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2 Application of Process Approach to the National Governance 3 System for Sustainable Development. Case Study in Romania

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10 **Abstract:** The paper aims to present a new manner of describing and managing the national gov-
11 ernance framework for “sustainable development (SD)”, focused on process-based approach. This
12 principle was applied in a previous work by the authors, related to the key processes of the United
13 Nations governance for SD. The present paper continues the process approach of multi-level gov-
14 ernance, aiming to contribute to the conceptualization of governance system for SD at the national
15 level, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda, taking into account the harmonization with
16 higher levels of governance. The workpaper presents in distinct sections: a review of publications
17 related to the national framework of governance for SD; the overall picture of the national SD
18 governance system, with the generic definition of key processes; and a case study performed in
19 Romania. The novelty of the paper consists in the new model-tool proposed by the authors, and in
20 its application in a study case that illustrates the benefits of such an approach. The proposed mod-
21 el is useful to SD experts and governing bodies, as well as academics and researchers, creating the
22 framework for developing and improving SD governance at country level in a systematic manner.

23 **Keywords:** governance for sustainable development; national governance system for sustainable
24 development; process-based model of governance system

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1. Introduction

Governance for “sustainable development (SD)” has gained increasing considera-
tion in the last decades, being currently a central issue of the governance worldwide. In
essence, the concept of governance for SD defines the governance focused on SD, but the
publications on this topic also present more complex definitions, e.g.: “Processes of so-
ciopolitical governance oriented towards the attainment of SD” [1] (p.299); “Governance
for SD encompasses the steering requirements and mechanisms that enable the formula-
tion of concerted and adaptive policies that foster the cooperation of diverse actors in
delivering SD” [2] (p.22), etc.

The publications also note the challenges facing governance for SD: it represents a
new conceptual framework for the development of society that requires a multi-sector,
multi-level and multi-actor demarche, and also continuous reflection and adaptive
learning cycles. These features are related to the key principles of governance for SD,
namely: integration, participation, reflexivity, and the long-term principle [2, p.24].

First of all, the governance for SD presumes a long-term horizon view: the present
actions should not affect future generations, as states the first SD official definition:
“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of
future generations to meet their own needs” [3] (p.41). Secondly, it is an integrative ap-
proach that takes into account economic, social and environmental aspects. Thus, the SD
is a way of development which modifies the purposes of traditional development by

46 adding environmental and social goals to the economic ones. In the same time, the ver-
47 tical integration of the SD actions is necessary, which supposes the harmonization of SD
48 actions in multi-level governance [4]. Central to this concept is the recognition that the
49 provision of SD requires the division of responsibility between more levels of govern-
50 ance: the “United Nations (UN)” is the main actor in SD global coordination, followed
51 by regional governance, national governance, and at the lower levels, local communities
52 and organizations. This complex multi-level governance reflects the global nature of
53 sustainability issues, the common goal of governance bodies at all levels being to deliver
54 results for citizens. According to Allain-Dupré [5] (pp.803-804), the multi-level govern-
55 ance has become an imperative to perform the complex interactions among stakeholders
56 in the design and implementation of public policies. This statement is related to the third
57 principle, the principle of participation, which refers to the large engagement of all
58 stakeholders to the SD governance, namely administrative bodies, organizations and
59 citizens. Finally, the principle of reflexivity defines the regular evaluation of SD govern-
60 ance performance and its continuous improvement.

61 The present paper refers to the national framework of governance for SD and pro-
62 poses a new approach to the governance system, focused on processes. Addressing pro-
63 cesses is a basic principle of modern management that leads to the improvement of the
64 overall performance of a system through a better correlation of its activities. In the au-
65 thors’ view, the process approach to the governance for SD allows a better understand-
66 ing and functioning of the governance system at each level, and also a better harmoniza-
67 tion between the different levels of governance. A previous authors’ work in this topic
68 describes the key processes for the UN governance for SD, and makes reference to the
69 main process’ regulations currently used [6]. The present paper is a continuation of the
70 prior work, and aims to contribute to the conceptualization and effectiveness of govern-
71 ance for SD at national level, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda [7], taking
72 into account the harmonization with the other levels of governance system.

73 The workpaper is structured on three sections, with the following specific objec-
74 tives: 1) reviewing the literature on the national framework of governance for SD; 2) es-
75 tablishing a generic process-based model for the “national governance system for SD
76 (NGS-SD)”; 3) applying the proposed model in a case study carried out in Romania. The
77 final conclusions summarize the benefits of implementing the process-based model for
78 national SD governance and outline the main directions of future research that can sup-
79 port such an approach.

80 **Methodology used**

81 The paper applies the methodology of process-based approach to define a generic
82 model for the NGS-SD, and analyzes how the processes of the SD governance are cur-
83 rently carried out in Romania. Also, an extensive literature-based documentation is pro-
84 vided both in the critical analysis of publications on the national SD governance frame-
85 work, and in the assessment of NGS-SD in Romania.

86 **Novelty of the paper**

87 The originality of the paper consists in applying the process-based approach to the
88 description of NGS-SD. The model for the NGS-SD proposed by authors is a novelty.
89 Also, the case study based on this model carried out by the authors is an original con-
90 tribution.

92 **2. Literature Review on National Framework of Governance for Sustainable Devel-** 93 **opment**

94 The governance framework is a complex concept, which refers to the totality of in-
95 struments, procedures, processes, actors and resources, designed to tackle a societal
96 problem [8] (p.13). The national SD governance framework has gained considerable at-
97 tention in research and public debate particularly since the drafting of the 2030 Agenda,

98 given the global and universal nature of the “SD goals (SDGs)”, whose achievement in-
99 volves all countries.

100 The review developed in this section is not exhaustive, being analyzed only the re-
101 cent publications on national governance for SD related to the 2030 Agenda implemen-
102 tation. This limitation takes into account the fact that, over the past decade considerable
103 progress has been made in the national SD governance framework. Also, the studies on
104 the national SDGs objectives and results, and those related to one particular element of
105 the governance system will not be taken into account. As examples, the publications on
106 SD governance principles or structures, respectively a single governance process or tool.
107 All of these are components of NGS-SD and their individual analysis does not corre-
108 spond to the purpose of this work, which focuses on the global picture of national gov-
109 ernance for SD.

110 • The publication of the “Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Develop-
111 ment (OECD)”, entitled “Governance as an SDG Accelerator”[9], illustrates the main in-
112 gredients of a whole-of-government approach to strategic visioning, priority setting, and
113 implementation of the SDGs. In the authors’ view, the SD governance involves the de-
114 sign, implementation and effective delivery of public policies, and in this sense three
115 processes are carried out: 1) elaboration of strategies; 2) planning operational actions; 3)
116 monitoring and evaluation. It is emphasized the key role of the robust coordination
117 mechanisms in ensuring policy coherence and successfully addressing the mul-
118 ti-dimensional policy challenges that characterize the SDGs. The authors also stress the
119 need to develop an appropriate structure with a strong coordination body at high level,
120 and refer distinctly to some governance processes, namely: strategic planning and prior-
121 ity-setting; public procurement; human resources, skills and digital tools to support the
122 SDGs implementation.

123 • The study of Niestroy et al [10], carried out under the auspices of the European
124 Parliament, examines the governance frameworks used to implement the SDGs in the
125 “European Union (EU)” member states. The analysis model includes seven elements of
126 the SD governance, namely: 1) commitment and strategy; 2) leadership and horizontal
127 coordination; 3) stakeholder participation; 4) monitoring and review; 5) knowledge and
128 tools; 6) institutions for long-term; 7) activities of parliaments for Agenda 2030.

129 • Comments on the national governance framework for SD are also made by Mori-
130 ta, Okitasari and Masuda [11], which focuses on the evaluation of national and local
131 governance systems for achieving the SDGs. Starting from the existing publications, the
132 authors remark that there are not effective tools for analyzing governance systems that
133 aim to implement the SDGs. The solution adopted by authors is the matrix tools of the
134 “Governance System Analysis” proposed by Dale, Vella and Potts [12], which includes
135 five key structural components: 1) vision and objective setting; 2) research and assess-
136 ment; 3) strategy development; 4) strategy implementation; 5) monitoring, evaluation
137 and review. Furthermore, each component includes three key functions, namely: deci-
138 sion-making capacity, connectivity, and knowledge use.

139 • Villeneuve and Lanmafankpotin [13] propose a guiding model for the national SD
140 governance evaluation, which was included in the UN Sustainability Acceleration
141 Toolkit [14]. The main components of this model are: 1) national institutional frame-
142 work; 2) strategic coordination; 3) interaction with sub- and supra-national levels; 4) ac-
143 commodating stakeholders; 5) monitoring and ongoing evaluation; 6) capacity-building
144 for authorities and stakeholders. Each of these components includes several elements/
145 criteria. As example, the “National institutional framework” component is analyzed
146 based on ten criteria: vision; principles; legal document; policy, strategy or equivalent
147 plans, horizontal integration; budgeting; national resources; greenhouse gas reduction
148 target; development and implementation tools; government departments and agencies
149 that help to implement the SD strategy.

150 It is to note the concern for the creation of tools to support the implementation of
151 the 2030 Agenda. At present there are a great number of specific SD governance tools,

152 most of them elaborated at the UN level and accessible online (e.g. the UN Sustainability
153 Acceleration Toolkit [14]). These instruments are related to SD principles, sectoral issues
154 or specific processes of the governance system, and did not provide an overview of the
155 NGS-SD.

156 A series of publications focus on the governance transformations needed to achieve
157 the SDGs, and in this context components of the national governance framework are
158 presented.

159 • One such a study was elaborated by Nestroy [15] and is focused on the tools for
160 SD integration. The author remarks that there are universal tools adopted by the UN
161 that support the process of the SDGs integration in national governance, but they must
162 be adapted to the context of each country, taking into account specific national realities
163 and capacities. The expression “meta-governance approach” is used in connection with
164 this contingent transformation. The paper focuses on the steps of governance transfor-
165 mations that need to be made at national level, and refers to three major components of
166 the SD governance system, namely: 1) strategies; 2) institutional (organizational) ar-
167 rangements; 3) and processes, including supporting tools. A particular attention is paid
168 to national culture and some interpretations are presented regarding the relationship
169 between SD integration approaches/tools and the cultural context, and respectively the
170 governance environment.

171 • A similar approach have Meuleman and Niestroy [16] in their work focused on
172 meta-governance combined with key governance principles, as mechanism to support
173 the analysis, design, and management of SDG governance framework. The authors
174 stress that implementation of the SDGs requires systemic thinking: comprehensive ap-
175 proaches (taking into account all relevant aspects) and, in addition, a holistic view.

176 • O-Connor et al [17] examine the transformations in several OECD’ developed
177 countries aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda. The case studies refer to some com-
178 ponents of the governance for SD, namely: 1) governmental structures and coordination;
179 2) SD strategy and objectives statement; 3) policy elaboration and coherence; 4) vertical
180 communication with the sub-national levels; 5) evaluation process and review of pro-
181 gress.

182 • In their paper, Fyson, Lindberg and Morales [18] underline that implementing
183 2030 Agenda represents a complex governance challenge and needs “to boost the capac-
184 ity of governments to plan, to coordinate, to act, and to serve as a catalyst in support of
185 SDGs implementation”. The authors refer to some enablers for accelerating progress on
186 the SDGs, namely: 1) vision and leadership (expressed at the highest levels and backed
187 by strategies, policies, legislation, action plans, instructions and incentive - which are
188 essential to pursue the SDGs in a coherent manner); 2) coordinated actions (dedicated
189 coordination mechanisms and tools, and collaborative partnership with all stakeholders
190 and sub-national levels of governance); 3) impact (evaluation processes for assessing the
191 progress towards the SDGs and the impact of the SD policies); 4) human resource (the
192 capacity and leadership skills of civil servants to understand the complex relationships
193 between the SDGs, and their ability to turn governance principles into actions).

194 • Finally, it must be said that two of SDGs (number 16 and 17) from 2030 Agenda
195 [7] focus on governance systems, but the aspects they refer do not provide a complete
196 picture of NGS-SD. The SDG16 specific targets are associated to: improving the deci-
197 sion-making process; efficient, responsible and transparent institutions; professionaliza-
198 tion of institutions. And the SDG17 refers to: policy coherence in SD; developing an ac-
199 tion plan; and updating of specific national indicators.

200 As a conclusion of the publication-based review, it can be said that achieving sus-
201 tainability requires a new governance framework, institutions and tools to address the
202 complex societal challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda. Research in governance for SD
203 often focuses on the SDGs planning, achievement and progress, or only on one particu-
204 lar aspect of the governance system (e.g.: principles, structure, strategy, etc.). There is a

205 general consensus regarding the need for a holistic approach of governance for SD at national level, aiming to develop a global picture of effective governance for sustainability.

206
207 As the previous review shows, there are few publications that address the national
208 governance framework for SD in a broader perspective, as a system. The analysis illustrates that there is no a clear picture of the NGS-SD: there are different visions on the
209 governance system for SD, which makes it difficult to understand what needs to be
210 done, which are the components of the governance system, and respectively which of
211 them is most conducive to achieve the SDGs. Also, there are not effective tools for analyzing the national SD governance framework as a whole.

212
213
214 In the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda worldwide, it is imperative
215 to define a generic model for NGS-SD as a common methodological framework for all
216 countries. The present work aims to contribute to solving this requirement.
217

218 **3. Process Architecture of the National Governance System for Sustainable Development** 219 **ment**

220 The principle of process-based approach and the benefits of its application to SD
221 governance have been presented in a previous paper by the authors [6]. The first work
222 on this topic focuses on the “process architecture” of the highest level of the governance
223 system for SD (the UN level), identifying and briefly describing the key processes on
224 which the overall SD results depend. The present paper aims to further the process-based
225 description of multi-level governance for SD, by focusing on the national
226 framework of the SD governance in the context of 2030 Agenda.

227 In essence, the process-based principle involves defining and managing the interrelated
228 processes on which the overall results depend. As pointed out in the prior work by
229 the authors, the process-focused vision emerged in the last decades of the last century, in
230 various management models and methods, but since 2000 it has spread widely by its defining
231 as a basic principle of quality management in the ISO 9000 standards [19]. Currently,
232 approaching by processes is used in many organizations, being one of the key ingredients
233 for effective management in terms of quality, environment, business process, etc. [6].
234

235 The processes of the governance system represent the interdependent sequences of
236 activities undertaken to achieve the overall goals. Figure 1 presents schematically the
237 key processes of the NGS-SD, considering their classification into the following three
238 categories: management processes, core/ basic processes and support processes. This
239 classification is generic and originates in standards for management systems, e.g. ISO
240 9000 (2015) series of standards for quality management systems.
241
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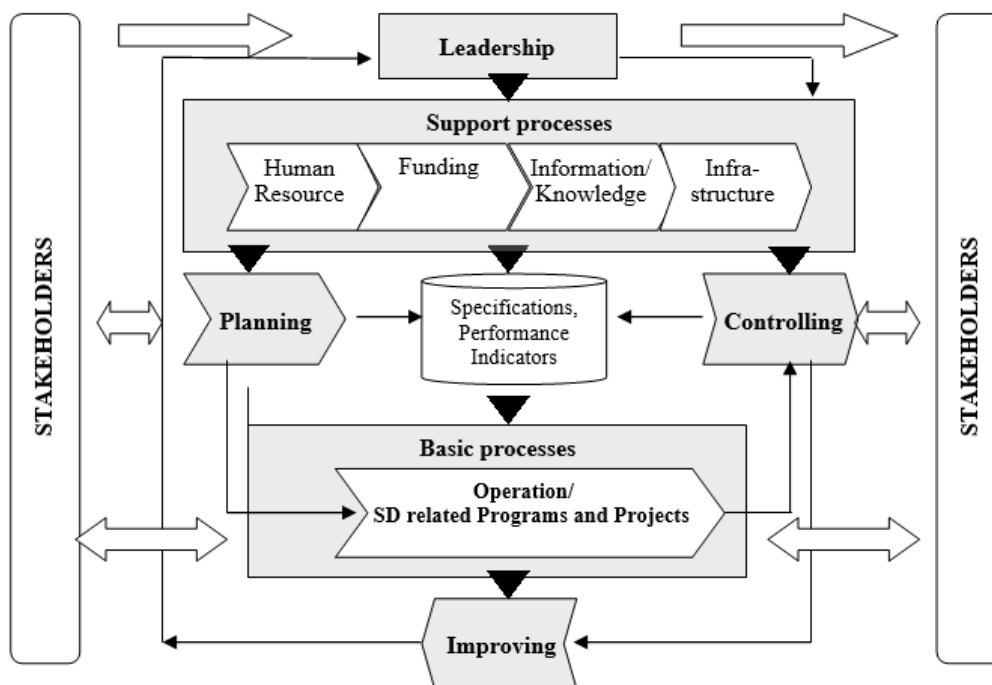


Fig.1. Process architecture of the national governance system for Sustainable Development (Adapted from [6]).

The process architecture of the NGS-SD is similar to those proposed for the UN governance system for SD [6], but there are some differences in the global picture and especially in the processes' content, which will be described below. Using the same scheme to represent the two systems is not accidental: it makes it easier to understand the connections between the two levels of multi-level governance for SD, which are based on common principles and rules. The connections materialize through inputs and outputs at both the system and process level. From the relational point of view, performing governance processes also implies broad partnerships and stakeholder engagement. Each process is defined through specific inputs, activities, tools and resources, outputs, and performance indicators. These elements must be described in process regulations (norms, procedures, methodologies, etc.), which are important tools for an effective management. The responsibility for the results and how the processes are carried out is assigned to the process owners.

The first category of processes, "Management processes", are generally the same in governance for SD at all levels, including leadership and the processes by which the management cycle of planning-control-improvement is achieved.

The "Leadership" process has a key role in the creation of overall action framework for SD governance, performing several functions: defining principles and policies on SD; developing national strategy, objectives and axes of action; establishing responsibilities/structures; communication and developing the SD culture; NGS-SD management; and SD regulation management. Establishing responsibilities refers to the creation of specific SD bodies and functions at the national level of governance. Developing coherent policies and national strategy represents activities/sub-processes that aim to ensure the establishment of the long-term SD direction and objectives, as well as the behavioral changes necessary for the SD to be integrated into daily life at the national level. In this regard, communication on the SD values and strategy is a very important process, contributing to the development of SD culture.

275 A distinct sequence of the “Leadership” process is the “NGS-SD management”,
276 which relates to the responsibility of national SD leadership to continuously control and
277 improve the governance system. As is already said, the improvement of governance
278 system for SD is included in the SDG16 and SDG17. Defining “NGS-SD management” as
279 a distinct process leads to a more systematic and comprehensive approach to SD gov-
280 ernance that needs to be regularly evaluated and improved. The leadership's responsi-
281 bility in this sense is embodied in the approval of the annual report of NGS-SD and the
282 establishment of improvement plans.

283 The management of SD regulations is another sequence of “Leadership” process.
284 SD regulations include laws and other type of regulations related to technical aspects
285 (e.g. environmental norms and standards), economic (e.g. pollution taxes, fiscal facilities
286 for disadvantaged categories) and administrative (e.g. environmental control structures).
287 These regulations have an essential role in achieving the SDGs. The definition of a dis-
288 tinct NGS-SD process related to SD regulations (norms, laws, methodologies) has in
289 mind the systematic control and continuous improvement of these tools considering the
290 strategies promoted and also assimilation of legislative initiatives from higher levels of
291 governance. The methodological aspects of the development and approval of SD regula-
292 tions determine the capacity of government to deliver legislation, being associated to
293 good governance, respectively “quality of governance (QoG)” system, and will not be
294 addressed in this work.

295 The planning-control-improvement processes define the cycle of management ac-
296 tions aimed at developing national SD plans, controlling activities and results, and re-
297 spectively improving performance. The major issues in SD planning are the establish-
298 ment of national SD indicators and the prioritization of actions taking into account their
299 impact and existing resources. The control aims to measure and evaluate the results and
300 progress in the field of SD from the perspective of the SDGs, respectively the evaluation
301 of the governance system. The assessment is done at the government level, but regular
302 reporting of SD actions and results to higher levels of multi-level governance is also in-
303 cluded in this process. According to Niestroy et al [10] (p.28), a robust monitoring & re-
304 view framework is crucial for an effective and operational strategy. The improvement is
305 based on the results provided by the control and implies the elimination of deficiencies
306 in terms of the SDGs and the way of governance, but also the transition to new levels of
307 performance through innovation. According to Meuleman [8] (p.7), “SD is a laboratory
308 for governance innovation (how will be goals achieved?), but also for policy innovation
309 (which concrete goals need to be set in a specific situation?)”.

310 The global responsibility for coordinating management processes must rest with
311 the prime minister, but the power is usually delegated to a specialized SD body. The SD
312 structural framework must be adapted to the national context.

313 The basic processes (“operation”) define the actions with direct effects on the over-
314 all results. In the case of NGS-SD, the operation process takes the form of development
315 programs and projects with specific SD objectives, coordinated by the line ministries or
316 inter-ministries. The key areas of action are defined by the national policies, strategies
317 and plans for SD, which are based on horizontal integration, but are also harmonized
318 with those adopted at higher levels of SD governance. Currently, the reference point is
319 the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs, to which there are associated thematic areas.

320 The thematic areas represent horizontal factors for achieving sustainability and
321 correspond to one or more fields of activity, usually associated with different ministries/
322 coordination structures. For each thematic area, specific objectives are established (de-
323 rived from the SDGs), and respectively, programs and projects are developed to achieve
324 them. The relationship between the national SDGs, thematic areas and the SD programs
325 and projects is illustrated in Figure 2. As the scheme shows, the programs and projects
326 are generally multi-ministerial. It is worth noting that the projects aim at concrete ac-
327 tions in various SD fields and are approved at the central level, but their initiative and
328 implementation usually belong to individual organizations or groups of organizations of

different categories (central and local community entities, public institutions, economic and non-profit organizations).

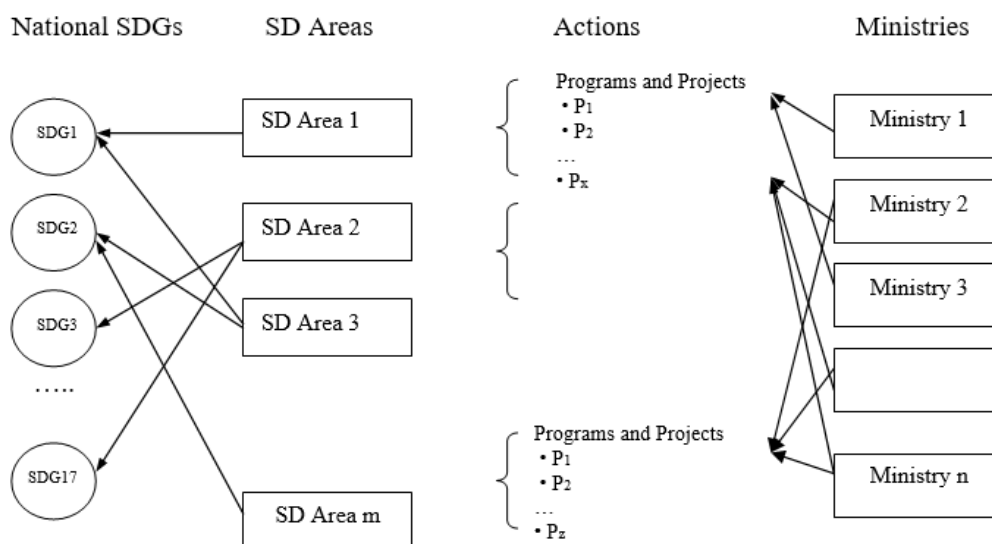


Fig.2. Correspondence between the national SDGs, SD Areas, Development Programs and Projects, and Ministries (original figure).

The support processes refer to providing the necessary resources for SD. The processes in this category are the same with those of the UN governance system for SD, namely: “Human Resource”, “Financing”, and “Information Management”. The process of “Infrastructure” could be added, for better controlling the way the infrastructure for national SD governance is developed. Particular aspects regarding the accomplishment of these processes are presented in the case study performed in Romania.

The major difference from the model for UN governance for SD is the lack of “policy coherence”, “stakeholder engagement”, and “partnership management” processes, which are defined as support processes in the prior work [6]. These are transversal functions that apply in all processes of the governance system. In our opinion, they must be defined as leadership sub-processes, their purpose being to control and continuously improve the way the principles they refer to are applied at the national level. As the previous work by authors shows, the processes of “policy coherence”, “stakeholder engagement”, and “partnership management” are regulated at UN level by framework documents with specific requirements and assessment tools. These instruments constitute guidelines for developing and unitary evaluating the three processes in a systematic manner at country level.

As a conclusion of this section, applying the process-based principle to define the NGS-SD results in a generic model, harmonized with those presented in the prior work by the authors, focused on the first level of multi-level governance for SD. The existence of a unique model for the NGS-SD does not mean enrollment in templates: the model shows what needs to be done, but not how it is done. Each process must be tailored taking into account the country context and particularities, the existence of common rules ensuring the convergence of SD actions on regional and global scale. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs are currently common benchmarks in this regard.

The proposed model creates the framework for the unitary evaluation of governance system for SD in all countries. This assessment is one of the NGS-SD control sub-processes and it must be done systematically, which means that: it is done repeat-

edly, with a certain frequency; the process is defined by methodologies or procedures that specify what is done, who does it, and the necessary tools and resources; reports are regularly elaborated, being a basis for the analyzes performed by country government, and respectively by coordination and evaluation bodies at higher levels of governance. The case study on SD governance system in Romania illustrates such an assessment, completed by the synthesis of strengths and weaknesses.

4. Case Study in Romania

Romania, as a member of the UN and the EU, has expressed its adhesion for achieving the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda in the framework of the UN Summit for SD, in 2015 [7], and respectively by the adoption of the document "A sustainable future for Europe: the EU's response to the 2030 Agenda for SD", in 2017 [20].

The purpose of this section is to analyze the SD governance system in Romania in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda. The analysis is structured on the elements of the NGS-SD model described above, namely: 1) leadership (establishing responsibilities; strategy elaboration, objectives and principles; communication and SD culture; management of the NGS-SD, management of the SD regulations; policy coherence, stakeholder engagement and partnership management); 2) management cycle (planning; control; and improvement); 3) operation (execution of the portfolio of programs and projects); 4) support processes (human resources; financing; information; and infrastructure). For each process, information about actions, actors and tools is presented, highlighting their current state and progress.

1) Leadership

- The development of an adequate national structure for implementing SD in Romania in the context of 2030 Agenda was one of the priority actions of the government. Currently the central SD structure includes several ministerial entities (Figure 3) and other independent organizations.

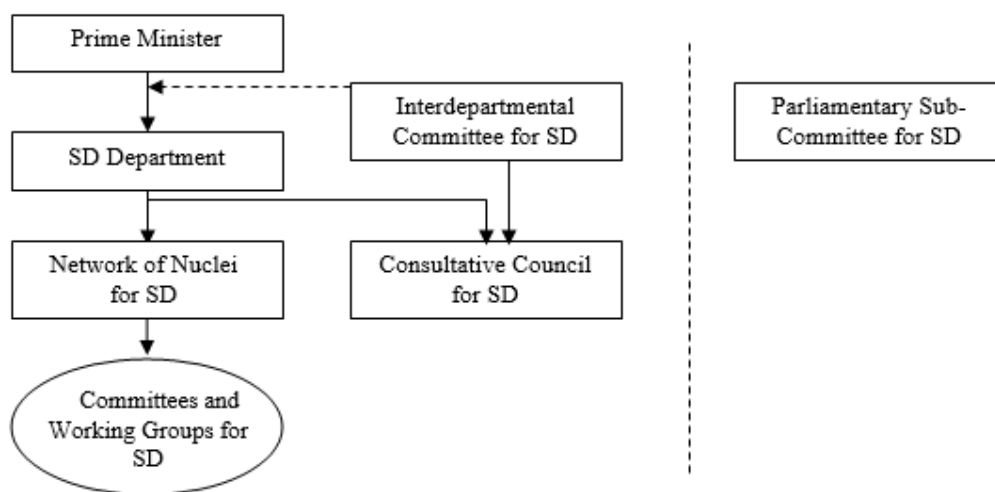


Fig.3. National Structure of the Governance for SD
(Source: adapted from [21] (p.15)).

The responsibility for SD at the national level is assigned to the Prime Minister, but the coordination of activities is delegated to the SD Department, created in 2017 [22]. In 2019, the "Interdepartmental Committee for SD" was created, an inter-institutional body chaired by the Prime Minister, which comprises the vice-prime ministers and ministers [23]. The Committee monitors the process of implementing, monitoring, evaluating and revising Romania's strategy for SD, its mission being to elaborate annual reports and

402 approve the action plans. The permanent secretariat of the Committee is provided by the
403 SD Department, which coordinates the elaboration and implementation of SD strategy,
404 and also prepares annual reports on the strategy implementation. The reports are sub-
405 mitted to the government and are presented in parliament. Within the SD Department
406 there is the “Network of nuclei for SD”, which organizes working groups for the imple-
407 mentation of sectoral strategies. There is also the “Consultative Council for SD” [24],
408 with independent specialists. The Council is member of the “Network of European Ad-
409 visory Councils on Environment and SD”, which works with European institutions and
410 other major organizations.

411 It is to note that SD department has a recognized national presence and visibility.
412 Externally, it made Romania an actor recognized at regional, European and international
413 level, awarded for the innovation brought to public policies [25] (p.7). The achievements
414 of the SD Department can be found in the annual activity reports published on the de-
415 partment's website [26].

416 In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, independent structures have been also created to
417 support stakeholders' participation to the SDGs implementation. The most important is
418 the “Coalition Sustainable Romania”, created in 2021 by the SD Department in partner-
419 ship with the Embassy of Sustainability in Romania Association [27], which brings to-
420 gether organizations representing civil society and the private environment. Joining the
421 Coalition is done online, on the organization's website, thus ensuring a bridge of dia-
422 logue with the government on sustainability issues.

423 • Elaborating strategies for SD is a key process in the effective governance for SD at
424 all levels. The “National strategy for SD of Romania (NSSDR)” 2030 was adopted by the
425 Romanian Government in 2018 [28]. The NSSDR has three parts, which refer to: the
426 SD-related vision and engagement; the evaluation of the first decade of implementation
427 of the SD strategy approved by Romanian Government in 2008 and the new strategic
428 objectives and targets for the 17 SDGs, in line with the 2030 Agenda and relevant EU
429 provisions; the strategy implementation and monitoring.

430 The foundation of the SD strategy was based on data and documents from minis-
431 tries and other central institutions, from European institutions and the UN, but also on
432 suggestions and recommendations recorded following public consultations with the
433 business environment and universities, research and development institutes,
434 non-governmental organizations and representative exponents of civil society, as well as
435 contributions of individual experts.

436 Regarding the SD strategic framework, the coordination instruments from the EU,
437 of which Romania is a part, should be mentioned.

438 Nowadays there are two different strategic guides in the EU: the 2030 Agenda with
439 17 SDGs, and the “European Green Deal (EGD)”. The EGD [29] is the EU strategy on
440 adaptation to climate and environmental-related challenges. This strategy has its own
441 structure, with overarching goals in four horizontal priorities, and appropriate policies
442 in nine areas. Following the adoption of the EDG, the EU strategic development plan
443 incorporated the “Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS)”. The EU development
444 plans also include a set of SDGs indicators aligned with the list of UN global indicators
445 for SD [30] (pp.74-76). For the integration of the two strategic guides, a methodology
446 was developed, aiming to assist the EU and national policy-makers to identify appropri-
447 ate SD policies [31]. This methodology also ensures the harmonization of the mecha-
448 nisms used in the EU for the implementation of development strategies in the member
449 countries, namely the European Semester and the EU Recovery Plan. The European Se-
450 mester is a mechanism in the EU governance framework that helps member states better
451 coordinate their economic and social policies [32]. During the European Semester, the
452 European Commission performs every year a detailed analysis of budgetary plan for
453 each country, and provides recommendations. Thereby the member states align their
454 budgetary and economic policies with the rules agreed at the EU level. Since 2020, the
455 EDG strategy has been integrated into the European strategy, and underpins “National

456 Plan for Recovery and Resilience (NPRR)" elaborated by each member state. The NPRR
457 represents an innovative EU tool introduced after the Covid crisis, and comprises reforms
458 and investments aiming to assure an inclusive and sustainable recovery. Comments
459 regarding the use of these tools in Romania within the NGS-SD processes are
460 presented below.

461 • The "Communication" process refers to the government actions to promote SD
462 values, policies and strategies and other SD issues at the country level.

463 Many actions to inform and promote the SD in Romania were carried out by the SD
464 Department after 2018, the most important of them being presented in the annual SD
465 Department reports [26], respectively in the government report on the implementation
466 of the SD objectives 2017-2021 [33] (pp.13-16). The reports include lists with meetings,
467 debates, workshops and publications to promote NSSDR and inform the general public
468 on the SD issues.

469 The communication is found also in the "National plan of action for the implemen-
470 tation of NSSDR" [34], in the priority direction 3. The plan provides the premises for
471 several actions to promote the concept of SD, namely: implementation of the annual
472 communication program; conducting sociological studies to measure perception and
473 impact at the institutional level and among the population; creating elements of visual
474 identity regarding SD in Romania. Also, actions for communication are foreseen in sup-
475 port of the SD strategy implementation, namely: organization of conferences, forum and
476 debates on SD, etc.

477 Communication is one of the factors through which governance directly contributes
478 to the development of SD culture at the national level. The development of the national
479 culture of sustainability or the cultural shift towards SD refers to the fact that SD guid-
480 ing values and principles must become an integral part of thinking and behavior pat-
481 terns of all, from political and governance bodies to organizations and citizen. Several
482 studies focus on the SD culture in different sectors (e.g. tourism and education), but
483 there is no global analysis that reflects Romania's progress from this perspective.

484 • Process of "NGS-SD Management" must be coordinated by the Prime Minister
485 and SD Department. Aspects related to the SD governance system are integrated in
486 SDG16 and SDG17 of NSSDR, but it is also distinctly approached in the plan of action
487 for the NSSDR implementation [34]. A picture of NGS-SD global architecture does not
488 exist, but there are management tools related to different components of the governance
489 for SD, which are discussed in the analysis of processes to which they refer.

490 • Regarding the process of managing SD regulations, it is to note that SD Depart-
491 ment made the first analysis on SD legislation in Romania in perspective of NSSDR im-
492 plementation within the project "Sustainable Romania" [35] (pp.57-79). The project pur-
493 sued the creation of databases with the relevant SD normative acts and their mapping on
494 the 17 SDGs of NSSDR. Some deficiencies were highlighted, e.g.: redundant regulations,
495 uneven coverage of the SDGs, etc. Important are the proposals formulated by the au-
496 thors, namely: the creation of a unique database with normative acts relevant to the
497 NSSDR; the development of a distinct module for the management of documents of
498 strategic importance; inclusion in all legislative documents of an explicit section de-
499 scribing the link and relevance to the NSSDR. To these aspects related to SD regulations
500 there are added the general requirements regarding the quality of the legislative process,
501 which are associated with QoG.

502 • Processes on the "policy coherence", "stakeholders engagement" and "partner-
503 ship management".

504 The "Policy coherence" was a major objective of the SD Department, which focused
505 on the creation/ consolidation of mechanisms to ensure policy coherence for SD and, in
506 particular, the alignment between the planning and budgeting of policies that support
507 the implementation of the SDGs. In this regard, in 2020 one OECD assessment was per-
508 formed in Romania [36] taking into account the guiding principles from the OECD
509 "Recommendation on Policy Coherence for SD" [37]. As the authors state, the report

510 “offers a preliminary analysis of the current strengths and bottlenecks to policy coher-
511 ence around the policy cycle and provides options that would spur a shift towards pub-
512 lic policies that systematically apply a SDGs’ perspective” [36] (p.3). These options were
513 important to the formulation of the national plan for the NSSDR implementation [34],
514 and also responded to some of the Country Specific Recommendations from the 2019 EU
515 semester report around strengthening decision-making predictability. A similar assess-
516 ment was performed in 2022 [38], which concludes that important progress has been
517 made to enhance policy coherence for SD in Romania, and outlines recommendations.
518 Another project focused on policy coherence was also developed in the same period,
519 with technical assistance from OECD experts, namely: “Strengthening Institutional
520 Mechanisms to deliver on the SDGs in Romania including linking policy planning and
521 budgeting to support their implementation” (2019-2020). The project ended with two
522 reports [39, 40], which present country’s strengths, gaps and possible ways for improv-
523 ing policy coherence for SD and budgeting the 2030 NSSDR objectives. There are also
524 several projects coordinated by the GSG, aiming to develop a reference framework for
525 policy coherence, as a component of good governance and implicitly to support the im-
526 plementation of the SDGs [33] (pp.11-12).

527 Building critical mass for public support through stakeholder engagement is an-
528 other key issue for achieving the 2030 Agenda. As stated in official publications, many
529 actions were developed in this regard in Romania. The first actions concentrate on the
530 legislative: the Romanian Parliament was the first member of the Inter-Parliamentary
531 Union to declare its support for the 2030 Agenda, in 2016. The lower house of the Par-
532 liament of Romania (the Chamber of Deputies) has a sub-committee on SD. But the ef-
533 fective implementation of the 2030 Agenda is not involving a single person or organiza-
534 tion. All ministries and institutions, all civil servants from central and local govern-
535 ments, decision makers, and members of Parliament should be part of the implementa-
536 tion process. As the SD reports states, starting from 2017 the SD Department organized a
537 series of events aimed at raising awareness of SDGs, national conferences with the par-
538 ticipation of the key stakeholders ranging from decision-makers and representatives of
539 public institutions, leading academics, representatives of research institutes, business
540 leaders, and NGOs [33] (pp.13-16), [41] (p.8).

541 There should be noted the tendency to connect all stakeholders at the SD Hub. The
542 SD Department has the responsibility to become a Hub of knowledge in the field of SD,
543 in the context of the digitization of PA in Romania, through the holistic integration of
544 data regarding policies, processes, activities and best practices. In this way, the SD De-
545 partment contributes directly to the increase of open governance in Romania, through
546 transparency and access to information of public interest, public consultation and the
547 increase of operational capacity of non-governmental organizations. Responsible for
548 developing the open governance in Romania is the SGS, and the actions on this sense are
549 defined as process of the QoG system.

550 Partnership management is another transversal process that refers to the actions
551 aiming to enforce the partnerships for SD by developing appropriate mechanisms.
552 Guidelines in this regard are established by the UN SDG Partnership Guidebook [42]
553 and also at EU level, by cooperation policy and specific mechanisms. The SD Depart-
554 ment made continuous efforts to increase the external visibility of the implementation
555 actions of the 2030 Agenda, to actively participate in processes at the global and regional
556 level, to strengthen Romania’s role as a regional hub in the field of SD. In this regard
557 there are many collaboration actions and participation in the events organized by: the
558 UN “High Level Political Forum (HLPF)” on SD; the OECD, in the field of policy coher-
559 ence for SD; EU Council Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, etc.
560 [43] (pp.6-9).

561 In the context of new technologies, Partnership management can be extended
562 throughout society, targeting training at the citizen level. In this sense, the SD Depart-

563 ment must continue the process of developing new specific tools regarding: training,
564 consultation, Crowdsourcing, Open Collaboration, Open Source, etc.

565 **2) Management cycle of planning-control-improvement processes**

566 This cycle materializes the management process of 2030 NSSDR implementation.
567 Aspects related to the NSSDR implementation were the subject of the project "Sustain-
568 able Romania" (2019-2021) [44], aiming to develop action plan; communication plan;
569 monitoring mechanism and coherent statistical database, etc.

570 • Planning refers to actions to achieve the 17 SDGs and consists in establishing the
571 portfolio of SD programs and projects, taking into account the alignment of the national
572 budget with SD objectives and national SD indicators. Planning, as well as monitoring of
573 results and assessment of progress in SD areas, is based on a set of national indicators of
574 SD. In 2022, in Romania a new set of SD indicators was launched, including 291 indica-
575 tors, of which 99 main and 192 additional indicators, harmonized with those established
576 at the UN and EU level. The new national SD indicator set was integrated into the online
577 open data platform "Aggregator Sustainable Romania" [45], which was launched in
578 November 2022. The platform automatically collects the national and European official
579 statistical data from the database of the National Institute of Statistics, and "Statistical
580 Office of the EU (Eurostat)".

581 Although two of the 17 SDGs refer to the national framework of governance for SD,
582 the system of governance is distinctly planned as it was already said. The national plan
583 for the NSSDR implementation [34] proposes actions to strengthen and extend the gov-
584 ernance framework for SD, in order to promote the SD principles and values and to im-
585 plement the NSSDR. The plan presents a package of 22 actions registered in four priority
586 directions of action: three directions with a transversal character facilitate the imple-
587 mentation of NSSDR, and one covers specific actions for monitoring the progress in
588 achieving the targets, based on the national indicators of SD. The deadline of the plan
589 implementation is until 2030.

590 The programs and projects related to SD are numerous, differing according to sev-
591 eral criteria: thematic area, level of coordination, source of financing, etc. The Directorate
592 for Policy Coordination and Priorities within the GSG has developed informatics tool for
593 strategic planning and monitoring the activities of each ministry and provides infor-
594 mation of the programs, objectives and targets, and allocated budget [40, 46]. The system
595 could be further developed to include a requirement to establish at the activity level if it
596 is linked to SDGs. This aspect is related to the SDGs funding, which is discussed at the
597 "Funding process".

598 • The "Control" process has multiple materializations, including the monitoring
599 and evaluation actions related to: achieving the SDGs; measurement of the national SD
600 indicators and evaluation of progress; assessment of governance system for SD, etc. Re-
601 sponsible of this process are the prim minister and SD Department.

602 The process of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the NSSDR is the
603 object of priority direction 4 of the action plan [34], which refers to: data collection
604 mechanisms on national SD indicators; creation and publication of the Scoreboard re-
605 garding the progress made by Romania in reaching the targets for 2030; the elaboration
606 and presentation to the Romanian Parliament of the annual reports on the state of
607 NSSDR implementation.

608 These planned objectives were met. As it is stated, the mechanism for collecting and
609 publishing data on national SD indicators [45] was lunched in 2022. According to its
610 statute, starting in 2017 the SD Department must prepare annual reports on the imple-
611 mentation of the 2030 NSSDR, which are presented to the Romanian Parliament. An in-
612 terim assessment report of sectoral policies, plans and action strategies in relation to the
613 NSSDR 2030 objectives was developed for the period May 2017- 2021 [33].

614 An important category of reports is the "Voluntary National Review (VNR)", based
615 on the information on mechanisms for national coordination and implementation of
616 Agenda 2030 and SDGs, collected through the UN HLPF on SD. Until now, two VNRs

617 have been developed in Romania, in 2018 [41] and 2023 [47]. Romania's progress in the
618 implementation of the SDGs is highlighted in UN reports, considering the SDGs Index
619 and Dashboards. The SDG Index is an assessment of each country's overall performance
620 on the 17 SDGs, giving equal weight to each goal. The score signifies the country's position
621 between the worst possible outcome (score 0) and the target (score 100). According
622 to the UN review [48] (p.2), in 2019 Romania was positioned on the 42nd of 162 countries,
623 considering the SDGs Index. It is to note that in 2018, Romania issued its VNR of
624 implementation of the SDGs, focusing on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17.

625 Other important SD reports are performed in the EU. As already said, starting from
626 2020 the progress made by the member states towards achieving the SDGs is integrated
627 into the European Semester. Romania is reporting on SDG global indicators to the Euro-
628 stat, which regularly monitors progress towards the SDGs in EU context. The last EU
629 report 2023 [49] provides an overview on the progress made towards the achievement of
630 the SDGs in the EU, and includes also a "country overview" chapter on the status and
631 progress of EU member states towards the SDGs. For each country the status of the 17
632 SDGs is depicted in a graph, taking into account two criteria: the relative position of
633 each SDG to the EU average, and the trend of movement (whether it has made progress
634 or moved away from the SDGs) based on the statistical data over the past five years. As
635 the overall picture of Romania shows [49] (p. 330), the country is progressing in 7 out of
636 17 SDGs, but only 3 of SDGs have a better status than the EU average.

637 Basic information on SD Romania's profile and review are also presented on the
638 "European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)" website [50].

639 The central problem in the efficient exercise of control in SD is the development of
640 appropriate measurement and control mechanisms, a key aspect in this regard being
641 digitalization. This issue is addressed distinctly, considering that the digital transfor-
642 mation is not limited to the process of control, but to the entire governance system, en-
643 suring the development of a more efficient, in real-time, transparent, and participatory
644 governance for SD.

645 • The "Improvement" process refers to the systematic actions aiming to improve
646 the results concerning the SDGs as well the SD governance processes and tools. The EU
647 mechanisms, namely the European Semester and Country Recommendations, are im-
648 portant in this regard. The tool currently used in the EU member states is the NPRR, in-
649 troduced after the Covid crisis, which comprises reforms and investments aiming to as-
650 sure an inclusive and sustainable recovery. The NPRR represents a good opportunity for
651 Romania's SD. The general objective of the NPRR [51] of Romania is the development of
652 Romania by carrying out essential programs and projects, which support resilience,
653 preparedness for crisis situations, adaptability and growth potential, through major re-
654 forms and key investments supported by European Funds. The Romania's NPRR is
655 structured on 15 components covering the next 6 pillars: green transition; digital trans-
656 formation; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; social and territorial cohesion;
657 health as well as economic, social and institutional resilience; policies for the new gener-
658 ation. The implementation of the proposed projects will generate improvements on most
659 SD objectives, given the specificity of the European recovery and resilience mechanism
660 through which they are funded and which has a strong component of greening, climate
661 change and digitalization.

662 In addition to the projects specific to ministries and other central public institutions,
663 the SD department's role in bringing changes at the global level is reflected in the NPRR
664 through three projects that it coordinates, aiming to: training of experts in SD; center of
665 excellence for PA in the field of SD, which will provide digital support for the fulfillment
666 of all the center's functions; one-stop-shop on SDG localization.

667 3) Operation processes

668 This process materializes in SD programs and projects. At the central level, the
669 global coordination of the programs and projects rests with the Prime Minister and GSG,
670 but the responsibility for SD related programs are delegated to the "Ministry of Invest-

671 ments and European Projects (MIEP)" and SD Department. Also, each ministry has re-
672 sponsibility for the sectoral SD programs and projects.

673 The development of SD programs and projects is based on NSSDR and NPRR,
674 which include targets for the SDGs and the axes of change related to sectoral issues and
675 the SD governance system. The initiatives can be made by central or local administrative
676 structures, but also other economic or non-governmental organizations can initiate the
677 development of SD projects. Most of the projects are carried out from public funds allo-
678 cated on the basis of specific methodologies established by program category.

679 For the NPRR projects, the coordinator is the MIEP, which publishes the launch of
680 the call for project applications and the requirements that project proposals must meet in
681 order to obtain funding [52]. Other important regulation refers to the management of SD
682 Program for the period 2021-2027 [53]. It is to note the recent improvement of this pro-
683 cess in order to ensure transparent, non-discriminatory and simplified access to external
684 funds non-refundable for the SD national program, in compliance with the provisions of
685 the Regulation (EU) 2021/1.060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of June
686 24, 2021 [54]. The fulfillment of all aspects related to SD stipulated in the financing re-
687 quest is constantly monitored by the Management Authorities throughout the develop-
688 ment of the projects, so as to ensure compliance with national and community legisla-
689 tion. On the government website there are presented five sets of data on the European
690 funds, including the list of SD contracted projects and the state of absorption of Europe-
691 an funds [55].

692 Other projects related to SD are carried out from the own funds of the regional,
693 municipal or communal administrative structures, respectively the funds of the organi-
694 zations, but a centralized situation does not exist.

695 4) Support processes

696 • The "Human Resource (HR)" process refers to the specific actions of HR man-
697 agement with effects on performance in SD [6]. The most important component of this
698 process is the educational one.

699 The 2030 Agenda includes one SDG dedicated to education, but the connections
700 with the other SDGs are major, the education, training and lifelong learning being key
701 factors in developing human competences and a culture of sustainability. Global guide-
702 lines in this regard are established by UNESCO, through publications related to educa-
703 tion for SD [56, 57]. In the EU, there are also reference documents on learning for SD
704 [58]. At the country level, Ministry of National Education has a major role in imple-
705 menting these guidelines, through the requirements regarding curriculum design and
706 SD related teaching and learning tools, and other legal provisions. Responsibilities in
707 developing HR competences and attitudes for SD lie also with each organization, central
708 and local government structures, national, international and regional agencies and asso-
709 ciations, etc. At each level, ensuring the necessary skills and stimulating the participa-
710 tion of HR in SD is carried out in specific ways, the levers of action being diverse, and
711 not limited to education.

712 The coordinator of HR process, as NGS-SD component, is the Prime Minister, and
713 respectively the SD Department. Their role consists in establishing national guidelines
714 for HR education for SD, as well as organizing training programs for people involved in
715 SD governance.

716 The action plan [34] includes (in the priority direction 2) specific objectives and ac-
717 tions for sustaining the implementation of NSSDR through formation programs for SD
718 in all education cycles, and respectively the training of SD experts.

719 As a result of the SD Department efforts, the position of expert in SD was included
720 in the nomenclature of jobs, Romania being the first country in the EU to have an occu-
721 pational standard of expert in SD (approved by the National Authority for Qualifica-
722 tions) [59]. Post-university courses are organized for the training of SD experts. There are
723 currently 150 experts employed by the government; the target established in the NPRR
724 is to train 2000 SD experts by 2026.

725 Other actions of SD Department to support the development of SD competences
726 and attitudes consist in organizing events and elaborating publications on SD, serving as
727 both education and communication tools [27].

728 Regarding SD education, there are currently no national mechanisms for assessing
729 progress on the inclusion of SD issues in the curriculum and extracurricular activities,
730 the competencies in SD of graduates, and the sustainability of educational institutions.

731 • **Funding process**

732 This process is about the financing of SD actions. Assuring financial resources is a
733 necessary condition for achieving the SDGs. It is estimated that around 4.5 to 6 trillion
734 euro is needed worldwide to achieve the SDGs. To reach the EU's 2030 targets, addition-
735 al investments worth around 180 billion euro are needed [60] (p.24). Estimated official
736 data regarding the financial effort for the NSSDR implementation does not exist.

737 Funding for NSSDR implementation comes from several sources: annual budgetary
738 allocations for SD Department; European funds allocated for NPRR, Multiannual Finan-
739 cial Framework 2021-2027, and direct funding from the European Commission; other
740 mechanisms (eg: SEE-Norway Funds, Swiss Funds, etc.) [34] (p.18). There is information
741 on the total allocation for the NPRR - 29.2 billion euro, and respectively on the total in-
742 dicative allocation for the Operational Program SD 2021-2027 - 4.04 billion euro, plus 1.2
743 billion euro of national co-financing [61].

744 The financing process is not limited to ensuring access to funds; it involves system-
745 atic actions to allocate resources to the SDGs and track results. The European Commis-
746 sion has set out a roadmap to promote the role of finance in achieving a performing
747 economy that achieves its environmental and social objectives [62]. The EU is bringing
748 about an extensive change to the financial system in order to put it on a sustainable path.
749 Suggestions for Romania on how an effective framework for SDG budgeting can be es-
750 tablished are presented in the OECD study "SDG Budgeting in Romania" [40] (p.15).
751 The budgeting mechanism accessible currently in Romania includes: application of an
752 SDG perspective to economic recovery (NPRR); application of an SDG perspective to
753 priority setting (through introducing a requirement for sectoral ministries to explain
754 how their budget support the achievement of the SDGs in their policy declarations pro-
755 vided as part of the Draft Budget); introduction of an SDG Budget Statement that sum-
756 marizes information from the policy declarations in a standalone document presented to
757 Parliament alongside the draft budget. There should be emphasized that the current
758 program budgeting methodology [46] does not refer to the SDGs.

759 The control of the use of funds is performed within each project. Funds attracted
760 are also reported by project category. But annual global reports on the situation of
761 SD-related funds in Romania do not exist.

762 • **SD information/ knowledge process**

763 This process defines the actions related to knowledge and information on SD at na-
764 tional level: data production, processing and publication. The process responsible is the
765 Prime Minister or can be the SD Department.

766 As it was shown at the control process, in 2022 the platform "Sustainable Romania"
767 [45] was launched, aiming to provide information on the progress made in the imple-
768 mentation of NSSDR, based on national SD indicators and on the opinion barometer re-
769 garding SD. The National Institute of Statistics is responsible for coordinating at the na-
770 tional level the activities of managing official statistical data, including those that moni-
771 tor progress in achieving the SDGs. Currently, the public data are at the level of 2020
772 year.

773 Information about the progress of the SDGs in Romania also exists on the websites
774 of European and UN institutions.

775 Relevant information can be found on the governance system for SD. The following
776 are published on the SD Department website [63]: Agenda 2030 (relevant own docu-
777 ments, but also external documents, e.g. UNESCO manual, OECD reports), etc.; news

(agreements and events); transparency (announcements, procedures, etc.); e-resources (strategic documents, reports, other publications). Information related to different aspects of the governance for SD also appears on the websites of GSG, MIEF and other ministries. As a summary analysis shows, the information about NGS-SD is incomplete, redundant and does not provide a clear picture of the governance system.

• Infrastructure/ computerization process

This process refers to the technologic base of actions on SD governance. The key issue in this domain is the digitalization, aspect mentioned in the previous comments on the NGS-SD processes. The distinct approach to computerization is justified considering EU policies regarding the digital transformation of society, as key enabler for reaching the EGD objectives [29, 64] (p.5). UN also supports digital government development taking in account the role the digital government play in building effective, inclusive and accountable institutions to support policy making and service delivery for the SDGs [65]. In Romania, digitalization was included in the strategies related to public administration and governance, but currently the computerization of governance is still on a low level, as official reports illustrate [66]. At present, responsible for this area is the “Romanian Digitalization Authority (RDA)” [67], subordinated to the Prime Minister.

The digital transformation of Romania coordinated by the RDA opens new horizons in the development of much more efficient, real-time, transparent, participatory SD governance. Harnessing the potential of digital transformation to achieve the SDGs is clearly a priority. The question is whether or not the computerization of governance for SD should be treated as a separate process. In both cases, the SD Department has an important role in planning actions and attracting the necessary resources to carry out infrastructure development projects for SD.

Concluding the case study, it can be said that, although the analysis is incomplete, it provides an overall picture of the state of the governance system for SD in Romania. Focusing on the processes of the governance system allows highlighting the relevant aspects on which the results depend, and the tools used. Table 1 summarizes the major achievements and main shortcomings associated to NGS-SD processes.

Table 1 Analysis of NGS-SD: Strengths and Weaknesses

Process	Strengths	Weaknesses
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern and efficient SD structure; • Long and medium term strategic planning, materialized in NSSDR; • Communication on SD based on plans and various mechanisms; • Planned actions for NGS-SD development; • Systematic actions to strengthen the principles related to policy coherence, stakeholder engagement and partnership management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a clear vision/ model of NGS-SD; • Deficient management system of SD regulations (laws, norms, procedures); • Lack of information on SD culture in Romania;
Planning, Control, Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National system of SD indicators; • Modern system for monitoring and reporting SDG progress; • Effective improvement mechanisms harmonized with those of the EU. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not updated on the "Sustainable Romania" Platform; • Deficient SD reporting mechanisms from lower levels of governance.
Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations and modern mechanisms for approval and coordination of SD projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficient, summary information regarding the management and global results of the SD projects.
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR: Actions for defining and the training of SD experts; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information regarding SD education in the national education system, actions and results;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding: Financing from various sources, attracting European funds; • Information/ Knowledge Online access to information on the website of the ministry and other organizations; • Infrastructure Concern for the computerization of databases and reporting systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficiencies in project planning/budgeting mechanisms; • Deficient information system: redundant and insufficient information, unsystematically presented on various websites; • Lack of a systematic approach of computerization for SD.
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It is to note that the case study is presented synthetically, the main purpose of the analysis being to illustrate the advantages of the process approach in SD governance and the need to develop a unitary model for NGS-SD to be applied worldwide.

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5. Conclusions

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Achieving the SDGs is a complex and universal demarche that involves actions all over the world, in every country. The national governance for SD must be adapted to the country particularity, but coordination at higher levels of governance is necessary to ensure the convergence of actions and results. There are many common guidelines and tools on national SD governance elaborated by governance bodies at global and regional level. But, as the review of the publications developed in the first part of the paper shows, there is no clear vision of the national SD governance framework. The authors of this paper come up with a proposal in this regard, namely a unitary model for NGS-SD based on the process approach. The process approach is a principle with wide application at the organizational level, but less common in governance systems.

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The benefits of approaching governance systems in terms of process are highlighted in the previous work of the authors, regarding the SD governance system at the UN level, from which we quote: "unitary conceptualization and better understanding of governance for SD at all levels; reinforcement of leadership in SD governance, which involves a strategic approach with long-term goals, and the development of a culture based on SD values at all levels; keeping under control the processes on which the performances depend, by appointing the process managers, who are responsible for the systematic realization of the process planning-control-improvement cycle; better controlling the framework documents and working & control tools, and their continuous changes; improving the management of data/ knowledge about SD governance, and access to the knowledge system" [6].

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It is worth noting the similarity of the two models associated with different levels of multi-level governance for SD, UN and national level, which incorporate common principles and rules.

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The case study carried out in Romania is structured on the components of the model for NGS-SD proposed by the authors. The analysis shows that in Romania many transformations were made based on the regulations launched at the higher levels of SD governance. The transformation process must continue, achieving success in implementing new governance practices being not an objective, but a "journey" that includes the continuous improvement of the expected performance and the tools used. The implementation of the NGS-SD model creates the premises for improvement actions to become more systematic, considering the performance of each process and the impact on global results.

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The model for NGS-SD proposed by the authors can be a starting point for teams of specialists and representatives of governance structures in SD at all levels, in the development of a standard model to be agreed, officially adopted and applied. The major problems in such an approach are: defining the general process architecture (process categories and list of processes for each category); generic description of processes (ob-

jectives, main actions, results and performance criteria); the framework methods and tools for realizing the processes should also be included in the model.

Some problems to be clarified are indicated in the paper (e.g. support processes related to policy coherence, stakeholder engagement, partnership management, computerization of SD governance, etc.), but there are certainly other question marks. Another issue that the process approach brings to light is the connection between SD governance and the QoG approach. Numerous publications state that QoG is imperative for the sustainability governance. The description of the two systems through processes better highlights the common elements and what distinguishes them.

As previously emphasized, a unique generic model for NGS-SD does not mean registration in patterns: each country will develop its governance system for SD taking into account the national specifics. The organizational framework, the specific way of working regulated by laws, methodologies, norms, etc. must be established at the national level, starting from the generic requirements and taking into account the country particularities. At the same time, when developing the governance instruments, harmonization with SD regulations developed at a higher level (UN, OECD, EU or other regional structures) must be taken into account.

The paper addresses to governance bodies and experts in SD governance, which directly contribute to the NGS-SD development and implementation of a generic model for NGS-SD. It is also useful to academics and researches, creating the framework for future studies on processes and ways of improving the governance systems for SD. The topic to be studied includes: defining the global configuration (process architecture); analyzes at the process level, taking into account the elements of the process, with an emphasis on regulations, specific tools and performance indicators; evaluating the maturity of processes and respectively which of them is most conductive to achieve the SDGs, etc. Last but not least, it is necessary to define models for SD governance and management at the sub-national level - community, respectively organization level, and to analyze their connection with the NGS-SD.

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