

Editorial

# Europe Moves toward Pragmatic Sustainability: A More Human and Fraternal Approach

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“Sustainable by passion and deliberate choice, not mere interest” This is the first message that young people should read, as should more mature adults. Sustainability had its beginnings in environmental protection, which was being defaced with the idea that resilience would always lead nature to regenerate. However, humankind has opted for the overuse of resources, and while scepticism about climate change still exists, it is clear that urgent action is needed. However, it is incumbent to be realistic and implement actions that protect the environment and not seek momentary consensus by making promises that cannot be kept. Nature must be protected, but so must the needs of humankind, and therefore, social welfare must also be preserved and economic opportunities generated. Hence, the 1987 Brundtland Report calls for respect for future generations by allocating at least the same resources to them as we currently have. In this context, the concept of sustainability shifts from an environmental view to a more comprehensive one that includes economic and social spheres. Is it then simple to find this balanced point? The answer is that with a purely ideological approach, disconnected from reality, we are far from improving our existing situation. Therefore, the need to find a pragmatic approach emerges. As such, what is derived from thought is subjected to the scrutiny of experience and an attempt is made to find an optimal point not only in an abstract model but also in a concrete one. Theories or words are not enough; instead, real actions and deeds are needed.

Pragmatic sustainability is a model of sustainability that contemplates the three dimensions of environmental, economic, and social factors and does not stop at enunciating a concept but ensures it is implemented in practice and is made concrete after providing analyses that support it. Clearly, an optimal point does not always derive from the point of maximum utility for each of the three dimensions but from a proper balance in which one or more of the three dimensions could be more highly valued. But who does this depend on? Stakeholders. As a function of what? The balance of ecosystems. So, the balance between humans and nature drives decision-making and a humane and fraternal approach to life needs to be put back at the centre of the agenda. A pragmatic view, therefore, values the great challenge of sustainability: overcoming personal selfishness to protect ecosystems and achieve the triple aim of economic performance, environmental protection, and social progress [1].

Pragmatic sustainability is based on the concept of altruism, just as the morning sentinels baptised by St. John Paul II defended “life at every moment of its earthly development” to make it “ever more habitable for all”. In the 2003 post-synodal exhortation



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“Ecclesia in Europa”, Europe is seen not in opposition or competition with the world community but in harmony with it. It is pointed out how the increasing openness of peoples to one another and the reconciliation between those who had long been enemies allowed for recognition, collaboration and exchanges of every order. In this way, “a culture, indeed a European consciousness, is created, which should especially among young people, grow the feeling of fraternity and the will to share”.

The European Coal and Steel Community came into effect in 1952, bringing together Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. The goal was to prevent any country alone from making weapons of war for use against others. Unfortunately, even today, there are armed conflicts that take the lives of innocent people and children. The European Union is seeing its borders expand but also shrink due to the United Kingdom voting to leave. Europe aims to be peaceful, united and prosperous; it should also promote the entry of new countries. The goal is to be able to compete with two global giants, such as the U.S. and China.

The European Green Deal has the potential to generate a competitive advantage, saving our planet but also creating new jobs. It is a set of policy initiatives involving states, civil society, and private actors in the fight against climate change [2]. In this innovative framework, digital technologies can enable the achievement of these policies, but they are also characterised by barriers [3]. However, it is crucial to combine sustainability with the needs of households, businesses and citizens without generating new dependencies or destroying entire production chains.

Forward-looking choices toward the future include ex-ante spatial impact assessments and sustainability analyses that demonstrate the relevant environmental, economic and social benefits. These are adequately outlined in the opinion “A Just Transition for All EU Regions” by Abruzzo Region President Marco Marsilio (rapporteur) and Stefano Cianciotta (expert). This opinion, which was voted on in July 2024 by the Coter Commission of the European Committee of the Regions, emphasises the relevance of technology neutrality, the role of storage, and the security of energy networks. This pragmatic approach to sustainable energy is a topic proposed in the literature [4], where it is emphasised that this approach is at the core of engineering activities that focus on technical needs to achieve energy sustainability and less on the role of economics, politics and other non-technical factors. Similarly, interdisciplinary collaboration, pragmatism, reliance on youth, and altruism are believed to be the resources that can support the realisation of a sustainable community within a university setting, where the phenomena of sustainable washing should be avoided [5]. This is a change resulting from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which concern all universities at the European level [6].

The topic of sustainability requires further analysis, as some aspects of this concept are not yet well understood [7,8]. Similarly, other analyses show a concentration of research and development on the SDGs in developed countries rather than in developing and underdeveloped countries [9]. The measurement of the SDGs plays a key role, and some analyses propose assessing their status [10], while others focus on comparing certain countries [11] and finally, approaches are also proposed at the level of each individual nation [1].

This Special Issue, titled “Sustainable Development Goals: A Pragmatic Approach”, aims to counter non-doing, i.e., day-to-day approaches that deny climate change or ideological approaches that do not allow for community-useful projects and infrastructure. Stakeholder engagement toward sustainable development is as basic as the balance between ecosystems.

The current context sees the Suez Canal as the needle in the reconciliation of new international balances, and a necessary ecological and digital transition cannot materialise by creating dependencies on raw materials from Asian territories. In this context, territorial specificities must be strengthened, poles of excellence must be generated, programs for the exchange of resources and skills must be fostered, and support must be given to the industrial system to modernise and be competitive. In this framework, public administra-

tion is called upon to equip itself with new professionalism, to reduce unproductive delays related to the Not In My Term Of Office (NIMTO) phenomenon, and include citizens in decision-making processes to reduce the Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) phenomenon. The goal of European funding programs is to foster a just transition by focusing on circular, digital and green investments with continuous monitoring of the proper use of public money. Europe must offer its countries and citizens a model of development that is sustainable but also inclusive and resilient. It is crucial for an area to avoid a diaspora of talent and graduates and to be attractive to acquire new knowledge.

Europe must be ambitious and be a spokesperson for a change in geopolitical balances. Pope Francis speaks of an “open sore in our humanity” that has seen the deaths of men, women and children in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach Europe. The Mattei Plan has become part of the G7 agenda and envisions a cooperative approach between Europe and Africa. This Plan concerns not only cultural cooperation but also the implementation of investments in energy and infrastructure. Figure 1 shows that the same picture can be painted in different colours. The most promising future visions are those in which the respect of young people is given for more experienced profiles, and there is trust that more mature people for the new generation will come from a variety of different backgrounds. A more humane and fraternal Europe with a pragmatic approach to sustainability is our future horizon.



**Figure 1.** Vasto (CH). City located in the Adriatic Sea in the Abruzzo Region, known as the green region of Europe.

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