

Sustainable development of local economic systems: analysis of a research path

Abstract

The interdependence of social, economic and environmental domains is very complex and requires a deep reflection on policy goals, strategies and actions to respond to the growing concern about the future of ecosystems and societies. The use of the "sustainable development" paradigm to study such connections is widely shared, but its application in heterogeneous contexts and different territorial scales has to be analysed more deeply. The variability of the specific conditions in which policies about sustainable development are implemented leads to very broad and sometimes contrasting interpretations of the concept itself, linked to the features of the system whose development is studied and to the conditions set for its sustainability.

The poster concerns the activities developed by a group of university researchers working at the University of Tuscia in this field of research. Following a 10-years research path, the topic has been addressed from different perspectives, looking at the definition of the concepts of development (as opposed to growth) and sustainability, at the identification of limits, features and functioning of the systems where sustainable development interventions are applied, at the selection of quantitative indicators able to measure the degree of sustainability of such systems, and at the analysis of the conditions for sustainable development of different types of local systems. The challenge in this domain is to go beyond the traditional scientific partition of social, economic or environmental sciences, as the topic requires a broader approach where the complex integration of these three pillars is the key to understand the phenomena and to support the policy decisions which different institutions are called for.

The objective of the poster is to present the structure of this research path and to discuss the results highlighting the outstanding issues to be tackled in the near future.

Starting from the discussion of the most relevant epistemological and theoretical issues, we will point out the challenges arising from the empirical appraisal of sustainability in different territorial systems, linked, on the one hand, to the choice of the physical boundaries of the area of analysis and, on the other hand, to the selection of appropriate indicators to assess the conditions for their economic, social and environmental sustainability. As for the discussion of indicators, the poster will present the main results obtained in research projects that have targeted the assessment of the sustainability at different scales of analysis, ranging from the national dimension to the micro-level of single farming production systems. The possible implications that these results may have on policy decisions and governance concerning sustainable development will be highlighted in the discussion in order to point out the potential contribution of the research to the design of coherent and effective sustainable development interventions.

Keywords

sustainable development; indicators of sustainability; concept of sustainability; sustainability pillars; multidisciplinary research