
Prioritisation and Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: An International and Metropolitan Approach

Submitted 23/05/25, 1st revision 05/06/25, 2nd revision 20/06/25, accepted 30/07/25

Marcin Budziński¹, Yurii Vitkovskyi², Anna Dewalska-Opitek³,
Ewa Palarczyk⁴, Piotr Oleśniewicz⁵, Justyna Juroszek⁶

Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the research is to conduct a comparative analysis of the approaches used for SDGs implementation at the regional level in metropolises. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted at the UN General Assembly under Resolution 70/1, cover a wide range of challenges faced by both developing and developed countries. Therefore, the identification and generalisation of national approaches to the implementation of SDGs at the regional level. This study includes a theoretical background of the topic, which focuses on sustainability in cities and urban and metropolitan areas. As well as a practical comparison of three metropolitan areas, two in the Poland metropolis GZM and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area, and one in Germany, the Ruhr Metropolitan Area. The empirical portion of the study was conducted on the basis of survey questions using a computer-assisted website interview method with three selected research samples totalling 2900 respondents.

Design/Methodology/Approach: In the course of the research, criteria for characterising the main goals of the SDGs during the implementation processes at the national and metropolitan levels were proposed, approaches to SDGs institutionalisation within the framework of national policy were compared, substantive priorities of central governments and regional authorities were compared, and specifics of SDGs localisation and implementation at the metropolitan level were revealed.

¹Ph.D., Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Academy of Silesia, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0002-6383-5369, e-mail: marcin.budzinski@akademiaslaska.pl;

²Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Academy of Silesia, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0001-5806-8671, e-mail: yurii.vitkovskyi@akademiaslaska.pl;

³Ph.D., Department of Organisational Relationship Management, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0002-1269-4738, a.dewalska-opitek@ue.katowice.pl;

⁴Msc Ewa Palarczyk, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Academy of Silesia, Poland, ORCID: 0009-0008-4399-5112, ewa.palarczyk@akademiaslaska.pl;

⁵Professor, Institute of Management and Quality Sciences, Humanitas University in Sosnowiec, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0002-0426-0630, piotr.olesniewicz@humanitas.edu.pl;

⁶Ph.D., Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Applied Arts, Academy of Silesia, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0002-7157-1180, e-mail: justyna.juroszek@akademiaslaska.pl;

Findings: *This is one of the first and largest surveys related to both the implementation and prioritisation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and labour market inclusiveness. This study presents a comparative approach and practical recommendations for metropolitan authorities and other stakeholders as well as directions for further in-depth research.*

Practical Implications: *As a result, differences in the formal institutional practices and structures used, the choice of priority SDGs for localisation and implementation, and the possibilities of resource support for managerial decisions made at the national and metropolitan levels were revealed. Since the countries under study are at the initial process stage of the localisation and implementation of the SDGs at the regional level, the conclusions obtained by the authors may be useful for improving the effectiveness of the work in this direction.*

JEL codes: *Q01, Q28.*

Keywords: *Sustainable, local development, development strategy.*

Paper type: *Research article.*

1. Introduction

The 2015 adoption by the United Nations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was a watershed moment for tackling some of the world's most intractable social, economic, and environmental problems. The 17 goals are aimed at eliminating the poverty, conserving the environment, and boosting prosperity for everyone by 2030.

Recognizing that cities serve as significant nodes of activity and demographic heterogeneity, this research examines the prioritization and operationalization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the urban environments of three large metropolitan regions: the Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia (Upper-Silesian – Zagłębie Metropolis) and the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot region in Poland, and the Ruhr Metropolitan Area in Germany.

The rationale for this research stems from the requirement to translate the global SDG agenda to local levels in an effective way. Metropolitan areas are likely to have unique problems and opportunities regarding sustainable development, and therefore, understanding how the different regions prioritize and implement these goals is essential to taking strategic responses to the next level.

This study aims to provide a comparative snapshot of SDG integration into these metropolitan areas, identifying best practices and probable areas of hindrance (Göçoğlu, Düzsöz, and Demirkol, 2025; Croese, Green, and Morgan, 2020).

For this purpose, a mixed-methods research approach was adopted. The empirical research consisted of a large-scale survey conducted in 2024 using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) technique.

The total sample consisted of 2,900 respondents, of which 1,274 participants were chosen from the Metropolis GZM, 824 from the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area, and 802 from the Ruhr metropolitan area. This sampling technique allowed for varied representation from public, private, and non-governmental backgrounds, thereby enhancing the richness of the data collected.

In addition to survey research, the research also adopted an extensive literature review in order to situate empirical findings in theoretical frameworks. The two methods permit a balanced understanding of qualitative and quantitative facets of SDG implementation (Berrone, Rousseau, Ricart, Brito, and Giuliadori, 2023). The survey instrument adopted validated measures in order to quantify primary constructs including stakeholders' awareness of the SDGs, the effectiveness of local policies, and different sectors' engagement with sustainable development initiatives.

The novelty and value of this work lie in its comparative nature, bringing to light the distinctive processes through which different metropolitan areas prioritize and operationalize the SDGs. With attention to both what worked and what did not work in the implementation process, the study not only advances theoretical discussion of urban sustainability but also provides practical guidance for policymakers.

Theoretically, this research contributes to understanding local sustainability initiatives through the investigation of how global targets are embedded in local conditions. It reveals how urban governments can render strategies flexible to accommodate stakeholders, marshal resources, and foster community engagement in the achievement of the SDGs.

Practically, the conclusions drawn from this study aim to inform local governments, civil society organizations, and businesses on how to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

By establishing successful models and possible sources of peril in SDG implementation, this study gives metropolitan governments actionable insight to enhance policy and practices facilitating inclusive and sustainable urban growth.

This study seeks to fill critical knowledge gaps in SDG prioritization and achievement in urban areas. As cities undergo unprecedented urban growth and environmental pressure, the findings of this project are intended to enhance the capacity of cities to become sustainable and resilient systems towards achieving a more equitable development agenda worldwide (Tremblay, Gowsy, Riffon, Boucher, Dubé, and Villeneuve, 2021).

2. Theoretical Background, Methods and Materials

The main feature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is that it can be applied universally while taking into account regional, national and local specificities; opportunities; levels of development; and specific challenges. The implementation of the SDGs at the regional level is a tool for implementing the sustainable development agenda, which is based on an integrated approach and requires the implementation of the SDGs while considering their close interconnection. Hence, it is an integrated approach that ensures the unity and coherence of all aspects of sustainable development (The World Bank, Urban Development, 2025; Thalassinou et al., 2023).

A study of country experience in the implementation of the SDGs at the regional level and a study of the labelling of activities and results of programs and projects aimed at achieving the SDGs suggest that even countries that are leaders in the implementation of the SDGs take different positions.

For a number of countries, work on the implementation of the SDGs at the national level dates back to 1997, and for others, it dates back to the early 2000s. Significant differences are also observed in the labelling of activities and results of strategic programs and projects aimed at achieving the SDGs ranging from complete ignorance of this process to the localisation of all 17 SDGs.

The reasons for these differences are largely related to the peculiarities of managing the implementation process, i.e., the existing models of governmental organisation (Mora, Bolici, and Deakin, 2017). However, these questions have not yet become the subject of active scientific discussion. To date, the greatest attention has been given to the institutionalisation of the SDGs at the national level and the assessment of the effectiveness of the management of specific projects (Glasmeier and Christopherson, 2015).

The issues of modelling sustainable development are a popular topic in the works of foreign authors, developed by scientists from abroad such as Gibbons and Overman, (2012), Badi and Baltaghi (2023), Marelli, Parisi, and Signorelli (2019), and others.

To fill the existing content gaps, a study of the experiences of Poland and Germany was conducted with respect to the implementation of the SDGs at the regional level.

The main purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the approaches used to implement the SDGs at the metropolitan level in Poland and Germany. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were completed:

- criteria were proposed to characterise the model for state participation in the implementation of the SDGs at the regional, although they are being formed at the national level;

- approaches were identified with respect to the institutionalisation of the SDGs within the framework of the national and regional policies of Poland and Germany;
- substantive priorities of activities for the localisation and implementation of the SDGs were analysed;
- mechanisms for financing the decisions made were characterised.

The results obtained can be used by governmental, regional and metropolitan agencies in the development of recommendations for achieving the SDGs, as well as by managers and specialists of companies in the development of development strategies.

Based on the method of comparative analysis, an assessment of the various tools used for state regulation was carried out on the basis of the assessment of the sustainability of the development of regions in accordance with the principles of the sustainable development of territories as determined by international organisations and the scientific community, when considering the SDGs.

Given the best practices for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs at the regional level while following the recommendations of the OECD, UN-Habitat and international ISO standards in the field of sustainable development of territories, leading research groups and organisations have adapted national indicators for the assessment of regions and ensured the comparability of indicators for all regions. With respect to the use of indicators, their values can be evaluated and the data on which the evaluations are based are published and updated on a regular basis).

Four types of sources served as the information base for this study:

- voluntary national reviews (VNRs) and country strategy papers;
- documents that form the regulatory framework for the implementation of the SDGs and documents characterising strategic national priorities in this area;
- strategic plans and programs of regional and local governments;
- a computer assisted website interview (CAWI) method administered a survey questionnaire to a representative research sample of 2900 respondents.

The concept of sustainable development is considered not only a tool for improving management efficiency but also a tool for embedding sustainable development in the international agenda to achieve the SDGs in Poland and Germany.

Currently, several directions for the implementation of the principles of sustainable development at the regional level can be conventionally distinguished, such as considering the principles of sustainable development in the strategic planning at the regional level; monitoring and reporting on contributions to the SDGs; involving businesses and other stakeholders in the sustainable development agenda; and

expanding cooperation in this area with major banks and development institutions. Important targets for promoting the sustainable development agenda for metropolitan areas include the improvement of the quality of life of the population and the increase in the level of competitiveness regarding the achievement of SDGs in metropolitan areas.

To assess the achievement of SDGs at the regional level, the key goals are the availability of high-quality affordable assessment and monitoring tools and the creation of effective formats for interacting with all stakeholders, especially businesses. Moreover, the quality of governance is assessed on the basis of the degree to which the sustainable development agenda is reflected in the program documents for the development of metropolitan areas.

The sustainable development goals have long been one of the most relevant research topics. For example, a group of scientists from China conducted a bibliometric analysis of all articles in English written over the past 40 years through the SCI/SSCI Web of Science database tagged "SDGs".

The final search identified 1402 documents in English in the main WOS database from 1981-2020. Moreover, the number of articles on this topic increased rapidly from 49 in 2014 to 147 in 2020 (Cheng, Liu, Wang, Cui, and Li, 2021).

The idea of assessing countries based on the criteria-based approach was proposed in 1992 in Agenda 21. In 1995, for the first time, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development identified a group of indicators for assessing sustainable development, which, in turn, served as the impetus for the development of country indicators (Biermann, Kanie, and Kim, 2017).

The literature on the problems associated with study models of governmental organisations in the implementation of the SDGs at the regional level are divided into three groups.

The first group consists of works devoted to the problematic issues of assessing the implementation of the SDGs at the regional level. Stafford-Smith, Griggs, and Gaffney (2017) focus on the existing interrelations in three areas, namely, large enterprises, the public sector and civil society, and also on the indirect coincidence of interests of low-, middle- and high-income countries. Based on the results of the study, recommendations were developed to improve the identified interrelations at both the global and national levels (Stafford-Smith, Griggs, and Gaffney 2017).

Bierman believes that digital technologies lead to universalisation and globalisation. However, they are expected to adapt to the national and local contexts while taking into consideration the level of development and the existing national and local sustainable development policies (Biermann, 2022).

Moreover, in the publication Sustainable Development Goal Diagnostics: The Case of the Arab Republic of Egypt, the authors offer an analytical framework to help countries prioritise the SDGs and assess the availability of data for their monitoring. The proposed analytical framework is tested using data from the implementation of the SDGs in Egypt, which analyses progress in the SDGs since 2000 and predicts the achievement of the SDGs by 2030 (Hanan, El-Maghrabi, and Osorio, 2018).

The results of the study published in the international journal Sustainable Development indicate that, owing to the complexity of estimating the Sustainable Development Index, a method was developed to measure sustainable development (SD) via regression analysis using data available in different global reports.

As part of the study, global reports were selected for each aspect of sustainable development, i.e., social, economic and environmental, and data from the 2016 reports were used to construct the regression models. The reliability of the results obtained for the 2016 and 2018 data was approximately 95% and 90%, respectively, and it was also concluded that the most important aspect of sustainable development is the social aspect (Browne, Dzebo, Iacobuta, Onbargi, Shawoo, Dombrowsky, Fridahl, Gottenhuber, and Persson, 2023).

The study, published in the Evaluation and Analysis of Poverty-Stricken Counties under the Framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Hunan Province, China, also used regression analysis to build poverty assessment models for the population of Huan Province, China. The authors used multiple linear models to analyse various socioeconomic factors. The results of the study revealed that the coefficient of determination and the relative error of the model, which includes all the factors, are 0.76% and 19.12%, respectively (Wang, Wang, Huang, Li, and Lin, 2021).

The second group of sources is the sustainability ratings and rankings, which are recognised as tools for monitoring and stakeholder interactions in the implementation of the SDGs. The third group of sources is the works devoted to the comparative analysis of the implementation of the SDGs at the regional level in Poland and Germany. The scientific community is currently only forming approaches to understand this problem.

Thus, the what are the characteristics of the governmental organisation model used in the implementation of the SDGs at the regional level in Poland and Germany remain unclear. In other words, are the characteristics considered a special case of one of the established models, or does the concept being introduced have a pronounced specificity in both Poland and Germany?

To answer this question, we conducted a comparative analysis of the metropolitan areas in relation to the implementation of the SDGs based on the developed criteria. The choice of criteria expands the existing approaches to the analysis of the

problems being studied by comparing formal institutional practices and structures, comparing substantive priorities of state policy, comparing the centres of management decision-making and comparing the centres of concentration of financial resources.

Data were collected from the Ariadna panel from 2023-2024, and all respondents were adults who were 18-years-old or older. The study followed the ethical requirements of anonymity and voluntary participation. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before inclusion. The costs of conducting this research were co-financed by two sources.

The Metropolis GZM, under the Metropolitan Science and Education Support Fund program from 2022-2024, funded the project "Challenges and recommendations for the management of social inclusion in the context of the internationalisation of metropolises – a comparative analysis of GZM with metropolitan areas in Poland and abroad" (2024), "Challenges of Public Space and Social Cohesion of the Metropolis GZM in Poland - an interdisciplinary approach" (2023), and the Academy of Silesia owned by Budziński M., Vitkovskiy Y., *et al.* (Budziński, Vitkovskiy, Ostenda, Szostak, and Palarczyk, 2025).

3. Research Methods

The study was conducted with a representative research sample of 2900 respondents. It includes 1274 respondents from 41 cities in the GZM metropolis of southern Poland in the central part of the Silesian Voivodship, 824 respondents from the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area (GGS) (Obszar Metropolitalny Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot) in northern Poland, and 802 respondents in the Ruhr Area in western Germany.

GGS research has focused on the following main cities: Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot, Pruszcz Gdański, Reda, Rumnia, and Tczew. In the Ruhr Metropolitan Area, the main cities selected for research were Bochum, Bottrop, Dortmund, Duisburg, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Hagen, Hamm, Herne, Mülheim a der Ruhr, and Oberhausen. Importantly, not all answers to all the questions pertain to all 2900 respondents. Each item is always mentioned in detail by respondents, who answer each question.

The reason is that the questions were presented to employees in companies or organisations in each metropolis, i.e., a group that comprises only a portion of the researched adult population, which also consists of people who are retired, unemployed, students and adult students.

Budziński *et al.* (2025). Additionally, in the 2023 GZM metropolis survey, the data were collected from 3301 representative respondents, all of whom were inhabitants of the GZM metropolis.

4. Main Results

The respondents were asked about UN SDGs prioritisation. The table below presents the results of the comparative approach to the importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals from an individual perspective.

Table 1. *SDGs prioritisation – Individual perspective in metropolises.*

The most important SDGs from the quality of life perspective in your city	Total respondents (%)			
	Metropolis GZM 2023	Metropolis GZM 2024	GGS Metropolitan Area 2024	Ruhr Metropolitan Area 2024
good health and well-being	21,9	15,1	16,3	19,0
decent work and economic growth	12,9	16,0	14,1	7,4
no poverty	11,6	12,2	8,0	16,2
zero hunger	9,5	9,3	8,0	5,9
clean water and sanitation	5,5	4,9	4,9	4,4
peace, justice and strong institutions	5,4	4,9	4,4	7,4
quality education	4,7	5,4	7,5	8,2
affordable and clean energy	4,5	3,8	5,0	4,4
climate action	4,3	5,3	5,2	6,2
industry, innovation and infrastructure	4,0	5,6	5,2	3,0
sustainable cities and communities	3,9	4,5	5,7	5,2
responsible consumption and production	3,6	2,9	3,5	1,9
gender equality	3,0	3,5	4,6	4,0
reduced inequality	2,5	4,0	3,4	4,7
partnership for the goals	1,1	1,3	1,9	1,1
life on land	0,9	0,7	0,8	0,9
life below water	0,7	0,6	1,5	0,2

Source: *Authors' elaboration of the research results.*

In 2023, “good health and well-being” was the top priority in Ruhr (19%), the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolis (16.3%), as well as in the GZM metropolis (21,9%). However, in 2024, this goal was replaced by “decent work and economic growth” as the top priority in the GZM metropolis (16% versus 15,1%). The goal is defined as “ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages” (United Nations, 2025). This latter goal and the 2030 targets were affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic (United Nations, 2024).

There is a significant difference in the perception of the goal of “decent work and economic growth” between the GZM metropolis (16%) and the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolis (14,1%), which is approximately twice that of the Ruhr metropolis (7,4%). This goal is defined as “promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable

economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. This goal has also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is also a considerable difference regarding the third top priority. The “no poverty” goal understood as to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” was selected by more than 10% of the respondents in the Ruhr metropolis (16,2%) and the GZM metropolis (12,2%), whereas in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolis, it was identified as the most important goal for only 8% of the respondents.

Three other goals were identified as priorities in all of the metropolises, receiving more than 5% of the respondents’ answers in the 2024 survey. These include “zero hunger”, interpreted as “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”; “quality education”, explained as “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”; and “climate action”, defined as “taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”. Eight of the seventeen UN SDGs scored 5% or less in all metropolises, and three of the eight received less than 2% with respect to degree of prioritisation.

The respondents were also asked about the positive (mostly) changes they observed in their cities over the past three years with respect to specific UN SDGs. The table below presents the results of UN SDGs priorities and the observed the biggest positive changes in their cities.

The presented results reveal a significant difference between the priorities and the observed positive changes in all metropolises. In particular, for the first four priorities, i.e., “good health and well-being”, “decent work and economic growth”, “no poverty”, and “zero hunger”, the observed positive effects are less than 10% with the exception of the Ruhr metropolis at 11,1% of the observed changes within “good health and well-being”. This, however, is still significantly less than the prioritisation of the goal at 19%.

Table 2. *SDGs prioritisation – Individual perspective in metropolises in comparison to the (mostly) positive changes they observed in their cities over the past three years*

Sustainable Development Goals	Total respondents (%)					
	Metropolis GZM 2024		Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area 2024		Ruhr Metropolitan Area 2024	
	SDG priority	The biggest change	SDG priority	The biggest change	SDG priority	The biggest change
good health and well-being	15,1	9,0	16,3	9,6	19,0	11,1

decent work and economic growth	16,0	9,0	14,1	8,3	7,4	3,1
no poverty	12,2	5,0	8,0	4,4	16,2	8,4
zero hunger	9,3	6,5	8,0	6,3	5,9	3,7
clean water and sanitation	4,9	8,5	4,9	7,6	4,4	5,4
peace, justice and strong institutions	4,9	2,9	4,4	2,7	7,4	3,0
quality education	5,4	7,8	7,5	7,4	8,2	9,5
affordable and clean energy	3,8	5,1	5,0	5,5	4,4	7,9
climate action	5,3	7,8	5,2	6,1	6,2	8,7
industry, innovation and infrastructure	5,6	16,6	5,2	12,4	3,0	8,1
sustainable cities and communities	4,5	7,1	5,7	6,8	5,2	6,7
responsible consumption and production	2,9	2,0	3,5	2,4	1,9	3,9
gender equality	3,5	5,7	4,6	8,0	4,0	10,7
reduced inequality	4,0	2,0	3,4	7,4	4,7	4,6
partnership for the goals	1,3	2,7	1,9	2,4	1,1	2,7
life on land	0,7	1,1	0,8	1,8	0,9	1,6
life below water	0,6	1,3	1,5	1,0	0,2	0,9

Source: Authors' elaboration of the research results.

The most remarkable positive changes observed are within the “industry, innovation and infrastructure” in the GZM metropolis at 16,6% and in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolis at 12,4%. The goal is to “build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation”.

In contrast, in the Ruhr metropolis, only 8.1% of the respondents identified this goal because positive changes had been observed. In all three metropolises, the “industry, innovation and infrastructure” goal was chosen as the most important goal from the perspective of quality of life, with a maximum of 5.6%. In the Ruhr metropolis, the most remarkable positive changes in the past three years were observed within the “good health and well-being” goal (11,1%), followed closely by “gender equality” (10,7%).

The three least important UN SDGs for quality of life of the respondents (i.e., “partnership for the goals”, “life on land” and “life below water”) are also the least common regarding positive changes, presenting values of less than 3% for both criteria and all metropolises.

The positive changes observed by inhabitants are similar in all metropolises, especially the metropolises of the GZM and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot. Differences greater than 2 pp between the two metropolises are observed in only three of the UN SDGs. Differences greater than 2 pp between the Ruhr metropolis and the Polish

metropolises are observed in seven of the UN SDGs. Notably, the greatest difference between the lowest and the highest values did not exceed 9pp.

This study examines whether the priorities for organisations with respect to the UN SDGs correspond with the observed positive changes in cities and whether they correspond to individual priorities. The respondents who declared themselves are presented in Table 3 from the comparative perspective of UN SDGs priorities in companies and organisations among employees in metropolitan areas in total as follows:

- In the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area (GGS), 305 out of 824 respondents (37%) were employees who answered the following question:
- In the GZM metropolis (GZM), 347 out of 1274 respondents (27.2%) were employees who answered the following question:

Table 3. *SDGs prioritisation – Organisational perspective in metropolises.*

UN SDGs organisation prioritisation	Respondents (%)							
	Metropolis GZM				Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolis			
	All responde nts	Private sector	Public sector	Self employed	All responde nts	Private sector	Public sector	Self- employed
good health and well-being	13,5	10,9	16,8	16,7	15,1	16,6	13,6	11,1
decent work and economic growth	14,4	13,5	15,3	16,7	13,4	16,0	9,7	11,1
no poverty	6,3	6,8	4,6	12,5	7,5	4,0	12,6	11,1
zero hunger	6,9	6,3	7,6	8,3	3,3	2,9	3,9	3,7
clean water and sanitation	5,2	4,7	6,1	4,2	6,2	5,1	6,8	11,1
peace, justice and strong institutions	1,4	1,0	2,3	0,0	2,3	2,3	1,0	7,4
quality education	8,1	6,3	10,7	8,3	13,1	11,4	15,5	14,8
affordable and clean energy	6,6	6,3	7,6	4,2	7,2	7,4	6,8	7,4
climate action	4,9	5,7	4,6	0,0	2,3	1,1	3,9	3,7
industry, innovation and infrastructure	7,8	10,9	3,8	4,2	5,6	5,1	6,8	3,7
sustainable cities and communities	3,5	3,6	3,8	0,0	2,0	1,7	1,9	3,7
responsible consumption and production	3,2	4,7	0,8	4,2	3,6	4,6	2,9	0,0
gender equality	10,1	10,9	9,2	8,3	8,9	9,1	7,8	11,1
reduced inequality	4,6	5,7	3,1	4,2	5,9	8,6	2,9	0,0
partnership for the goals	1,7	1,6	1,5	4,2	2,6	4,0	1,0	0,0
life on land	0,9	0,5	1,5	0,0	0,3	0,0	1,0	0,0
life below water	0,9	0,5	0,8	4,2	0,7	0,0	1,9	0,0

Source: *Authors' elaboration of the research results.*

The research revealed that the most important UN SDG for the companies and organisations in the metropolises of the GZM and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot was “good health and well-being” (Table 3: 13.5% and 15.1%, respectively).

Similarly, this was also indicated as the most important SDG from the perspective of the inhabitants of all three metropolises. “Decent work and economic growth” was identified as the second most important goal for companies and organisations, specifically, 14.4% in the GZM metropolis and 13.4% in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolis, and it was also associated with the inhabitants’ perspective in the GZM metropolis (16%) and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolis (14.1%) (Table 2).

Companies and organisations’ third priority of the UN SDGs in the GZM metropolis and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolis was “gender equality” (10.1% and 8.9%, respectively). In contrast, this goal was one of the five least important goals from the perspective of the inhabitants (Table 2). According to the survey, the companies and organisations indicated “quality education” and “industry, innovation and infrastructure” as important goals, a finding that corresponds with the most observed positive changes in the metropolises.

5. Conclusions

This study unfolds the intricate nature and diversity inherent in the prioritization and implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the metropolitan scale in two member states of the European Union—Poland and Germany. Adopting a comparative framework drawing on the metropolitan areas of GZM, Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, and Ruhr, the study offers penetrating insights into how individual attitudes, organizational routines, and government policies interact—with or without convergence or divergence—with localizing the SDGs.

Most striking is the apparent discrepancy between citizens' perceptions of what they see as most important for their quality of life to improve and what they have noticed as positive developments in their urban lives in recent years. Whereas aspirations such as "Good Health and Well-being," "Decent Work and Economic Growth," and "No Poverty" consistently appear as top concerns of citizens, tangible advancements witnessed in these dimensions are few. This disconnection embodies the underlying challenge of the SDG agenda: aligning policy outputs and popular expectations on substantive, measurable terms.

Notably, the study illustrates the way in which organizational agendas—irrespective of whether they are private or public sector organizations—may both mirror and differ from public mood. For example, companies from both the GZM and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan areas emphasized the importance of "Good Health and Well-being" and "Decent Work and Economic Growth," while additionally underlining the importance of "Gender Equality" and "Quality Education."

This indicates some social awareness among corporations that metropolitan authorities could additionally exploit, particularly in the creation of partnerships and inter-sectoral collaboration that aligns institutional objectives with societal demands. The study also refers to the necessity of good monitoring and evaluation tools.

Both in Poland and Germany, while tools to measure specific dimensions of sustainable development exist, systemic mechanisms for SDG factors to be included in regional strategic planning are still lacking. The SDGs are currently not formally or consistently incorporated into metropolitan programmatic and legislative documents.

The lack of official integration limits both the scope and intensity of sustainable development initiatives at the regional level (Bandari, Moallemi, Lester, Downie, and Bryan, 2022). Institutionally, the evidence reveals convergent national governance and financing models.

Poland and Germany differ in how they organize governmental decision-making, allocate financial resources, and prioritize policy agendas for sustainable development. Yet despite these structural divergences, each faces the same obstacles: fragmented institutional responsibilities, irregular funding, and an ongoing need to more effectively engage private sector actors and civil society with SDG implementation.

The research concludes that stakeholder engagement, particularly at the urban level, is a driver of SDG progress. City governments are well positioned to serve as brokers between national policy and local realities. However, this can be accomplished effectively by not just coordinating vertically with state apparatuses but also horizontally with citizens, NGOs, businesses, and universities.

Participatory governance, through which citizens help set priorities and monitor progress, could help to increase transparency and accountability and, over time, legitimacy and trust.

A second key observation is the malleability of the SDG framework. While standardized globally, its application and interpretation at the regional scale is very much dependent on the socio-economic context. For example, the Ruhr metropolis placed greater emphasis on targets for "No Poverty" and "Gender Equality," possibly reflecting local labour market dynamics and demographic trends. Such specificity highlights the need for adaptive localization strategies that are attuned to actual urban realities rather than generic national templates.

Lastly, the study reaffirms the understanding that SDGs are not tick-box exercises to be fulfilled—instead, they are guiding principles requiring integrated planning, continual measurement, and cross-sector alignment (Fox and Macleod, 2023). In practical terms, regional policymakers must move from rhetorical commitment to

feasible frameworks integrating SDGs into daily governance. Tactical leveraging of public data, co-financing mechanisms, and private sector incentives for collaboration could all serve towards more coherent and results-driven implementation (Dewalska–Opitek, 2014).

As the SDGs reach their midpoint to 2030, this research provides timely confirmation that activation at the local level and exchange across nations are essential in ensuring progress. The metropolitan level, where global agendas meet local realities, is not just a site of implementation but also a possible driver of sustainable transformation.

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- A fairly extensive array of studies has focused on the specifics of the localisation and implementation of the SDGs in different countries, including the specifics of the role of the state in this process. To analyse the role of the state, criteria such as the level of management, at which key political decisions are made; the scale of the national goals to which sustainable development contributes; and the type of financial sources required to implement the SDGs. Within the framework of this study, the list of criteria for the analysis of governmental organization was expanded. The proposed set of criteria made it possible to compare the implementation processes of SDGs in Poland and Germany, while considering formal institutional practices and structures, substantive priorities of public policy, data on management decision-making centres and centres of concentration of financial resources.
- Poland and Germany have different approaches to policymaking aimed at financing sustainable development. Nevertheless, the countries under study are looking for additional incentives to direct financial resources to sustainable development that correlate with the most acute problems in the fields of social security, environmental pollution, and the creation of efficient industries.
- An important condition for the effective management of sustainable development at the regional level is the availability of assessment and monitoring tools. In Poland and Germany, the developed tools are aimed at assessing certain aspects of sustainable development.
- The implementation of SDGs at the regional level has not yet been carried out. Notably, at present, the countries under study do not regulate the procedures for considering the SDGs in strategic planning documents developed at the regional level or for labelling the activities and results of programs and projects aimed at achieving the SDGs.

References:

- Baltagi, B.H. 2023. The two-way Hausman and Taylor estimator. *Economics Letters*, no. 228, pp. 111-159. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2023.111159>.
- Bandari, R., Moallemi, E.A., Lester, R.E., Downie, D., Bryan, B.A. 2022. Prioritising Sustainable Development Goals, characterising interactions, and identifying solutions for local sustainability. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 127, 325-336.
- Berrone, P., Rousseau, H.E., Ricart, J.E., Brito, E., Giuliadori, A. 2023. How can research contribute to the implementation of sustainable development goals? An interpretive review of SDG literature in management. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 25(2), 318-339.
- Biermann, F. 2022. Earth system governance World politics in the post-environmental age. *Routledge handbook of Global Environmental Politics*, 2nd edition, pp. 283-294. URL: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003008873>.
- Biermann, F., Kanie, N., Kim, R.E. 2017. Global governance by goal-setting: the novel approach of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, no. 26-27, pp. 26-31. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.01.010>.
- Browne, K., Dzebo, A., Iacobuta, G., Onbargi, A.F., Shawoo, Z., Dombrowsky, I., Fridahl, M., Gottenhuber, S., Persson, Å. 2023. How does policy coherence shape effectiveness and inequality. Implications for sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda: *SustainableDevelopment*, no. 31(5), pp. 3161-3174. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2598>.
- Budziński, M., Vitkovskiy, Y., Ostenda, A., Szostak, A., Palarczyk, E. 2025. Sustainable development in urban and metropolitan areas – international comparative approach. In: Jabłoński, A., Jabłoński, M., (editors), *Effects of Digital and Climate Changes in the Business Models of Companies*, CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Cheng, Y., Liu, H., Wang, S., Cui, X., Li, Q. 2021. Global Action on SDGs: Policy Review and Outlook in a Post-Pandemic Era: Review. *Sustainability*, no. 13, pp. 1-25. URL: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116461>.
- Croese, S., Green, C., Morgan, G. 2020. Localizing the sustainable development goals through the lens of urban resilience: Lessons and learnings from 100 resilient cities and cape town. *Sustainability*, 12(2), 550.
- Dewalska-Opitek, A. 2014. Smart city concept—the citizens' perspective. In: *Telematics-Support for Transport: 14th International Conference on Transport Systems Telematics, TST 2014, Katowice/Kraków/Ustroń, Poland, October 22-25, 2014. Selected Papers 14* (pp. 331-340). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Fox, S., Macleod, A. 2023. Localizing the SDGs in cities: reflections from an action research project in Bristol, UK. *Urban Geography*, 44(3), 517-537.
- Gibbons, S., Overman, H.G. 2012. Mostly pointless spatial econometrics? *Journal of regional Science*, no. 52(2), pp. 172-191.
- Glasmeier, A., Christopherson, S. 2015. Thinking about smart cities. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, no. 8(1), pp. 3-12. URL: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8111122>.
- Göçoğlu, V., Düzşöz, E., Demirkol, A. 2025. Challenges and Priorities in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: A Multi-Scaled Global Analysis. *Sustainable Development*, pp. 1-13. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.3466>.
- Hanan, A.S., El-Maghrabi, M., Osorio, R. 2018. Sustainable Development Goal Diagnostics: The Case of the Arab Republic of Egypt. *World Bank Working Paper*, pp. 5-8.

- Marelli, E.P., Parisi, M.L., Signorelli, M. 2019. Economic convergence in the EU and Eurozone. *Journal of Economic Studies*, no. 46(7), pp. 1332-1344.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JES-03-2019-0139>.
- Mora, L., Bolici, R., Deakin, M. 2017. The First Two Decades of Smart-City Research: A Bibliometric Analysis. *Journal of Urban Technology*, no. 24(1), pp. 3-27.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10630732.2017.1285123>.
- Stafford-Smith, M., Griggs, D., Gaffney, O. 2017. Integration: the key to implementing the Sustainable Development Goal. *Sustainability Science*, no. 19, pp. 911-919.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-016-0383-3>.
- Thalassinos, E., Kadłubek, M., Norena-Chavez, D. 2023. Theoretical essence of organisational resilience in management. In: *Digital Transformation, Strategic Resilience, Cyber Security and Risk Management* (pp. 133-145). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- The World Bank. Urban Development. 2025. Environmental and Social Policies.
URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-policies>.
- Tremblay, D., Gowsy, S., Riffon, O., Boucher, J.F., Dubé, S., Villeneuve, C. 2021. A systemic approach for sustainability implementation planning at the local level by SDG target prioritization: the case of Quebec City. *Sustainability*, 13(5), 2520.
- United Nations. 2025. Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
URL: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.
- United Nations 2024. The Sustainable Development Goals Report.
URL: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>.
- Wang, Y., Wang, M., Huang, B., Li, S., Lin, Y. 2021. Evaluation and Analysis of Poverty-Stricken Counties under the Framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Hunan Province, China. *Remote Sensing*, 13(23), pp. 1-23.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs13234778>.