

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: POST-WESTPHALIAN TRANSFORMATION AND DEMOCRATISATION

Catarina Lima Silva

CATARINA LIMA SILVA
Natural do Porto, Catarina
Lima Silva é doutoranda no
Programa Doutoral em Políticas
Públicas do Departamento de
Ciências Sociais, Políticas e do
Território da Universidade de
Aveiro. Licenciada em Línguas
e Relações Internacionais e
Mestre em História, Relações
Internacionais e Cooperação,
especialização em estudos
políticos, pela Faculdade de
Letras da Universidade do
Porto, tem focado a sua carreira
sobretudo na investigação e na
área académica, seja a nível das
relações internacionais, ciência
política, políticas públicas,
ou tomando uma abordagem
multidisciplinar. Com presença
em diversas conferências e
colóquios, a sua investigação
é direccionada a variados
assuntos, com ênfase maioritário
em temas como euro-regiões,
cooperação transfronteiriça,
governança multi-nível,
política regional europeia,
regionalização, desenvolvimento
sustentável, transformação pós-
westefaliana, entre outros.

This essay looks at Sustainable Development (SD). Specifically, how a model of Multi-Level Governance (MLG), that better assesses Sustainable Development (SD), is establishing itself as an alternative to the current Westphalian system of International Relations. We will analyse the European Union (EU) as an example of MLG, taking a closer look at the intermediate level structures known as Euro-Regions. This transformation is, in turn, promoting a democratisation of policy-making and allowing for the blossoming of grassroots movements that enhance the Democracy, but also the MLG and get society closer to its' SD goals.

SD is a pivotal issue in today's political panorama. Essentially defined by the United Nation's Brundtland Report, in 1987, this concept consists of assuring a better and healthier future, having a holistic view of nature and humanity (Blewitt, 2015). The concept has evolved through the years and, nowadays, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the most recent expression, making up the Agenda 2030 developed in 2015 in the UN's General Assembly, affirming this commitment to tackling human development and climate change challenges together. The SDGs are a group of goals and targets that followed from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and that are broader and more comprehensive than the latter (Giller et al., 2019).

The concept of SD is difficult to grasp (Barbier, 1987). This concept emerged with the growing importance of environmental and ecological issues, such as climate change and seeks to integrate these concerns with the need to promote human development, thus linking environmental, social and economic goals. The distinction between sustainability and SD is also an important point, as it is important to distinguish the long-term goal (sustainability) from the "many processes and pathways to achieve it", which is the SD itself (UNESCO, n.d.). SD has thus been seen as a "necessary but elusive process operating on

various scales, including the global and local level”, as put by Blewitt (2015, p. 38). First appearing in the 1980’s, SD pinpointed the increasingly negative relation between humanity and biosphere in case of continuing with the current development model. Nevertheless, as authors like Gómez-Baggethun point out that, this 1980’s developments represented an inflection from previous incarnations of the concept, as “Sustainable Development effectively reshaped sustainability principles to fit economic imperatives of growth and shift the emphasis from social justice to ‘poverty alleviation’ [while also fitting] dominant economic ideas favouring ‘trickle down’ over redistribution of wealth.” (2019, p. 72). This shows that the concept of SD has been co-opted by the status quo, to serve its purposes, being fit into a sovereignty based Westphalian model and the concerns with sovereign economic development associated with it.

The World Commission on Environment and Development started, in 1983 to develop the work that would establish SD as the central concept, when it comes to environmental issues (Blewitt, 2015). Their results were published in 1987, in the Brundtland Report. The definitive concept of SD, that we are following, says that “Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, representing a balance between needs and limitations and, “in its broadest sense, the strategy for SD aims to promote harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature” (United Nations, 1987, pp. 16-57). We’ll use this definition, because it is, still today, the most widely used definition of SD, being seen as the UN’s “overarching paradigm” (UNESCO, n.d.). SD has since worked as a political and ethical guideline for dealing with the planet’s ecological and social crisis, as defined by the Brundtland Report (Grober, 2007). Since the publication of the Brundtland Report, several changes have occurred in international society, namely the growing importance of subnational and supranational actors in the pursuit of the SD agenda itself, that have shaped the notion of SD along different lines than those that presided the Westphalian framing of the concept. The 2015 Climate Change Conference would bring this new definition of Sustainable Goals and the new climate Protocol that would replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The Paris Agreement (2015) is a treaty that determines that each country should have a plan to mitigate climate change and reduce its’ environmental impact. This treaty is, so far, more successful than Kyoto, as it has a more universal application, and is getting a more widespread acceptance (it was signed by 191 countries, including the USA). Besides the individual countries’ ratification, the EU also ratified this agreement, making it even more ambitious.

Being a concept focused on the future, SD demands ecological sustainability in the long-term, as well as social commitment and involvement from all areas of society (Barbier, 1987; see also: Endress & Roumasset, 1994). Besides cementing its position in international policy-making, it has also established itself at the national and local levels, zooming on its potential at the regional

level and on the role that Euregions could have on its implementation. To achieve SD, commitment and effectiveness are needed (United Nations, 1987). To reach socio-ecological justice, focus must be on safeguarding the future and recognising the environment's value, and re-examining policies (Heal, 1998; see also: Imran et al., 2011).

The most efficient environmental policy is thus one that creates the conditions for economic agents to “internalize” the costs of the degradation they cause (Lambacher, 2007; see also: Romeiro, 2011). All forms of SD include a broad set of concerns, but the fulcrum is that we should preserve the ecological conditions and understand that social conditions influence ecological sustainability, being seen as intrinsic elements of SD, without which it cannot have significant consequences (Baker et al., 1997; see also: Barbier, 1987). As a complex concept that has multiple layers, the SD supported by the UN can also be divided into dimensions, namely society, environment, culture and economy (UNESCO, n.d.). These dimensions should be regarded in a connected way and not separately, as SD demands a holistic view of reality, meaning to reach sustainability, which is a paradigm of environmental, societal and economic balance (UNESCO, n.d.). The integration of these different dimensions is the route to achieving the synergies and dynamics intended by SD, as its connection allows for positive synergies to be fostered and negative synergies to be eschewed, generating in turn smart growth and innovation (Mensah, 2019).

As other authors point out, SD has been evolving with the times, adapting to contemporary worries of a complex global environment (Klarin, 2018; see also: López, 2015). This flexibility is pointed as ideal, keeping the concept universal and abstract enough to fit different situations (Lafferty, 2004) and having an inherent ‘constructive ambiguity’ (Dale, 2001). The fact that SD has broad appeal and little specificity is the root of the acceptance of SD as a policy goal, in particular, and it has allowed the concept to provide a means whereby policy-makers can reject the notions that environmental conservation constrains development and that development necessarily means environmental pollution (Parris & Kates, 2003; see also: Baker et al., 1997). Thanks to this, governments and leaders embrace this approach as a crucial way of making compatible development needs and environmental concerns, (Rietig, 2013).

In the framework of SD, it became urgent to define goals of development, to structure the policies, that are efficient, inclusive and balanced (Romeiro, 2011).

The SDGs were adopted, at the Rio+20 conference, in 2012. These SDGs were built on the previous MDGs (adopted in 2000) while including expanding its policy focus area (Lamichane et al., 2021). Comparing with the former goals, the SDGs are more comprehensive and are now directed to all countries (not solely the developing countries), which can facilitate the integration of the objectives and help SD have a more global adoption (Schleicher et al., 2018). At its inception it was defined that “this Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet

and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom.” (United Nations, 2015, preamble). So, the SDGs acknowledge that different issues such as poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, environmental degradation, among others, are intertwined and can therefore only be addressed together, being the central objective of the whole agenda implementing them as an indivisible whole (Weiland et al., 2021). For authors like Wysokinska, successful realisation of the MDGs and the later SDGs depends above all on appropriate planning and successful financing efforts (2017).

Indeed, challenges posed to societies by climate change are new in many levels and so the traditional forms of governance turn out to be sometimes inaccurate to address these issues. As environmental questions are inherently transnational, or as put by Rogers “many environmental impacts have broad cross-boundary and global effects that require international frameworks and agreements to deal with them” (Rogers et al., 2008, p. 177), because of that we have seen a rise in cross-border cooperation (CBC) and multi-levelled/multi-layered policy-making. Indeed, the UN has touted the importance to coordinate local efforts with broader initiatives, as patent in the Agenda 21 and its local counterpart, Local Agenda 21, brought forth in 1992, at the Rio Earth Summit, highlighting the need to harmonise action plans between national and supra-national structures and their local partners. The traditional system of international relations has been dominated by a Westphalian paradigm, centred around sovereignty and nation-states, yet many problems related to SD challenge the status quo with their transnational and cross-border character. These transnational aspects accentuate how the traditional Westphalian paradigm is going through a transformation, and they may disclose a paradigm change into a post Westphalian system, representing a drastic transformation of the political community (Linklater, 1998, p. 106). Glimpses of a post-Westphalian paradigm are, not only the growing transnational character of the challenges faced by states, namely in what concerns those associated with SD, but also the growing need to deal with these challenges via the establishment of models of governance that defy traditional logics, implying extensive sharing of responsibility throughout different levels of power, across borders and through overlapping of roles, or what has been described by authors like Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe (2003), or Simona Piattoni (2010) as the emergence of forms of ‘Multi-Level Governance’.

These conflicting dynamics of, on the one hand, more intervention to promote CBC and, on the other hand, regional/local movements that are filling in for the institutions that are now moving away from their initial goal, illustrates the transformation that society is going through. This prompts us to consider that the problems intrinsic to SD may bring inherent challenges that cannot be solved within traditional models of governance, due to their transnational nature. Seeing this, MLG may get a bigger role in the promotion and implementation of SD, having been already adopted in several SD

endeavours, which positions MLG as a possible future default model to address SD and its challenges. We can see how the Westphalian model is showing fragilities in dealing with SD issues. It is thus important to see SD as a “problem that operates simultaneously at several levels” (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016, p. 132), which cannot be solved through an exclusively sovereigntist perspective, such as the one that has constituted the status quo so far. This realisation appears to be leading to a transformation of the paradigm, with the adoption of new forms of governance, such as MLG that “engage the local governments voluntarily into the process of climate policymaking” (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016, p. 133) and help to build networks of dynamics between a variety of different actors.

MLG has been developed as a theoretical framework that seeks to understand the emergent forms of governance characterised by the action of various actors in different levels of power, working interdependently and simultaneously on various topics. Author Gary Marks showed us that MLG departed from the basic assumption that MLG is, simultaneously, having overlapping competencies and multiple interactions between the different actors across different levels, in order to explained a complex, layered and interconnect group of dynamics, where there are many simultaneous dynamics in several networks, involving not only subnational actors, but also supranational actors (Marks et al., 1996). While looking into MLG, putting the fulcrum on actors is also important, because it is “emphasized how the different levels were traversed and linked by actors moving rather freely across formally still existent levels of government and spheres of authority. [Illustrating why these] new processes were, therefore, not just multi-level, but also multi-actor—meaning that different types of actors linked different governmental levels and populated the policy networks thus formed” (Piattoni, 2010, p. 20). MLG also concerns shared decision-making competencies by actors at different levels in interconnected and overlapping political arenas (DeBardeleben & Hurrelmann, 2007). Thus, MLG describes a set of general purpose or functional jurisdictions that enjoy some degree of autonomy within a common governance arrangement and whose actors claim to engage in an enduring interaction (otherwise it would simply constitute networks and dynamics) in pursuit of a common good (Enderlein et al., 2010). Soon, “Multi-Level Governance (...) became a catch-all phrase that indicated phenomena taking place at three different analytical levels: that of political mobilisation (politics), that of policy-making arrangements (policy), and that of state structures (polity).” (Piattoni, 2010, p. 18).

Seeing that MLG reunites various actors from different levels, it has more flexibility than traditional governance models, operating between centre and periphery, state and society, and between domestic and international, simultaneously (Piattoni, 2009). This multi-levelled model sets itself apart from models like regionalism, federalism or decentralisation (Panara, 2015). While those systems focus on regions, autonomy and distribution of powers, MLG focuses on the interconnexion of multiple decision arenas (Enderlein

et al., 2010). So, it contains both vertical and horizontal dimensions at once, rather than just establishing hierarchies or networks of governance and in some cases, simple centralisation or decentralisation policies provide no alternative to it (Bache & Flinders, 2004; Benz, 1999). When analysing a MLG model, we can see that it is not just a simple two-sided process, rather a complex one, spanning over different layers and scales both beneath and above the state, with inconsistent policy-making patterns (Marks, 1993), differing greatly from traditional modes of governance, while also revealing nuances within itself.

Indeed, there is a “growing awareness of deepening interdependence” and “governments are in the process of transition, in terms of how authority is shared between different authorities, [so that] there is no clear division of responsibilities with respect to climate change” (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016, p. 136). At the same time, more actors have now an important role, reinforcing the centrality of actors beyond the traditional states, with “other actors, such as transnational companies, scientific laboratories, NGOs and social movements (...) [becoming] important members in the choir of voices needed to bring about trans boundary governance and democracy” (Lidskog & Elander, 2010, p. 39).

The fact is that it is also important to the states that they adopt these new modes of governance, since it can help them be more efficient and perceived as more legitimate, because “under current international power relations and decision-making patterns many states often find themselves in the position of a policy-taker, a fact that can erode their legitimacy as policymakers in the national context” (Zürn 2006, p. 244).

We need to see the SDGs as important parts of SD policy, as they were designed to supersede the MDGs and promote the process of social and economic change (Blewitt, 2015). It is important to understand that most policies that follow the SDGs, for implementing SD and shifting the current economic and social ways into more sustainable ones, need to take place beyond the national level, above and below it (international and local/regional levels) (Baker et al. 1997). This cross-border and transnational element is important because, as mentioned, SD has a holistic character that comprise all levels of action. In this context, SD has promoted a multiplication of “domestic and the cross-border causation chains (...) to the extent that the complex bio-physical-chemical mechanics of the biosphere as a whole are put under strain”, which means ecological and environmental problems are not territorially limited and span over multiple borders and countries, demanding a trans-territorial approach (Winter, 2006, p. 1). Rather, regarding SDGs, local actors are important for a system of MLG to achieve these targets (Hickmann, 2021). As pointed out by Marquardt (2017), MLG is useful for SD management, because climate change governance involves several different actors, state and non-state, at different jurisdictional levels. Also, as a matter that concerns all the community, in terms of governance, “sustainability requires the leadership and responsibility of the private sector alongside the public sector and civil society”, to capture the

important synergies and accommodate the community's specific needs (Sachs, 2012, p. 2210).

We have seen an increasing connection between MLG and SD. As the challenges of SD are inherently transnational in nature and pose issues to which the traditional Westphalian international society is not ready, MLG has been appearing more and more as a model used to address these questions. As seen in examples mentioned above, MLG has been used in different parts of the world and with various purposes, yet, SD has consistently lined up with it. MLG and SD have appeared together in very dissimilar territories, but always in a perspective of addressing transnational environmental issues that demand cooperation and a holistic view of the situation.

One example of how MLG has come to play a greater role in tackling environmental issues and pursue SD can be found in the EU. Indeed, the EU system has been described as one of Multi-Level Governance, by authors such as Ian Bache (2010), Marks and Hooghe (2001), or Benz (1999). The EU's governance structure, with several intersecting and interconnecting levels of power, can be described as a Multi-Level Governance model, with the interaction between nested territorial administrations, where different levels of power (local, regional, national, supra-national) all intersect and overlap (Faludi, 2012). Besides, the EU has come to commit publicly to SD, as we can see by the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (first developed in 2001, and consequently reviewed in the following years) and its' inclusion in the Europe 2020 Strategy (Boissière, 2009; European Commission, 2010). Here, SD is clearly defined as a priority in the EU's goals. The EU evidences the role of CBC in the pursuit of its goals, as it actively seeks to promote the SDGs, having included them in an increasing number of its policy areas, and consequently making SD a key aspect of its' governance structure (Blatter, 2000; see also: Rietig, 2013).

Despite some authors reckoning that the EU is not such an evident example of MLG, as a clear system wide multi-levelled model remains weak (even if efforts were made through the cohesion policy), signs of a multi-level model are visible (Bache, 2010). We can describe the EU as an example of MLG especially since the Maastricht Treaty, which established a framework for coordinating policy-making within and across multiple actors and territorial spaces (Stephenson, 2013). Throughout the years, the EU has been increasingly enhancing what we see as a model of MLG by integrating more networks and synergies between member-states and their regions (Bache, 2010). As put by Piattoni, Marks established the European Union as an example of MLG, by showing us the "roles that non-national state authorities and non-governmental organisations played in the daily politics of the European Union and therefore to their capacity to be present in the European and international arenas without the gatekeepers' permission", that fitted the model of MLG (2010, p. 18). Also, "the construction of the EU as a Multi-Level Governance system may create an area of discursive consensus which may keep the process of European

integration going while leaving its exact shape and competences unspecified” (Piattoni, 2010, p. 257).

Fitting into the European ideal, this type of governance manages, at the same time, to champion the role of cities and the inter-regional networks (Castro & Pontes, 2011). MLG has various tiers of geographical and organisational functions, where several actors act and cooperate and these are autonomous and interdependent at the same time, working together for common goals (Duit & Galaz, 2008). In this type of multi-level scheme of governance, the state’s delegate and divide powers upwards, downwards and horizontally, with a scenario of “overlapping authorities and competing competencies” between the different levels and authorities (Petrariu, 2019; Aalberts, 2004, p. 23). MLG can be more effective if we address the balance between the local and central actors, allowing for a healthy cooperation, where regional and central authorities share responsibilities (Homsy et al., 2018; Jeffery & Peterson, 2020). It can also work as dispersion of authority, so that mutually exclusive jurisdictions can work together all the same and to surpass the limits from having several asymmetries between all members (Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

Indeed, “Sustainable Development is deeply rooted in the European project and firmly enshrined in the EU Treaties” (Eurostat, 2019, p. 4), and as SD can transcend national jurisdictions and change the political paradigm (Newman, 2006), to address the challenges of climate change, attention needs to be focused not only at the international level but also on how climate protection policy that is taking shape locally (Bulkeley & Kern, 2006). In a multi-level system like the EU, we can pinpoint the Euro-Regions as ideal structures to implement these policies. Indeed, MLG has come to take a central place in EU governance on SD, since SD brings challenges that “require integrated action at multiple levels of government and within the spheres of politics, economics, and society. National, regional, and local governments have both distinct and complementary roles in developing climate mitigation and adaptation strategies” (Schreurs, 2017, p. 101).

A fundamental actor in the European Union’s MLG are the Euro-Regions (also called Euregios, Euregions or Euroregions), i.e., groups of local and/or regional authorities, from two or more EU member states, that promote cooperation across one or more borders (Wolf et al., 2006). As points of intersections between national, regional and EU-level actors and policies, these institutions play a very important role in nurturing CBC in the European Union, and in the overall model of MLG that characterises the European Union, by promoting a sharing of power between different level actors within and beyond national state borders (Schakel, 2020). This is reflected in the EU formalised legal framework for Euro-Regions entitled European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). For the EU, these groupings “shall (...) facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and/or interregional cooperation, (...), between its members (...), with the exclusive aim of strengthening economic

and social cohesion” (European Union, 2006, art.1). The figure of the EGTC was designed to foster CBC at interregional and transnational levels (Evrard, 2016), and so, it has also become one of the main frameworks to develop cross-border strategies for SD and address transnational environmental and related socio-economic issues. In this context, Euro-Regions thus appear as a key-actor in tackling not only environmental, but also related social and economic development problems, that are central to the EU’s development agenda and pursuit of the SDGs.

Euro-Regions and INTERREG are seen by many authors as a success case of MLG, having helped to connect people who inhabit border territories, while showing potential to connect different levels and bring a more flexible approach to cross-border question (Bufon, 2013; Cots et al., 2009). In fact, other authors point out that INTERREG contributes to the fulfilment of MLG principles and is an important trigger for cooperation (Scandola, 2017). The Euro-Regions are important parts of the European Union model, based on networks, horizontal/vertical relations, as multiple autonomous actors help decentralising local policies, and this joint work and a multi-levelled approach can be beneficial to Euro Regional programs (Nadalutti, 2015; Perkmann, 2007; Scandola, 2017). The Euro-Regions are also important to the implementation of SD, being an example of CBC, in this context.

Some authors tell us that CBC and MLG feed into each other, being the partnership of various actors at regional and local levels (Araújo & Álvarez, 2014; Gobert-Keckeis, 2017) and having the potential to create a platform that is beneficial for fostering and enhancing SD and goal integration (Blatter, 2000).

In the EU, CBC began gaining ground, contributing to building MLG, while producing new transnational actors and new opportunities for regional/local actors (Perkmann, 1999). Euro-Regions are stable cooperation arrangements, involving local and regional entities, in a border area between two or more EU state-members, and directed at enhancing CBC, coming along as structures for cooperation between administrative, territorial and municipal institutions of neighbour countries (Perkmann, 2002; Fedorov, & Korneevets, 2009). Euro-Regions are based on transboundary identities and transboundary networking, to bring marginalised and peripheral border territories into the core of the European project (Kramersch & Hooper, 2004). These structures unite local and regional authorities across one or several borders (Wolf et al., 2006). The main objective of Euro-Regions is the creation of integrated cooperation spaces in territories on all sides of borders (transforming bilateral relations into networks and borders in common areas), and thus complying to the holistic nature of SD and presenting themselves as an ideal level of implementation of these policies (Tabarly, 2007; Kurowska-Pysz & Szczepańska-Woszczyzna, 2017). Euro Regions have been created mainly with support of INTERREG, to enhance development, CBC and deepen the EU’s system of MLG (Medeiros, 2013).

The EGTC framework provides the chance for regional and local authorities to act in parallel to national governments, that get to keep their roles in the regional governance scheme, while they can act under a new supranational legal and institutional framework for cooperation, with more flexibility and opportunities for innovation (Csizmadia, 2020). Yet, the structure of the CBC still has fragilities, as it does not erase developmental differences and sometimes even accentuates asymmetries between the given territories (Durand et al., 2017). Some obstacles faced by the Euro-Regions are administrative and organisational differences, as their structures are heavily bureaucratic and their discourses removed from citizens' lives (García-Alvarez & Trillo-Santamaria, 2013). In fact, between most Euro-Regions there are several differences, and some problems arise from this heterogeneity, which prompted the EU to eventually establish a legal framework, the EGTC, to simplify these connections (Lepik, 2009). This is not without its disadvantages, as initially Euro-Regions appeared as community-based, bottom-up fluxes, they were new strategies for border territories that suffered from their peripheral location, but now the EU is focused on a more structured model, the top-down EGTC framework, that may disturb some cooperation dynamics previously established (Sanguin, 2013).

In the EU, small-scale cross-border regions have flourished, in particular, because of their increasingly relevant role as implementation units for European regional policy, as emergent cross-border actors can benefit cooperation, effectiveness and sustainability (Perkmann, 2003; Makkonen et al., 2019). In terms of legal framework, the EGTC, which is a policy tool for CBC, was adopted in 2006 and amended in 2013 (Engl, 2016; Csizmadia, 2020; Ulrich, 2019).

Euro-Regions enhance local/regional development, having potential to become examples in SD (Bartiniczak, 2019). This strategic environmental CBC has clear goals, such as diversity of participating actors, experience in CBC, coherence of objectives, and benefits to both sides, posing Euro-Regions as a good vehicle for its application, since they already share these conditions and have proven to be collaborative and problem-oriented approaches, which could benefit the success of SD (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018; Meadowcroft, 1999). "The success of the 2030 Agenda will depend on implementation at the country level, as well as international collaboration. (...) International collaborations and partnerships are essential components of this effort" (United Nations, 2019, p. 140), but as well as the SDGs are global, they have an important local dimension (Jones & Comfort, 2019). Cities and their governments are increasingly recognized as important actors in global sustainability governance, and due to their proximity to citizens, local authorities have an advantageous position in the MLG system allowing them to act as transmission belts between the 2030 Agenda and the plethora of local stakeholders operating in the field of SD (Hickmann, 2021).

We highlight the link between Euro-Regions, MLG and SD, and the successes, obstacles and barriers we can find in that process. Euro-Regions were not designed thinking only in SD, but on the confluence of levels, and the interconnection and overlapping of different actors, being an intermedium platform for the implementation of these measures/policies. Euro-Regions are an intermedium platform that serves as a multi-level perspective point for identifying the positive and the negative points of the connection between Euro-Regions and SD, while also giving broader lessons on the role of MLG in the promotion of SD.

We can see that the system is evolving in the sense of overcoming its' shortcomings in tackling SD, with the progressive rise in prominence of MLG and other alternatives to the traditional Westphalian international system. This transformation also shows how democratic ways of governance are evolving, since MLG and new forms of governance are bringing to light voice from grassroots movements and leading to rise in local movements that highlights the increasing importance of diversity and inclusion, indicating that the policy-making process is becoming more open and democratised, comprising not only different levels of power but also multiple actors involved in the different stages of policy-making.

In a way, SD is a cause and a consequence of MLG, since we already saw some forms of MLG before SD came to the forefront of international politics and established itself as the central motivation in policy making (Marks, 1993), SD as played a large role in the ascendance of MLG as a form of governance, but as also been boosted into mainstream by these exact forms of governance. As a matter of fact, the problems arising from climate change have pointed the inadequacy of the traditional systems in dealing with inherently cross-border and transnational issues, empowering MLG structures due to their capacity to, on the one hand, deal with overlapping, intersecting realities and multiple actors at the same time, and to, on the other hand, to include various perspectives and inputs into the policy-making. This, in turn, lead to a natural adoption of SD, since it was seen as the perspective that better addressed the current problems and issues, stemming from climate change and environmental problems, while also keeping economic growth as a central issue. Simultaneously, with the emergence of SD as an official concept in the 1980's, with the Brundtland Report and other groundbreaking documents (United Nations, 1987), policy-makers started to notice the clear discrepancy between the new challenges posed by environmental problems and the implementation of SD, in order to bring about a solution coalescing tackling climate change and promoting economic development, and the usual modus operandi of states and power players, leading to the adoption of MLG models, as a way to better adapt to SD.

For instance, we have been emphasising the case of the EU, which is paradigmatic in terms both of SD and MLG. In fact, the EU has always showed MLG tendencies, being a transnational and multi-levelled institution,

but particularly since the Maastricht Treaty, in the 1990's, that established the intertwined network of different levels of power and diverse actors, all reunited in the policy-making process (Stephenson, 2013), moreover the EU has also been an early adopter of SD, including it in its goals, and trying to go beyond the UN's expectations SDGs (even if the results are sometimes questionable and the commitment to SD and the SDGs seems to be somewhat symbolic at times) (Baker, 2007). The EU is, therefore, an example of this interconnection between MLG and SD, since it has a model where synergies between different actors and multiple levels of power are encouraged, all at once, also promoting CBC, magnifying the MLG dimension, while having all-encompassing goals of SD and environmental concerns, in general.

A good case in point is the Euro-Regions, which are intermediate level transnational organisation, that act in cross-border areas and include public and private actors from different levels of power. They are, thus, intrinsically MLG and have been fine-tuned to adapt to SD, after all its' original goal was not to exclusively cater to the environmental concerns but mainly to promote CBC and European Integration. Today, we can see that the EU and, specifically, the Euro-Regions are an integral part of the EU's MLG dimension and play an important role at maintaining the commitment to SD, expanding the local and regional dimension of these environmental goals, which are crucial for better assessing and achieving the SDGs and SD as a whole (Blewitt, 2015). This local/regional dimension and the multi-actor, multi-level and multi-scale facets of Euro-Regions show us a democratising tendency, since including more voices and more perspectives is the best way to allow for easier and better participation and representation, while also allowing to approach the growing concerns with accountability (which is an elusive concept in the top-down model of the traditional Westphalian system, but can become easier to attain in bottom-up models that include more players, or in multi-layered models that allow for interaction and dialogue between levels and actors).

In conclusion, we can see that the recent concerns with environmental questions and the goals for SD have allowed for MLG models to thrive, as we can see in the paradigmatic case of the EU, particularly the Euro-Regions, showing that we are witnessing a transformation into a new post-Westphalian system, which seems to, not only approach more accurately transnational issues, but also to promote better participation, representation and, in general, democratising the process of policy-making, contributing to a healthier Democracy as a whole.

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