

6.

Policy coherence for sustainable development as a means of analysing development

As we saw in the previous chapter, a number of diverse institutions are explicitly highlighting the need to search for sustainable development indicators that cover more areas and are based on new perspectives on social reality. Underpinning this need is the insufficiency of GDP which, however, in its different formats, is still the measurement most commonly used by governments and political decision makers. It was in this context that the PCSDI emerged as a possible way to remedy this situation. But we must first specify what exactly we mean conceptually by policy coherence for development and how it contributes to building the PCSDI.

As we have mentioned, there are several ways of understanding what policy coherence for development is, ranging from simply technical approaches conceiving coherence as a means

to improve public policies by reducing as much as possible the negative impact that some specific policies (trade, migrations, environment...) have on aid recipient countries, to more advanced approaches which, from a whole of government perspective, attempt to analyse the extent to which the development perspective has been included in the package of government actions, with the aim of proposing changes to increase that inclusion²⁶.

²⁶. For an in-depth analysis of the concept and application of Policy Coherence for Development, we refer to Millán (2012).

Not only do they differ in its application or scope, but a fundamental element underpinning all PCSD conceptualisations is the assumption that various policies contradict each other. While some "favour" development (regardless of how it is understood) others "hinder" it. However, this finding merely confirms something fundamental to all development processes. Development, viewed as a social process, takes place in a concrete society, with differentiated social groups that have divergent interests, contradictory opinions about what a desirable life is, different social movements, be they reactionary or emancipatory ... and all this is framed within forms of power relationships that, while not fixed, do stake out what is possible and the way we understand development itself.

The PCSDI integrates this essentially conflictual vision of development in order to try to analyse it. It does so, and it is important to explicitly highlight this, from a critical perspective²⁷. For us, the PCSD is an instrument of political change that, based on

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this analysis, proposes the consolidation of a given type of policy and action, the transformation of others, or even eliminating still others as they are currently being implemented.

Within this approach, the PCSDI uses an indicator to try to synthesize the different variables that must be taken into account when assessing the extent to which a given country, its public policies and, in general, its development process, is more or less consistent with a particular view of sustainable development. It goes without saying that this second element, which is not usually mentioned when talking about policy coherence for sustainable development, is one of the key PCSDI elements worth examining more closely. Before we start discussing policy coherence for development, a definition should be established of what we need to be coherent with.

CAN DEVELOPMENT BE REDUCED TO A NUMBER?

The PCSDI, like any index or ranking, has its limitations. The variables impacting development cannot be captured in all their breadth, much less converted into a number. It is not the intention of the PCSDI to contribute to the quantitative obsession that some SDG interpreters and their catalogue of goals and indicators are bringing to the world of development.

The essence of the PCSDI therefore does not lie in a merely superficially taking note of a ranking, but rather in delving into how the variables relate to each other, analysing each country's performance in each dimension, and determining why those ranked as highly developed in other indices are so incoherent.

²⁷. In other words, we aim to draw attention to how the negative or contradictory elements of a given process conflict with a predetermined scale (which could be the objectives set by policy or purely ethical or more general approaches).

Indeed, the PCSDI analyses development and builds its index based on a specific normative framework. A normative framework is understood to be a specifically sought form of development, having discriminated and considered that a certain type of policy and variables contribute to this concept of development, while others thwart it. Therefore, the indicator has been devised to integrate the positive and negative contributions that different policies have in the development process into a single (contradictory) piece of data reflecting it. The idea is to stop what has a negative impact on sustainable development and increase (and improve) what has a positive impact.

6.1. THE PCSDI NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

The term itself is a good example of the significance that the choice of normative framework has in understanding the development process. The term “development” is used by different groups and people to mean totally different things. For many, development is basically synonymous with economic growth, while for others it means human capacity-building. Economic growth is a means to that end in the best-case scenario in certain approaches while in others it is a hindrance²⁸. The key in each case is not in the words, but in the “way of looking at” the facts that they describe. This is constructed based on the political project that we are carrying out²⁹; in other words, based on the normative framework that, again, each of us either explicitly or implicitly has in our head.

Moreover, these normative frameworks are not merely subjective, i.e. major theoretical constructs that each individual builds a priori out of the social reality they aim to evaluate. On the contrary, they are the result of ongoing, never-ending disputes taking place in different social spaces. And they change simultaneously in tune with public policy. The human development framework, usually

attributed almost exclusively to Amartya Sen, is not subjective intellectual production of his. It is the response coming from the heart of the United Nations system to the shortcomings of the post-war normative framework, usually attributed to Walt Whitman Rostow who focused his recommendations on modernizing policies that can be implemented in any country to ensure growth. And Rostow’s normative framework is the defence of the Western bloc against the communist project in the context of the Cold War³⁰.

As they take place in society, all social actors participate in these ongoing disputes. Consciously or unconsciously; with or without hegemonic potential capacity; with a predefined framework or partially based on specific demands; through formal channels, international

28. A concise and very clear analysis of the problem can be found in Unceta, Koldo (2016).

29. And there is always a project: either the mere reproduction of the order of things, with better or worse intentions, or to increase the capacities of a happy life in harmony with the environment, sometimes referred to as emancipation.

30. Indeed, the subtitle of this author’s main work, “The stages of economic growth”, originally published in 1960, is “A non-communist manifesto”.

public institutions, national governments or academia, or informally, through private institutions, mobilization, political advocacy or non-academic discourse, these disputes always take place in a context in which there is a dominant view of development that social actors attempt to reinforce, criticize or produce an alternative to.

Growth as a component of development stands as a very clear example. The notion that development is basically economic growth is currently under fire from many different fronts ranging from the human development viewpoint to criticism from the ecological movement regarding the environmental consequences of that growth, to the theoretical input from the ecological economy that has questioned the way in which Western societies produce and consume since energy and physical variables have been included in economic analyses. All of this has generated an approach that has permeated a large part of civil society, academia and even international spheres of policy decision.

However, in the public debate or when producing development policies, the inescapable need for economic growth remains virtually indisputable. This is neither theoretical nor does it involve the best arguments, as this debate never takes place. There is resistance to change and difficulties

in overcoming structural issues making it less likely for alternatives to emerge. But the underlying reason is fundamentally political and has a lot to do with the fact that the groups that benefit from economic growth (large companies, the financial sector, etc.) are much better at imposing their ideas, regulations or indicators than those referred to above.

Based on this premise, the PCSDI has not been built as a neutral indicator, but rather seeks to analyse the development process in each country. It takes a critical view of the most common ways of interpreting development, and, moreover, it does so with the intention of participating in this ongoing dispute over the concept of development. It is critical of dominant views and aims to draw a broader picture of reality by highlighting aspects that other indicators ignore.

The PCSDI has not been built as a neutral indicator, but rather seeks to analyse the development process in each country from a critical view of the most common ways of interpreting it

From this point of view, there are three factors that in our opinion are fundamental to sustainable development and which therefore must be addressed by any coherence indicator: development's ecological sustainability; a feminist approach; and democratization of society.

Development's ecological sustainability

Few words are more overused in the field of development (except perhaps development itself) than the word sustainability and all its derivatives. Its origin dates back to the Bruntland Report and it is usually related to the idea of making development compatible with the environment, although it is also used to mean lasting or less unstable.

With the approval of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the development agenda converged with the United Nations sustainability agenda. In part, this occurred because of the increasingly obvious ecological crisis facing our planet. This crisis is being addressed by more and more actors, both public and private, both governmental and social. Each of these actors intends to approach this ecological crisis differently, either thanks to changes in the growth model to make this "less harmful to the environment", mainly through technological solutions to be found by the market, or through massive public intervention to ensure a "Green New Deal" that structurally changes capitalism, or by questioning the development process itself (and the very idea of sustainability), challenging the notion of growth and development and advocating degrowth.

In our view, any PCSD approach must include ecological sustainability as central to development. Ecological sustainability is to be understood simply as current development not impeding the development of future generations. Questioning of economic growth as an indicator of progress is key, and the questions would be: Is economic growth (understood as increase in

per capita GDP) a substantial element of development? Are coherent development policies those that contribute to a rise in per capita GDP every year?

Based on the sustainability criterion, our answer would have to be no. GDP as an indicator or variable to measure development is not only insufficient but is also misleading and contributes to maintaining the dominant view of development that has "tiptoed" around this issue since the Bruntland Report first appeared.

A feminist approach

Since the publication of the 2016 PCDI report where a feminist approach to any possible evaluation of development was already adopted, feminism has taken centre stage in public debate. Today it is hard not to consider oneself feminist and the only ones who do not are those who have directly declared war on feminism. In 2019, the PCSDI has confirmed its commitment to feminism and tried to gain further traction in the consolidation of this feminist approach³¹.

³¹. However, further consolidation of the feminist approach is needed, in part because of the difficulties in identifying indicators whereby to evaluate political processes in this regard and that can supply data for the large set of countries that this index evaluates.

Analysis or implementation of a feminist approach must basically incorporate two elements: 1) analysis of how development affects women based on the premise of the structural inequality they endure in any patriarchal system; and 2) examining the entire development process through a "feminist lens". This feminist perspective aims to shed light on what the dominant perspective in a patriarchy fails to reveal: the significance of reproduction (also referred to as care-giving) in order to make production possible. GDP is unable to measure this significance (because it does not go beyond the traditional / patriarchal perspective that only monetizes what has value for it), i.e. the work done outside the economic transaction; the work in the domestic sphere carried out mostly by women making the very existence of a market labour force possible.

Democratizing society

The third factor understood as fundamental to development in this report is its contribution to democratizing society, i.e. constituting real political equality that can become effective. Although democracy is usually associated with the presence of democratic institutions, we aim to work towards equality in power and, therefore, our normative framework also refers to democratising the economy, building global democratic governance, and establishing a minimum set of social rights and a fair production model oriented towards materially sustaining a country's society.

6.2. THE PCSDI PERSPECTIVE

Based on this normative approach, figure 38 offers a possible classification of each of the 2019 PCSDI variables according to its major contribution to each of these three elements. Note that in some cases a variable contributes to more than one element. In table 11 it is important to point out that this approach is analytical and that in terms of the development process, sustainability, feminism and democratization are frameworks of analysis that allow us to study each of the variables or aspects of the development process individually.

Figure 38. PCSDI variables according to their contribution to sustainability, feminism and democracy

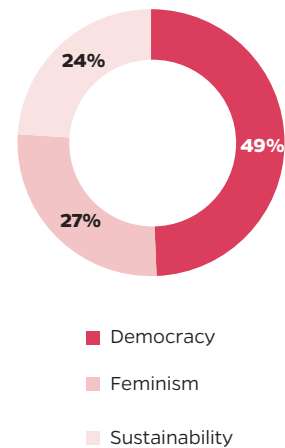


Table 11. PCSDI variables' contribution to normative frameworks

Code	Name of the variable	Component	Normative framework
FIS1	General government revenue (% GDP)	Economic	Democracy and sustainability.
FIS3	Variation rate of the Gini index before and after taxes and transfers	Economic	Democracy
FIS6	Financial Secrecy Index	Economic	Democracy
F2	Oversized banking sector	Economic	Democracy
F4	Account at a financial institution: difference between men and women (%)	Economic	Feminism
EDU5	Survival rate to the last grade of secondary education, both sexes (%)	Social	Democracy
EDU8	Pupil-teacher ratio in pre-primary education	Social	Democracy
EDU9	Pupil-teacher ratio in primary education	Social	Democracy
EDU14	Repetition rate in primary education (all grades), both sexes (%)	Social	Democracy
PS1	Public social protection expenditure (% of GDP)	Social	Democracy and feminism
PS5	Old age pension beneficiaries (%)	Social	Democracy and feminism
IG1	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)	Social	Democracy and feminism
IG2	Vulnerable employment, female (% of female employment)	Social	Feminism
IG5_6_7	Legislation against gender violence, sexual harassment and marital rape	Social	Feminism
IG11_12	Maternity and paternity leaves	Social	Feminism
IG14	Position at the UN in favour of the LGBTBI community	Social	Democracy and feminism
S2	Healthy life expectancy at birth (years)	Social	Democracy
S3	Medical doctors (per 10 000 population)	Social	Democracy
S9	Universal Health Coverage Index	Social	Democracy
S11	Improved sanitation facilities (% population with access)	Social	Democracy, sustainability and feminism
CIT1	Internet access in schools	Social	Democracy and sustainability
CIT6	Percentage of students in tertiary education who are female	Social	Feminism
CIT13	Graduates from tertiary education who are female (%)	Social	Feminism
EM1	Unemployment rate	Social	Democracy
EM4	Share of unemployed receiving regular periodic social security unemployment benefits (%)	Social	Democracy
EM6	Vulnerable employment, total (% of total employment)	Social	Democracy and feminism
J3	Abolition of the death penalty	Global	Democracy
J4_5	Legality of homosexuality and equal marriage	Global	Democracy and feminism
J6	Ratification of UN Human Rights treaties	Global	Democracy
J8	Universal Jurisdiction	Global	Democracy
J9	Ratification of Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court	Global	Democracy
J10	Legislation on abortion	Global	Feminism
J13_14_15	Women's rights in the sphere of justice	Global	Feminism

Table 11. PCSDI variables' contribution to normative frameworks

Code	Name of the variable	Component	Normative framework
PYS1	Military expenditure (% of GDP)	Global	Democracy and sustainability
PYS3	Armed forces personnel (per 100,000 inhabitants)	Global	Democracy
PYS4	Ease of access to small arms and light weapons	Global	Democracy
PYS6	Participation in international arms treaties and conventions	Global	Democracy
PYS9	Nuclear and heavy weapons capabilities	Global	Democracy
PYS12	Plan of action to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325		Global Feminism
C5	Contributions to UNWOMEN (GDP per capita)	Global	Democracy and feminism
C6	Contributions to UNEP (GDP per cápita)	Global	Democracy and sustainability
M4_5	Convention and Protocole relating to the Status of Refugees and International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families	Global	Democracy
P4	Clean water	Environmental	Sustainability
DR9	Fertilizers use	Environmental	Sustainability
B2	Ecological footprint of production (gha per person)	Environmental	Sustainability
B10	Participation in international environmental agreements	Environmental	Democracy and sustainability
B13	Biocapacity reserves/deficit (ha. per person)	Environmental	Sustainability
EN1	Electricity production from renewable sources, excluding hydroelectric (% of total)	Environmental	Sustainability
EN2	Ecological footprint of imports (gha per person)	Environmental	Sustainability
EN4	Carbon Dioxide Emissions (Metric Tons per Person)	Environmental	Sustainability
U2	Improved sanitation facilities, urban sector (% of population with access)	Productive	Sustainability and feminism
U4	PM2.5 air pollution, mean annual exposure (micrograms per cubic meter)	Productive	Sustainability
IT3	Improved water sources, rural sector (% of the population with access)	Productive	Sustainability and feminism
IT4	Access to electricity (% population)	Productive	Democracy, sustainability and feminism
IT5	Internet users (per 100 people)	Productive	Democracy
IN5	Annual freshwater withdrawals, industry (% of total freshwater withdrawal)	Productive	Sustainability
IN7	Ratifications of the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention	Productive	Democracy

Capturing the complexity of the political process

Development has usually been understood as a result. Greater or lesser health coverage, life expectancy, school enrolment or GDP per capita were what defined a country's development. We believe that the PCSD enables a more complex analysis for a more accurate view of the development process that lends attention not only to its results but also to political will expressed through action and the functioning of the political process. The PCSDI establishes variables showing us different aspects of the process (table 12).

This differentiation among variables based on different aspects of the political process is directly related to the critical vision stated at the beginning of this chapter. Attaching too much weight to outcome variables as has been done for decades in measurements made by international institutions and governments, partly limiting the availability of official data, is counter-productive in showing

the complexities of the political process determining different development situations.

We will now delve into each of the types of variables and provide some examples taken from the 2019 PCSDI.

Input and product variables

In this first case we refer to variables that show how an element is introduced into the political system (input) and what kind of elements that political system produces (product). These types of variables are intended to show the strength and institutional capability of a particular political system.

Table 12. Policy process dimensions indicated by PCSDI variables according to their typology

Type of variable	What it indicates
Input	Indicates the premises of the political process, i.e. the starting point for public policy design. For example, the % of expenditure in a specific area
Product	Indicates performance, in the form of public policy products, stemming from the political process. For example, the existence of regulations, of greater or lesser scope, is a variable attributable mainly to the political process
Outcome	Indicates development results, not directly attributable to a political measure but to the political process, at least in part. These are the traditional development indicator variables
Stance	Indicates political will in terms of the signing or ratification of treaties or the approval of specific legislation on development related matters. They are pertinent to understanding political will

One key input variable, for instance, is a country's revenue collection capability which will be one of the main factors determining the extent to which public policies contribute to sustainable development. In the PCSDI, government revenue as a percentage of GDP is the variable that reflects this.

Product variables will show the extent to which society has changed following the application of a particular product. For example, continuing in the fiscal sphere, the variation rate of the Gini Index before and after taxes and transfers (%).

Let us compare these two variables. These are the 25 countries with the best performance for each variable (table 13).

As the table shows, although many of the countries are listed twice since there is an obvious link between the ability to collect revenues and the impact of expenditure on society, some of the countries in the first column do not appear in the second. For example, Kuwait, a country that has a percentage of government revenue over GDP similar to that of Finland, ranks 101st in the second table. In other words, from the point of view of policy coherence for sustainable development (and democratization of society in line with the transformation mentioned above), Kuwait's fiscal system produces highly dysfunctional products, although it does have inputs that could help the country to improve significantly. Spain, for example, despite only marginal performance in the first area, is ranked higher in the second column indicating that the fiscal system is succeeding in terms of redistribution, although it stands much room for improvement in terms of collection. Weak input coupled with strong products may indicate that focus should be placed primarily on the margin of improvement observed in inputs in order to enhance the latter.

Table 13. The top 25 countries in Government revenue and Gini index variation rate before and after taxes and transfers.

Ranking	Government revenue (% GDP)	Variation rate of the Gini Index before and after taxes and transfers (%)
1	Finland	Finland
2	Iceland	Denmark
3	Kuwait	Hungary
4	Norway	Sweden
5	France	Germany
6	Denmark	Czechia
7	Belgium	Cyprus
8	Greece	Malta
9	Austria	Norway
10	Sweden	Ireland
11	Croatia	Slovenia
12	Italy	Austria
13	Qatar	Slovakia
14	Hungary	Poland
15	Germany	Netherlands
16	Netherlands	France
17	Bosnia and Herz.	UK
18	Montenegro	Luxembourg
19	Portugal	Greece
20	Lesotho	Portugal
21	Belarus	Switzerland
22	Luxembourg	Serbia
23	Serbia	Canada
24	Iraq	Spain
25	Estonia	Iceland

Outcome variables

Here, these variables show the coherence of the set of given situations in a particular society or geography, without focusing on the influence that each public policy has on each specific result. They are usually the result of an entire set of public policies or, in most cases, are caused by reasons beyond the control of the state itself.

A good example is the ecological footprint, the variable that measures the environmental impact that a given development model has on the planet as a whole. The PCSDI includes several variables that measure ecological footprints such as the ecological footprint of production (ha. per person), ecological footprint of imports (ha. per person), and carbon dioxide emissions (metric tonnes per person).

Here we have the ecological footprint of imports indicating the impact that the consumption of products from abroad in each of these countries has on the global ecological system.

Here, table 14 shows the countries that are the least coherent with sustainable development based on their ecological footprint of imports. This is an outcome indicator in the sense that it does not show the behaviour of the political process, but rather the behaviour of society as a whole. The reasons for the amount of imports will depend on the demand and the type of goods demanded, the productive capacity of the country, and so forth.

Table 14. The bottom 25 countries in Ecological footprint of imports (ha. per person)

Ranking	Countries
1	Luxembourg
2	Belgium
3	Netherlands
4	Singapore
5	Denmark
6	Austria
7	Slovenia
8	Norway
9	Sweden
10	Finland
11	Estonia
12	Lithuania
13	Slovakia
14	Qatar
15	Czechia
16	Bahrain
17	Germany
18	Switzerland
19	Latvia
20	Ireland
21	Israel
22	Malta
23	Portugal
24	Oman
25	Canada

Stance variables

Lastly, the PCSDI includes stance variables which show a given country's commitment to democratic global governance. These types of variables are included because democratic governance and building collective security are fundamental to enabling sustainable development and, therefore, each country's political contribution to them must be assessed when determining its coherence. Also, as indicated above, these variables are indicators of the political will of the governments of each country, a substantial factor contributing to effective coherence.

To conclude this exercise, these variables show us what appears to be counterintuitive at first sight. In principle, the widespread belief is that Western or more developed countries are the ones that contribute most to global democracy, for example through international human rights legislation. However, ranking for the Ratification of UN Human Rights treaties indicator is as follows (table 15).

Although definitive conclusions would require more thorough research (for example into why the Balkan countries rank so high on this list and whether this has to do with the resolution of the conflict of the 1990s), this ranking does illustrate some important aspects. Of the 25 countries that contribute most to international human rights legislation only 9 are EU members; 10 of those 25 are Latin American countries. The list does not include any Asian country. As addressed in the global component, this may break with certain assumptions about Regions' international behaviour.

Table 15. The top 25 countries owing to the ratification of UN Human Rights treaties

Ranking	Countries
1	Uruguay
2	Argentina
3	Ecuador
4	Spain
5	Austria
6	France
7	Montenegro
8	Chile
9	Serbia
10	Belgium
11	Bosnia and Herzegovina
12	Mexico
13	Bolivia
14	Germany
15	Portugal
16	Costa Rica
17	Albania
18	Peru
19	Paraguay
20	Mali
21	Brazil
22	Azerbaijan
23	Luxembourg
24	Slovenia
25	Sweden

6.3. CONCLUSION: CAN POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BE MEASURED?

As we have seen, studying policy coherence for sustainable development is complicated. First, it requires a normative framework enabling us to analyse the concrete facts emanating from political reality. It is important to signify this as it is often “taken for granted” that a given view of development is the only one possible. In the first part of this chapter we attempted to this by drawing attention to the elements needed to progress in transforming each country's development model.

In order for policy coherence for sustainable development to make sense, to be useful for something, it must actively participate in the debate resulting from the various development imaginaries. It will make sense if it helps us to measure the impact that financial or industrial policies have on rich countries, or the impact that the size of the ecological footprint has on the sustainability of our way of life. In short, it will help to guide us along the best path to putting an end to business as usual by coherently steering specific transformation.

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