landscape of state participation in the international economic relations. The role of international trade in achieving the UN's SGs is briefly investigated, and the role and place of cities and other territorial communities in implementing SDGs are analyzed. Also, "digital ESG" as a digitalization of sustainable development is described as one of the most important vectors in today sustainability agenda.

Keywords: international economic relations; sustainable development; artificial intelligence; digitalization; local self-government; competencies.

1 Introduction

The main idea of humanity today is socio-territorial development, in which human economic activity is carried out on the principles of rational environmental management and ensuring high standards of well-being of the population. The coherence of the economic, social, and environmental components of sustainable development within the framework of the interaction of man, the economic system, and nature at the global, national, regional, and local levels is determined by the effectiveness of management - the vertical integration of all levels of management and the consistency of policy development in achieving the goals of sustainable territorial development.

The role of local governments in promoting policies to combat climate change is critical. In order to play this role, local administrations must have different capacities that allow them to analyze, manage and transform their environment through public policies. An important step in defining the role of local communities in achieving sustainable territorial development was the creation, for the member countries of the Council of Europe in 1985 of the European Charter, of Local Self-Government (ETS N 122), which obligated in such countries the constitutional consolidation of legal norms regulating the independence of settlements. The fundamental principles of local self-government have become the constitutional regulation of the autonomy of local government, its political, administrative and financial independence, subsidiarity, as well as control of a significant part of public obligations in the interests of local communities. In 1992, the European Urban Charter established the principles of effective urban management as part of the implementation of the rights of local communities to safety, a "healthy" environment, employment, housing, mobility, health, sports, culture, and sustainable territorial development.

In 1994, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe established the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the main role of which was the representation of local governments of the member countries of the Council of Europe, including in matters of promoting local democracy and strengthening local

self-government in accordance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government [50]. In the same year, in Aalborg (Denmark), the participants of the European Conference on the Sustainable Development of European Cities and Towns in the Charter "European Cities on the Path to Sustainable Development" updated the key role of local communities in achieving sustainable territorial development - the processes of changing the style of public life, models of consumption and production, spatial structure of production location and settlement. The signatories of the Charter, representatives of European cities and towns, have committed to engage in the development of local agendas for the 21st century by preparing their own long-term strategies for sustainable territorial development, based on the principles of economic, environmental, and social sustainability [3; 4]. The very concept of sustainable territorial development in the document was defined as a creative local process aimed at achieving a balanced urban development based on effective self-government, increasing the efficiency of use of natural resources, reducing the burden on natural capital, as well as the pursuit of social justice. The latter meant reducing the uneven distribution of material goods and services, meeting the social needs of the population, improving the quality of life and ensuring long-term employment.

The next step in defining the role of local communities in achieving sustainable territorial development was the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda (II UN Conference on Human Settlements, Istanbul, Turkey, 1996). The first document established the obligations of states and governments to achieve sustainable territorial development of human settlements (solving the problems of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, demographic changes, homelessness and increased poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation), the second - a comprehensive action plan for the sustainable territorial development of human settlements (including issues of effective urban planning and strengthening the financial and institutional capacities of local communities).

In 2001, the UN report "Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements 2001" was presented to the world community, which contained the results of a study of the conditions and trends in the development of human settlements since Habitat II. In the course of the study, the authors substantiated the trends of worsening social inequality, spatial segregation and social isolation, namely: the uneven distribution of benefits and costs of globalization (declining real incomes of the population, rising costs of living, increasing the number of low-income households) and the unbalanced nature of globalization (imbalance of globalization goals with the role of governments, the private sector and civil society in cooperation mechanisms) [60; 61]. The overall result of the report was the conclusion that namely local communities are the link between globalization and human development: "the specific and functional characteristics of local communities are of significant importance in achieving sustainable territorial development, since namely on the basis of expanding opportunities for the participation of local communities in the management of territorial development, the chances of achieving social justice and environmental sustainability increase ... it is local communities today that should play the role of "agents of change" and the main "actors in achieving" sustainable territorial development" [59]. According to the authors of the study, special attention is required to the need to implement effective policies at the local level in relation to the poor in order to develop their untapped potential for the benefit of the whole society.

In the same year, at a special session of the General Assembly (taking into account the conclusions of the global report “Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements 2001”), the Declaration on Cities and Human Settlements in the New Millennium once again confirmed the particularly crucial importance of “development of settlements as a key factor in sustainable territorial development” [59].

In 2012, UN-Habitat introduced a toolkit for measuring urban sustainability, the City Well-Being Index, which was later (2013) transformed into the global Urban Well-being Initiative - a global platform for comparing the level of urban development and identifying problems in the well-being of local communities.

Today, the UN-Habitat programs include the following [19]:

- Agenda 21 localization program, implementing selected Agenda 21 activities in local communities;
- Disaster Management Program, which implements measures to eliminate the consequences of natural disasters at the local level;
- Program for the exchange of experience and methods of local government in order to improve the well-being of the population;
- Sustainable urban development program aimed at strengthening the potential of local communities.

Local governments are now required to take the lead in accomplishing the SDGs through situational analysis, resource and need identification, stakeholder partnership development, policy and project implementation, and partnership development. The significance of local stakeholders was emphasized in both the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is acknowledged that local governments in particular are in a key position to carry out intermediation techniques for the localization of the global agenda [17]. SDG 11 – “Sustainable cities” - is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and it specifically addresses local communities. It is anticipated that local governments would take the lead in accomplishing the SDGs through situation assessment, resource and need identification, stakeholder partnership development, and project and policy implementation [48]. In their goals and objectives, they have already advocated for the reformulation of institutional frameworks, which reflects the 2030 Agenda. It is imperative that local governments play a more significant role in the implementation of the SDGs [39; 56]. While research is starting to recognize how important it is to talk about the many roles local governments play in putting the SDGs into reality locally, more study is still needed to understand how these roles really play out, in particular, within the landscape of state participation in the international economic relations, as well as digitalization and introduction of artificial intelligence tools virtually in all spheres of society’ life.

2 Materials and Methods

The interdisciplinary, multidimensional, and multi-level nature of the problem of sustainable development of regional socio-economic systems has necessitated the use of a set of theoretical and methodological approaches in the process of its study, in particular, neoclassical and institutional approaches that place different emphasis in the choice of driving forces of regional development, analyzing the diverse aspects of cause-and-effect connections.

During the study, general scientific methods of induction, deduction, generalization, classification, comparative and logical analysis were used. In the process of research work, the authors were guided by the principles of a systems approach, used a logical analysis of the processes of development of civil society, and a dialectical method for assessing empirical data. The work employs a sociological research method using theoretical and methodological analysis of systemic research concepts.

3 Results and Discussion

Particular attention of the world community in the context of achieving sustainable territorial development today is paid to the development of human settlements - administrative-territorial units that unite territorial settlements and produce the necessary changes at the regional, national, and global levels. In the system of legal categories, a settlement is a municipal entity, the core of which is the local community [5; 6; 57]. The local community influences the formation of municipal policy in the sphere of achieving sustainable territorial development and, as a social system, has such properties as compactness of residence on the territory designated by geographic, economic, and other boundaries; resource availability to meet the basic needs of life, the ability to reproduce a territorial population group and living environment, social self-identification, general needs for organizing living conditions, and the presence of elements of self-government [35].

Moreover, the role of international trade in achieving the UN’s SGGs is absolutely evident, in particular:

1. SDG 1. No poverty. Because it increases access to products and services, creates jobs, and promotes economic progress, international commerce is essential to the fight against poverty. Through the facilitation of nations' ability to specialize in areas where they possess a comparative advantage, commerce across borders fosters economic growth, draws in capital, and helps alleviate poverty. Along with facilitating the flow of technology and resources, trade may also help reduce poverty by fostering the development of sustainable livelihoods, knowledge transfer, and capacity building.
2. SDG 2. Zero hunger. By enhancing access to a variety of nutrient-dense and wholesome food alternatives and fostering food security, international commerce helps achieve the goal of ending hunger. Through trade, nations may take advantage of international markets to satisfy their food needs and offset seasonal differences in food production. It promotes sustainable farming practices, boosts production, and lowers food waste by facilitating the exchange of agricultural goods, technology, and information. By resolving disparities in local food availability and diversifying supply sources, commerce can also increase the resilience of food systems.
3. SDG 5. Gender equality. The promotion of gender equality can be accelerated by international commerce, as it presents avenues for the economic empowerment of women. Trade may help women enter new markets, increase their involvement in export-oriented sectors, and foster the expansion of women-owned enterprises. International commerce has the potential to promote gender equality, poverty reduction, and social development by mitigating obstacles to women's economic involvement, such as discriminatory trade rules or restricted financial accessibility.
4. SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production. Since it significantly affects patterns of consumption and production, international commerce is a key factor in the adoption of ethical and sustainable business practices. Trade may hasten the shift to more sustainable production techniques by encouraging the interchange of eco-friendly products and technology. It can promote resource efficiency, the adoption of circular economy concepts, and the decrease of waste and pollution. Additionally, customers may purchase a greater variety of sustainable products thanks to international commerce, which also pushes companies to implement ethical supply chain procedures.
5. SDG 13. Climate action. Due to its ability to facilitate the worldwide interchange of clean technology, renewable energy, and low-carbon commodities, international commerce is essential in combating climate change. It makes climate-friendly solutions more accessible to nations, lowering greenhouse gas emissions and advancing sustainable development. Trade may also encourage

international collaboration in reducing the effects of climate change, boost the expansion of renewable energy projects, and improve energy efficiency.

Kurt Schmoke, the mayor of Baltimore, Maryland, traveled abroad on many occasions in 1990 to further the city's interests in international trade. In 1990, Maryland Governor William Donald Schaefer also concluded trade missions abroad, representing his state to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. Foreign trade has quickly become the "in" fiscal planning method during the past ten years and is expected to stay that way long into the 1990s and beyond, as towns, counties, states, and the federal government have fought daily with an ever-shrinking fiscal budget. One possible way to inject new money and enterprise into local economies might be through foreign trade [12]. With the widespread use of digital technology and the accompanying digital revolutions, this is even more apparent in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Historically, local governments have taken a somewhat passive approach to pursuing international trade projects. In order to draw in international companies, towns and counties would often advertise their "good business climate", which includes their labor and skill markets, infrastructure, and amicable labor-management relations [8-11; 54]. These towns frequently loosened environmental and zoning regulations to attract more international companies. Additionally, several municipal governments provided tax breaks to international companies that established operations within their borders [33; 67]. All of these efforts were designed to lure foreign businesses to particular localities, with the hope that the foreign business would generate revenue and jobs for the local economy. Although cities and counties continue to pursue these strategies, they have recently begun taking an even more aggressive stance in foreign trade.

Today, experts note that "modern politics is increasingly reminiscent of the times of the Hanseatic League, which included medieval cities. Global centers trade with each other and fight common problems together in a way that nation-states cannot. Lacking sovereignty, cities are becoming increasingly independent and pursuing policies that are driving change around the world" [43].

Indeed, cities have become the engines of the global economy. The contribution of the 600 largest cities to global GDP is more than 60% [7]. The top 20 cities are home to one in three major corporations, and these cities provide companies with nearly half of their total revenue. Tokyo leads in population, economic power, and number of corporate headquarters, ahead of New York, London, and Paris.

Cities occupy only 2% of the earth's surface. But they consume 78% of energy and are responsible for 60% of carbon dioxide emissions. While states debate what to do about climate change, major cities are joining efforts and taking real steps. An example of one such attempt is the C40 group created to combat global warming, which includes 75 major cities [44; 47]. They share information and coordinate actions to combat climate change in a thousand different ways, from energy-saving street lighting technologies to modernizing public transport.

Increasingly, global cities are even pursuing their own international policies. Shanghai has its own international affairs office. Sao Paulo has established diplomatic relations with several dozen countries [13; 14]. Their diplomatic missions in this city are in no way inferior to those in the capital of Brazil and even surpass them.

The largest capitals - such as London, Tokyo, Paris - are being integrated into the international policies of the governments of their countries. But non-metropolitan global cities like Chicago or Shanghai, which are not home to their respective federal governments, are increasingly gravitating towards pursuing their own international policies [15; 18]. They have to coordinate the international activities of their corporations, research centers, cultural institutions, civic institutions, and universities so that the

cities themselves and their residents benefit. Increasing participation in strategizing, coordinating and joining forces in the international activities of institutions operating in the city is becoming a hallmark of Chicago politics.

In other words, global cities are increasingly influencing international life, whether in economic, political, cultural, or social terms. Global cities are becoming leading players on the world stage.

However, not only large cities, but also territorial communities are becoming subjects of international economic relations. Pressure from above and from below has led to a growing emphasis on economic cooperation in international local government relations (councillors and communities demand the development of business and investments) [16; 20; 21]. Local government financing determines the extent of support provided to businesses in the community and the efforts made to attract investors to partnership units. Large cities can afford to host business marketing events, trade missions, and participation in trade fairs since they have large budgets. Smaller organizations are less equipped to co-finance events, publicize them, share connections, and support local goods [49; 51; 52]. Typically, supporting their business partnerships is more of an add-on to other operations rather than a clear component of their collaboration strategy.

Local governments working together internationally not only benefits the municipality and surrounding area, but also the nation as a whole. The majority of local government representatives, particularly in Poland, acknowledge that promotion plays a significant role in their interactions with foreign governments. The chance to showcase the most significant locations, landmarks, and local culture as well as share the biographies of notable historical figures is provided by cultural events, youth exchanges, and collaboration with other social organizations [22-25]. The majority of initiatives aimed at helping businesses also help to promote the region, Polish goods, and ultimately the nation as a whole. The major purpose of all business trips, trade shows, and investor information sessions is to showcase Poland's offerings. Through these initiatives, local governments are starting to be included in the national campaign to promote the brand "Polska", which aims to combine the efforts of both the national and local governments in influencing how the world views Poland. [53].

Szetey et al. (2021) [58] propose conceptual scheme depicting the process of localizing SDGs and driving forces to create local socioeconomic pathways (see Figure 1).

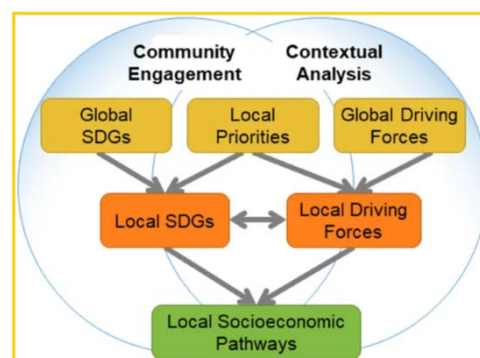


Figure 1. The process of localizing SDGs and driving forces to create local socioeconomic pathways [58]

Maria Spiliotopoulou claims: "Achieving the SDGs and other international goals (like the UN climate accords and the New Urban Agenda) is a complex undertaking that requires coordinated collaboration of actors at numerous scales. Yet effective action, as well as political will for meaningful, structural change, has been elusive, perhaps because these global issues must be primarily addressed at the local level" [55].

Furthermore, tourism has evolved into a tool for soft power in international affairs in recent decades. One example of leveraging tourism to exercise soft power is the signing of international agreements for tourism cooperation. Through these agreements, nations exchange their tourism experiences, technological know-how, educational opportunities, infrastructure development, and ability to create tourist products, new investment opportunities, and technical expert support for tourism sector stakeholders [40; 66]. The role of local communities and effectiveness of self-government appear to be crucial in these processes, both in plane of economic and political international relations. It concerns, in particular, Indigenous tourism – in Canada and Australia it is indeed a huge contributor to GDP and strong component of national image, in particular, within soft power efforts.

With over 1,875 Indigenous tourist enterprises operating across the country and employing little over 39,000 people, the Indigenous tourism sector in Canada generated \$1.7 billion in direct economic effect in 2017. Over a three-year period since the Indigenous tourist industry was assessed in 2015, the gross domestic product has increased by 24%, and the number of enterprises and jobs has also significantly increased by 23% and 18%, respectively [1].

With a 75% rise in gross domestic product over three years, from \$94.8M in 2014 to \$166.2M in 2017, Alberta has also witnessed a large boost in Indigenous tourism. As a result, Alberta now ranks third in Canada for both overall gross domestic product and growth. The Canadian government and Destination Canada have demonstrated a much higher degree of interest in assisting and advancing Indigenous tourism. In a December 2016 media release from Indigenous Northern Affairs Canada announcing funding to support the development of a national Indigenous tourism strategy, the Government of Canada stated the following: “This investment will ensure that Indigenous communities can continue to grow the tourism industry, which is shared and celebrated worldwide, differentiating Canada as a unique tourism destination while respecting and strengthening Indigenous traditions and cultures”. Destination Canada Indigenous tourism research in 2016 shows that international travel markets have the most interest in [1]:

- Rich, interactive, and immersive interactions with Indigenous people;
- Encounters with the natural world and education;
- Authenticity;
- Looking for advantages of ‘discoveries’ and ‘adventures’;
- Indigenous style of existence and connection to environment within the framework of spirituality and cultural traditions;

Naturally, this positively impacts the territorial communities and self-government, contributing to sustainable economic growth.

The two most often used phrases in the literature about national and international economic development are “sustainable growth” and “sustainable economic development”. Although these concepts have some relationship, their economic meanings are quite distinct. One of the most crucial phrases for describing the macroeconomic growth process of economies is “economic growth”, and “sustainable economic development” refers to a well-balanced transformation of the economy as a whole, encompassing social, cultural, and political aspects in addition to economic ones [26-32]. Compared to “sustainable economic growth”, which solely relates to measurable economic outcomes, “sustainable economic development” is a far more expansive idea. The literature examines the degree to which environmentally sound economic growth supports sustainable development and the degree to which it exacerbates environmental degradation and worsens living circumstances for people, despite the wide range of perspectives on the topic and the ever-evolving definition of sustainable economic growth. Without a strong economic development dynamic, it is without a doubt impossible to accomplish its goals. Achieving the SDGs is made more difficult or impossible by the need to decrease public

spending, budget deficits, and public debt as a result of the economic downturn [36-38]. Therefore, it would appear reasonable and methodologically sound to say that society as a whole cannot progress without a stable, contemporary, and competitive economy. Without extensive international commerce, macroeconomic factors cannot be stabilized and national income patterns cannot be changed to favor knowledge- and technology-based industries.

The UN SDGs include a wide range of measurability; these include totally measurable objectives like employment, growth dynamics, investment, consumption, and energy consumption, as well as simply qualitative, equitable, and legally secure aims like political trade agreements and migration. As a result, the metrics used to evaluate each exposure’s performance are suitable for tracking and assessing change; these metrics are often reported as percentages and considered in both short- and long-term trends [43; 46]. For instance, the goal of reducing poverty considers factors like the number of socially excluded or economically vulnerable population groups, the total number of persons who might be affected by social assistance transfers or poverty, and the proportion of the population that is very materially deprived.

A nation’s national revenue, standard of life, and population wealth are all significantly impacted by international commerce. The value of national income rises as a result of the positive trade balance, which also raises GNP. At the same time, the dominant majority of appropriate measures are taken namely at local level, under the condition of the effectiveness of local self-government [41; 42]. Thus, the role and competences of local self-government in achieving the goals of sustainable development in the process of state participation in international economic relations acquire continuously growing importance.

Stable and consistent government revenue is needed to fund the SDGs, and this can only be achieved by high levels of economic globalization, particularly at the local level, and sustainable economic growth [63-65]. Thus, it is clear that international commerce, a major driver of economic growth, is crucial to the development of a sustainable global economy.

Mention should also be made of the so-called “digital ESG”, that is, the digitalization of sustainable development. According to surveys, about 60% of companies globally are taking ESG into account as part of their digital transformation [62] (see Fig. 2). The scheme demonstrates how local socioeconomic pathways can contribute to achieving local sustainability goals from the bottom up in alignment with global initiatives.

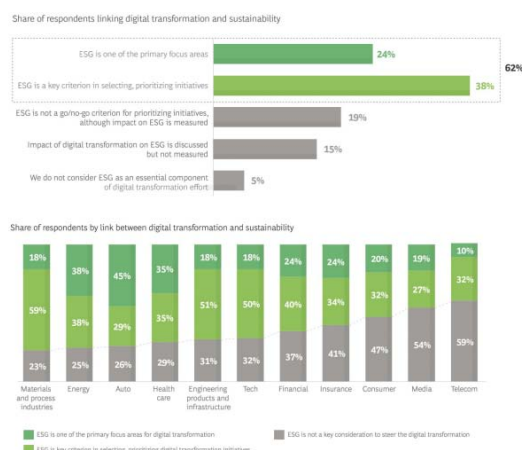


Figure 2. Statistical data on the link of digital technologies and ESG I business, according to BCG Global Digital Transformation Survey [62]

In the annual report of PricewaterhouseCoopers “Forecast for the development of artificial intelligence technology for 2022”, the ESG trend is highlighted as one of the key trends in the

development of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of companies, minimizing ESG risks, and using AI to increase inclusivity (by introducing a wider range of AI tools to enable people with disabilities to fully participate in the work of companies) [45]. In addition, the report highlights a trend towards determining the compliance of artificial intelligence with ESG principles from the point of view of the social component (artificial intelligence makes decisions that may be unfair in relation to certain groups of people).

The ESG agenda is becoming increasingly important in the field of artificial intelligence technologies. Disclosure of information on compliance with ESG criteria is a competitive advantage for many IT companies in the domestic and international markets and allows them to be more attractive to clients and investors. The latest IT developments help investors to process arrays of information and select the most promising objects for ESG investing.

The European Green Deal message, which lays out the blueprint for a dramatic overhaul of Europe, was released by the European Commission. A truly sustainable food system, as described in the farm-to-fork approach, is a key component of this program. Such a plan necessitates a systems approach that takes into account economic, environmental (climate, ecosystems), and social factors all connected to the production and consumption of enough and healthful food. Digitalization and artificial intelligence have a lot of promise to help with the shift to a sustainable agricultural system. The roles and relationships of all the participants in the value chain, from farmers to consumers, will be impacted by this change [34]. These technologies and systems are mostly deployed at the local territorial community level, while also falling within the 'orbit' of the global food trade and necessitating the improvement of local self-governance capabilities. There are several instances of this kind.

How to localize the new development framework, assess the local effect of the upcoming SDGs, and make sure the local component is emphasized and successfully implemented have been important topics of discussion and debate to date [33]. There is a strong opinion that the localization problem has to transcend beyond national, provincial, state, and regional implementation, and that the local execution of the new development agenda and its consequences for local government should be the main focus. According to the UN, localization denotes the "process of defining; implementing; and monitoring strategies at the local level for achievable global, national and subnational sustainable goals and targets" [2]. Utilizing various methods, procedures, platforms, strategies, and innovations, this approach would make sure that the development agenda is successfully transformed into firm action and tangible outcomes that benefit communities locally. It is intended to be a comprehensive procedure that extends beyond municipal boundaries to include pertinent parties and build a powerful local government. When considered in this light, localization plays a crucial role in the multilevel political system, particularly when it comes to achieving the sustainable development objectives that the world community will soon accept.

The 2030 Agenda's implementation calls for multilevel governance to encourage cooperation between many players operating in various sectors and at various levels as a manifestation of this problem. When it comes to methods at the international, national, and regional levels, the 2030 Agenda development recommendations and indicators are more specific than when it comes to the local level [46]. On the other hand, the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals has demonstrated that cities are now a crucial point of reference for the direction of climate change mitigation efforts and the advancement of sustainable policy.

The scholarly discourse postulates that local governments have the capacity to spearhead policies aimed at mitigating climate change and advancing sustainable development [50]. They may create interactions and management dynamics that have a significant deal of potential to implement sustainable development goals because of their distinct geographical focus,

close connection to residents, and diversity of competences [7]. Knowing how to create, put into practice, and assess management systems that can balance the three main goals of sustainable development - sustainable economic growth, (social, economic, and environmental) equity, and environmental sustainability in local policy management processes - represents the biggest challenge facing local governments. At the same time, there is a dimension which is frequently does not appear in the sight of researchers - the role of cities and other territorial communities in the international economic relations, as well as the development of digital ESG at local levels. These important issues should be the vectors of further research.

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