

---

## Cross-Border Cooperation in the Vienna Bratislava-Region - A Contribution to Sustainable Regional Development?

LUKAS LENGAUER

*Institute for Regional Development and Environment  
Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration*

Nordbergstraße 15

1090 Vienna

Austria

e-mail: lukas.lengauer@wu-wien.ac.at

### Abstract

Since the fall of the iron curtain the Vienna-Bratislava region has experienced dramatic changes. Now it represents a dynamic region trying to exploit its economic potential that results from its geopolitical location at the border between the old and the new EU member states. To foster cross-border development various initiatives and projects at the bilateral and the multilateral level have been created. Among these INTERREG projects play a crucial role. The INTERREG programme and most of the individual projects claim not only to enhance economic development, but also to promote *sustainable* regional development, without however, further specifying this concept.

In this paper the author focuses on INTERREG projects and critically evaluates their contribution to sustainable regional development. First, different concepts of sustainable development will be discussed relying on environmental economics literature. These approaches will be confronted with regional perspectives on sustainability discussed in the fields of human geography and regional studies. The confrontation of the two approaches will result in a synthetic framework, which allows for the assessment of individual projects. Subsequently, selected INTERREG projects will be analysed and evaluated. This analysis will combine a quantitative analysis based on a survey and qualitative interviews with project managers.

**Key words:** sustainable regional development, INTERREG, Vienna-Bratislava region

## 1. Introduction

This article deals with the theoretical concept of sustainable regional development and its application in INTERREG projects in the Vienna-Bratislava region. The results presented in this paper rely on empirical data gathered in the context of the research project NOVA, which is funded by the Jubilee Fund of the Austrian National Bank (OENB- Jubiläumsfonds Projekt-Nummer 12041).

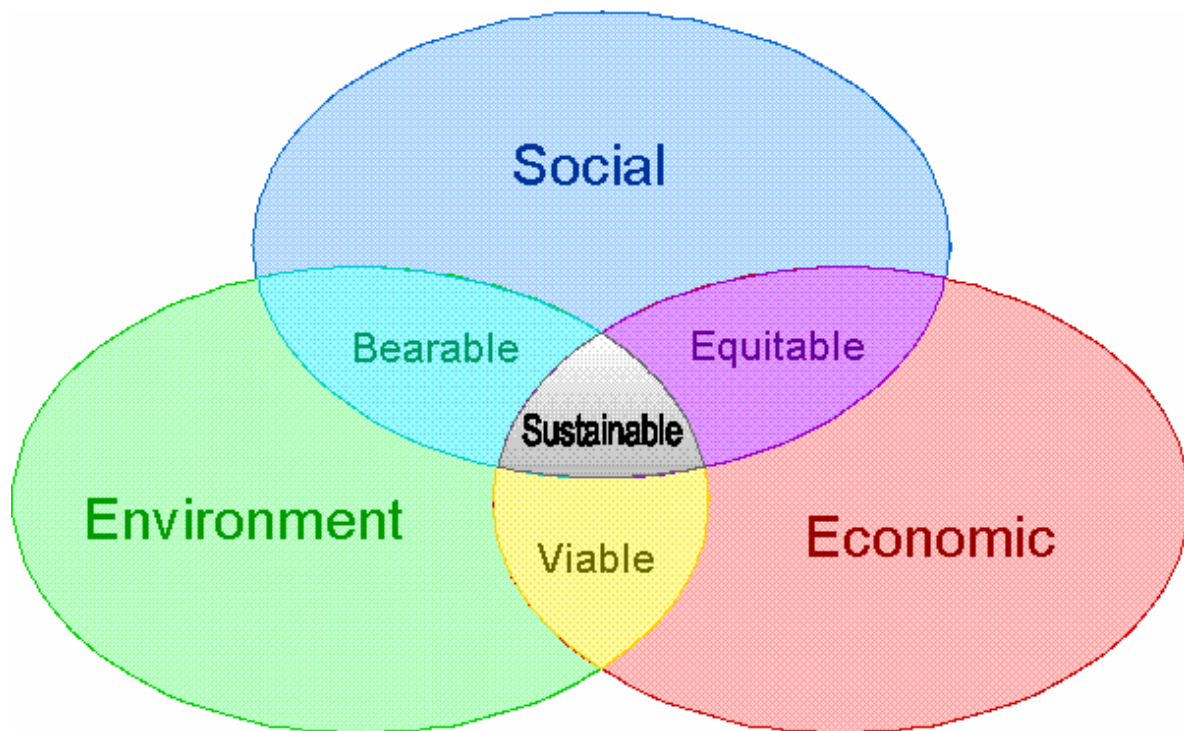
The main research questions that will be answered in this paper concern (1) the theoretical foundations of sustainable regional development and (2) the assessment of concrete INTERREG projects and their contribution to sustainable regional development. In the first section different approaches to sustainable development in regional science and environmental economics will be discussed. This allows for the formulation of a set of theses on sustainable regional development, which will represent a pragmatic framework for the empirical investigation. Before the presentation of the empirical results, the thematic foci of the INTERREG III A programme- Austria-Slovakia for the period 2000-2006 will be analysed. Moreover, the author will give a short description of the region in focus, followed by the assessment of individual INTERREG projects based on the statistical analysis of a survey and ten qualitative interviews with project managers. At the end of the paper conclusions will be drawn.

## 2. Sustainable Development

As a result of the Brundtland report [1] and the Rio summit of the United Nations [2] the concept of sustainable development gained broad recognition by the international public. Since then, the concept of sustainable development has influenced environmental and regional policies in many countries and has been integrated in a variety of policies of the European Union.

Sustainable development, however, is not a clear-cut concept. It goes back to the discussion in German forestry in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. “Nachhaltigkeit” the German term for - sustainable development refers to a form of timber industry, which only extracts timber at a rate that does not endanger the long term reproduction of forests, thus preserving their economic potential as well as their qualities as unique eco-systems. Subsequently, the concept of sustainability was embraced by other scientific disciplines like biology, ecology, economics, sociology and regional science. Sustainability today has assumed great importance as a normative and political concept. As such it comprises a broad variety of strategies that aim at harmonic social, economic and ecological development to protect the eco-system and its productive capacity for future generations. Sustainable development is situated at the confluence of three preoccupations- economic, social and environmental- and goes beyond the concerns of equitable, bearable, and viable development strategies.

Figure 1: Dimensions of sustainable development



Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development)

As the concept of sustainable development has been studied and advanced in many diverse fields, the term has become quite ambiguous. For the purpose of this paper- the assessment of individual INTERREG projects- a pragmatic and operational definition is needed. To come to such a definition, in the next section we will combine different approaches from the disciplines of environmental economics and other social and regional sciences.

## 2.1. Strong and Weak Sustainability

Sustainability is fundamentally tied to the reduction of the total consumption of material inputs to the production process towards a level that does not compromise the supply of these inputs or respective substitutes for future generations. In this context strong and weak approaches to sustainability have emerged, which assess the possibility of substituting raw materials for man-made capital quite differently.

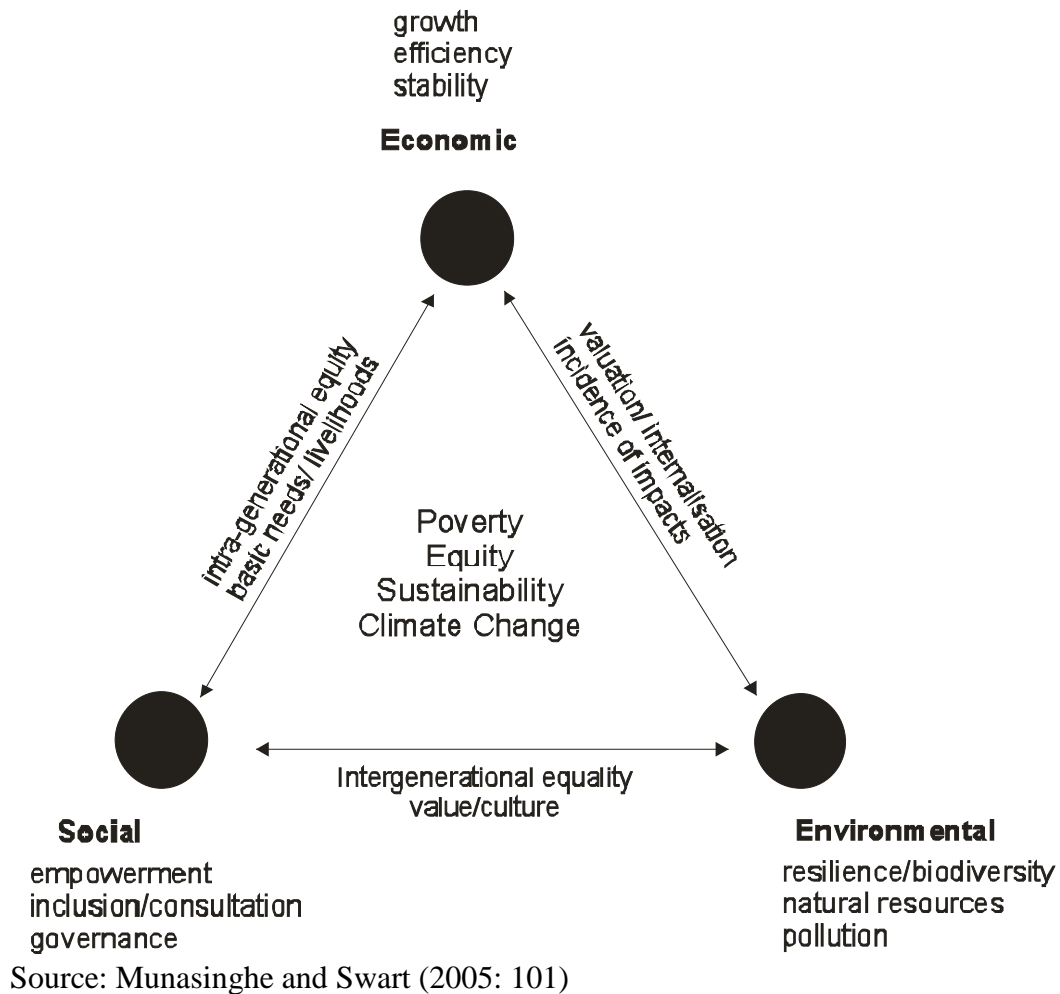
The concept of strong sustainability goes back to the “two capitals” model by Herman Daly [3, 4]. Daly assumes that the economy represents a subsystem of a broader system, the eco-system which is biophysically limited and non growing. Between the eco-system and the economic subsystem, there is a constant flow of matter and energy, called *throughput*. The economic subsystem extracts raw materials from the eco-system and returns pollutants and waste. Daly distinguishes between two types of capital: natural capital and man-made capital. Natural capital is limited and represents the biophysical basis for production. It is complementary to man made capital and can neither be reproduced nor fully substituted, as natural capital is needed to produce man-made capital. Thus the growth of the economic subsystem is strictly limited by the size of the eco-system, by its limited supply of raw

materials and its limited carrying capacity concerning pollution. Therefore development strategies relying on a strong approach to sustainability aim at the determination of safe limits of extraction and pollution. At these limits the stock of natural capital shall be maintained. This shall be guaranteed by depletion quota and the development of renewable sources of energy and renewable material inputs. Strong sustainability in its last consequence calls for a farewell to the paradigm of economic growth. Daly suggests, that in order to achieve a sustainable mode of development, we will have to aim at a non growing economy, which he calls a “steady-state economy”. In a steady state economy throughput shall be limited and safe stocks of natural resources maintained. Not growth but the quality of life of all citizens shall be maximised. Although the vision of a steady-state economy seems to be rather utopic these days, Daly’s work has strongly influenced and shaped the discipline of ecological economics and the environmentalist movement.

Weak approaches to sustainable development have less ambitious goals than Herman Daly and other ecological economists. They rest on the assumption, that man made capital, natural capital, human capital and social capital are substitutes [5] and that all four forms of capital can be valorised in monetary terms. Weak sustainability thus refers to a situation in which, the total capital stock is maintained irrespective of the share of each of the four forms of capital. Ecological degradation thus can be balanced by rising welfare. The basis of the practical implementation of weakly sustainable development is the internalisation of external costs, which allows for the assessment of environmental costs caused by economic growth. The key economic policy scholars of the weak sustainability approach call for is *qualitative growth*. Qualitative growth shall be achieved (among others) by substituting non renewable sources of energy for renewable ones and by the dematerialization of production processes, as well as by longer product life cycles.

Munasinghes’s model of sustainable development [6] belongs to the weak approaches to sustainability. It distinguishes between three dimensions of sustainability: the social dimension, the economic dimension and the environmental dimension. Sustainable development strategies need to consider and balance all three spheres (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Elements of sustainable development



To progress towards sustainability, Munasinghe and Swart call for a new transdisciplinary science “sustainomics” that relies on knowledge from different disciplines as well as from actors outside the scientific community, politicians, NGOs etc. This approach is less rigid than Herman Daly’s, as it tries to develop small partial and pragmatic solutions that can work as steps towards sustainability. Sustainomics is not a grand, all encompassing utopia like the “steady state economy” but a “trans-disciplinary, integrative, comprehensive, balanced, heuristic and practical metaframework for making development more sustainable” (ibid.: 101).

## 2.2. Substantive and procedural goals

Feichtinger and Pregernig [7] not only distinguish between social, environmental and economic factors that need to be balanced in order to achieve sustainable development. They argue that there are two different types of goals sustainability strategies need to satisfy: substantive and procedural goals. Substantive goals refer to clear cut objectives that can be specified in quantitative terms e.g. emission targets, inflation targets, targets concerning social cohesion. Procedural goals refer to the processes of democratic agenda setting and decision making. Feichtinger and Pregernig argue that a basic requirement for regional sustainable development is the collective deliberation about the substantive goals a regional community wants to achieve. Substantive goals should be defined in a participatory process including regional stakeholders and a broader public of citizens, who want get involved. In this concept the procedural goals of empowerment, inclusion and participatory decision making are prerequisites for sustainable development. Top down determination of substantive sustainability goals by bureaucrats and external scientific experts, thus is not to be understood as good practice of regional sustainable development. In practice, the concrete balance between substantive and procedural goals varies from case to case. Pregernig and Feichtinger show that even a comprehensive approach that gives due importance to both types of goals does not guarantee good results, because regional sustainability initiatives are strongly dependent on the support of regional governments. In their comparison of LA 21 processes in Helsingborg (Sweden) and Vienna they found out, that even the broad and integrative LA 21 process in Vienna could not work effectively, because it had been marginalized by central political actors.

## 2.3. Spatial Approaches to Sustainability

In the last two decades regional scientists and geographers have been trying to make use of the concept of sustainability [see 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. These contributions helped to advance the approach of the Rio Declaration (1992), giving due importance to the question of how to operationalize the concept of sustainability at the regional level. Lately a differentiated approach to sustainable regional development has been proposed by Segert and Zierke [16] which takes into account different socioeconomic and environmental potentials and impediments to sustainability. This approach argues that different types of regions need to develop specific sustainability strategies. Zuideau [17] moreover shows that highly industrialized regions might not be able to achieve sustainability within their own borders, whereas other regions, e.g. rural regions might even show a sustainability surplus that is consumed by people from within and outside the region. He proposes compensatory payments (sustainability transfers) from regions which exhibit sustainability deficits to regions with sustainability surpluses. Martinez-Alier [18, 19] deals with a similar topic: the uneven contribution of industrialized and developing countries to global pollution. He argues that the accumulated pollution caused by the industrialized North represents an ecological debt the North has assumed from the South and which it has to pay back in monetary terms. Thus regional scientists, have convincingly shown, that sustainability strategies need to be fine tuned according to the weaknesses and potentials of individual regions and need to consider their effects on other regions.

### 3. Sustainable regional development in practice

In recent years sustainable regional development (SRD) has emerged as a distinctive approach in the field of regional policy, characterized by “distinctive features, timescales, tools and techniques, all of which contribute to an interesting European diversity” [20]. SRD aims at strategies that balance economic, social and environmental factors, thus reducing the traditional predominance of the economic dimension in regional policy. SRD as a strategy has largely emerged out of environmental disciplines (ibd.), much less from economics and other social sciences.

Empirical evidence concerning the integration of all three dimensions of SRD in concrete development plans or projects is ambiguous. In many cases it seems that competition between the three dimensions and not their integration prevails. For the Nordic countries Clement [21] surveyed structural funds programmes and INTERREG 3a and 3b programmes. He argues that in all Nordic countries environmental topics have been integrated in European regional development programmes, whereas sustainable development integration still poses a big challenge. Cross cutting, horizontal programmes that aim at the integration of social, environmental and economic concerns are still rare and often half hearted. For Scotland Macleod [22] paints a more positive picture. His results, however, only concern structural funds programmes in the period from 2000 to 2006; INTERREG programmes were not included in the evaluation. Sustainable development as a holistic concept incorporating interlinked economic, social and environmental components was well integrated in the Scottish structural funds programmes. Even at the level of individual projects the Scottish authorities expected tangible contributions to each dimension of sustainable development. Nevertheless, there are some negative experiences in the Scottish case as well: some stakeholders argue that regional sustainable development is too ambiguous a concept to be operationally valuable. Others seem to pay lip service to sustainable development in project applications and do not live up to their promises during the execution of the projects. The example of North Western England shows another problematic feature of *really existing* regional sustainable development. Since the 1970s this region has developed quite a successful regional approach to environmental and later social issues. With the implementation of regional sustainability strategies the old economic cornerstones of regional policy have returned and have made the implementation socially and environmentally progressive projects more difficult. This can be seen in the guidelines for regional projects. The first three questions on the checklist for SDR projects in North Western England, which was issued in the year 2000, are: “Will the initiative improve the competitiveness of business? Will the initiative promote the growth potential of business sectors? Will the initiative develop an exploit the region’s knowledge base?” [23]. The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), which had been responsible for the evaluation of British regional sustainability initiatives also points at the economic bias in concrete regional projects, and makes clear that this situation is not compatible with sustainability in the strict sense.

*“We see a society and a Government whose primary objective is still the achievement of economic growth as conventionally understood and measured, with as much social justice and environmental protection as can be reconciled with this central goal. We envisage a society whose primary goal should be the well-being of society itself and of the planetary resources and environment that sustains us all, with economic objectives shaped to support that central goal rather than the other way around” [24]*

Bertrand and Larrue [25] show that in France experiences with regional sustainable development initiatives since 2000 have been quite different from the English example. In France the concept of regional sustainability has been merged with traditional regional conservationist and environmental policies. It has been less strongly integrated in regional economic or social policies. Therefore, the environmental dimension dominates concrete projects that claim to be integrative sustainable projects. Especially social aspects including the topics of participation and governance are only represented at a very basic level. However, even some actors from the field of environmental policy are hesitant to embrace the concept of sustainability because they fear more rigorous environmentalist positions might be diluted by the broader notion of sustainable development. Since EDF, the monopolistic French energy supplier and one of the biggest producer of atomic energy in the world has used the notion of sustainability as a marketing tool, a large group of environmentalists has even started to radically oppose the use of term. Instead of sustainability many environmentalist groups in France use the concept of “downscaling” (*décroissance*), which aims at a non growing economy, similar to Daly’s “steady state economy”.

#### **4. Working definition of sustainable regional development**

This short literature overview demonstrates that there are a number of competing definitions of sustainable development in academia and in the broader political discussion. This situation makes it problematic to use the term as an analytical category. To overcome this difficulty, we propose a pragmatic definition of regional sustainability that allows for assessing individual INTERREG projects. Our working definition rests on four interconnected theses:

1. Regional sustainable development strategies need to explicitly combine aspects of economic, ecological and social development.
2. Strategies of regional sustainability must be developed in a participatory process including not only regional stakeholders but also the regional population. Trade offs between the individual dimensions of sustainability need to be balanced in a democratic and participatory process.
3. Different regions have different sustainability resources and deficits. These different starting conditions need to be considered in sustainability strategies.
4. Regional sustainability strategies need to consider their effects on supra regional spaces and must not endanger the sustainability potentials of other regions.

#### **5. The Vienna-Bratislava region and the structure of the INTERREG programme**

The regional focus of the NOVA project was the entire cooperation space of the Austrian and Slovak INTERREG 3A programme. This region includes Vienna, parts of Lower Austria, Northern Burgenland, Bratislava and parts of western Slovakia.



Figure 3: Cooperation Area- INTERREG III A Austria-Slovakia



Source: <http://www.at-sk.net/sk/sub-1-de/seite-1.htm>

INTERREG is a community initiative, which supports cross-border cooperation among regions of EU member states. In the NOVA project we analysed the INTERREG 3A programme, which operated in the period from 2000-2006. In the new programme period (2007-2013) INTERREG was upgraded and renamed. Former INTERREG activities now are supported by the European structural funds under the objective “European Territorial Cooperation“. INTERREG supports cooperation in different sectoral fields (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Overview of the programme structure

P1 Cross-border Economic Co- operation	P2 Accessibility	P3 Cross-border Organisational Structures and Networks	P4 Human Resources	P5 Sustainable Spatial and Environmental Development	P6 Special Support for Border Region
P1/M1: Development and Support of Business Sites and Business Service Infrastructure in Border Areas	P2/M1: Improvement of Cross- border Transport and Telecommunication Infrastructure	P3/M1 Support of Cross- border Organisational Structures and Development of Networks	P4/M1 Development of Regional Labour Markets within the Context of EU Enlargement	P5/M1 Resource Management, Technical Infrastructure and Renewable Energy Supply	P6/M1 Special Support for Border Region
P1/M2: Cross-border Co- operation of Enterprises (SMEs) and Counselling and Support for Cross-border Business Activities	P2/M2 Transport Organisation, Planning and Logistics	P3/M2 Micro-projects including People- to-People Actions and Small Pilots	P4/M2 Development of Co-operation and Infrastructure in the Fields of Education, Training and Science	P5/M2 Measures for Nature and Environmental Protection including National and Nature Parks	
P1/M3 Tourism and Leisure				P5/M3: Cross-border Spatial Development in Rural and Urban Areas	
Technical Assistance					

Source: <http://www.at-sk.net/sk/sub-1-en/seite-3.htm>

The total budget of the programme including European funds and Austrian national co-financing for the whole programme period was 68 million €. The biggest share of the budget was assigned to the priorities P1 “Cross-border Economic Cooperation”, P2 “Accessibility”, and P5 “Sustainable Spatial and Environmental Development”, of which each priority was assigned about 15 million €. These three priorities obtained about 70% of the total budget (see: [http://www.at-sk.net/data/SK\\_umsetzungsstand\\_monitoring.pdf](http://www.at-sk.net/data/SK_umsetzungsstand_monitoring.pdf))

Due to the design of the programme INTERREG funds are allocated to member states. Thus, individual projects in the Austria-Slovakia programme are funded by European funds and Austrian co-financing. This implies that the responsibility for the projects is in Austrian hands and the project budget has to be exclusively spent in Austria. Of course, there is a Slovak-Austrian INTERREG programme as well, funded by European and Slovak sources and focussed on the Slovak side of the border region. In practice, there is a clear division of roles between a co-financing senior partner and a non-financing junior partner in each project. This situation creates asymmetries in terms of responsibility and decision making power; however, the mode of cooperation within the individual projects is quite diverse. In the NOVA project we focused exclusively on the Austria-Slovak INTERREG programme; this means that all individual projects that have been assessed are based in Austria and are managed by Austrian senior partners.

## 6. Methodology

In the empirical part of the NOVA project we applied both, quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the contribution of INTERREG projects to sustainable regional development in the Vienna-Bratislava region. In a first step we developed a web based questionnaire and invited 76 INTERREG project managers to fill it in. The questionnaire consisted of three major sections: section one referred to general information on the project, such as the duration of the project, the budget, the members involved etc. The second section was aimed at obtaining information about the project managers' assessment of regional strengths and weaknesses and the potentials of cross-border cooperation. Finally, section three dealt with the concrete project objectives and the mode of cross-border cooperation. The response rate was very good: we received 25 answers of project managers, which represents a response rate of 32,9%.

Based on the results of the survey we selected ten INTERREG projects for qualitative interviews in order to dig deeper and find out more about practical experiences of project managers. The use of qualitative methods was essential, in order to find out if project managers just pay lip service to the objectives of sustainable development or if they take real measures to make regional development more sustainable in the sense of our working definition.

## 7. Results

At the beginning of our questionnaire we asked INTERREG project managers to rank economic, ecological and social challenges the Vienna-Bratislava region faces today. Table 1 gives an overview of the most important challenges. It shows that INTERREG project managers regard economic, social and environmental challenges as important, although the latter are mentioned slightly less often. In the economic sphere enhanced cross-border cooperation as well as a general global orientation of the region are seen as crucial for future regional development. The concentration of endogenous potential (cross border tourism, regional niche strategies and trademarks) is also seen as important, however less so than the strengthening of regional competitiveness on global markets. Concerning the social challenges, the reduction of unemployment and the protection and enhancement of a broad economic, social and cultural infrastructure are regarded as most important. Social challenges with a clear cross-border dimension do not score high in our survey, only the implementation of Slovak, Czech and Hungarian in Austrian curricula is regarded as very important. Some ecological challenges are also of great importance: all project managers in the survey demand the upgrading of public transport within the region. Moreover, renewable energy production, the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the fight against urban sprawl are high on the agenda.

Table 1: Challenges for the Vienna-Bratislava region

<b>Economic challenges</b>	<b>very important, important (%)</b>
Cross-border tourism	80
Regional niche strategies	84
Regional competitiveness	92
Upgrading of railway links	96
Cross-border business cooperation	100
<b>Ecological challenges</b>	
Bicycle paths	64
Organic agriculture	64
Reserves and national parks	64
Urban sprawl	72
Reduction CO2 emissions	72
Renewable energy production	76
Public transport	100
<b>Social challenges</b>	
Slovak, Czech, Hungarian in school curricula	76
Poverty reduction	76
Educational facilities	80
Childcare facilities	84
Economic, social and cultural infrastructure	88
Reduction of unemployment	92

Concerning the obstacles to regional development (Table 2), on the one hand a strong focus on the poor cross-border traffic infrastructure and small number of border crossings can be shown. On the other language problems are seen as equally big obstacles to regional development. Moreover structural problems like the lack of innovative potential in the region, the unemployment rate and the large wage differential between Austria and Slovakia are regarded as important impediments to regional development. For about 46% of the respondents pollution is seen as severe problem as well.

Table 2: Obstacles to regional development

	<b>very big, big (%)</b>
Wage differential Austria-Slovakia	56
Big companies are missing	36
Backwash effects caused by the cities Vienna and Bratislava	20
Pollution	45,8
Border crossings are missing	76
Language Problems	88
Unemployment	45,8
Emigration	32
High share of commuters	20
Lacking innovative potential	64
Lacking transport links	84
Global competition	12,5

Regarding the potentials of cross-border cooperation, INTERREG project managers show a remarkable bias towards economic and socio-cultural factors (Table 3). 76,2% believe that cross border-cooperation can reduce xenophobic prejudices, more than 60% expect positive

impacts on the regional economy and on the cultural life within the region. However, only a minority of INTERREG project managers (22,2%) regard cross-border cooperation as beneficial to the solution of environmental problems. On the one hand, this is quite surprising as many environmental problems in the Vienna Bratislava region, as growing traffic or the protection of fluvial habitat long the rivers Danube and March/Morava, are clearly cross-border issues. On the other, project managers might be well aware that many policies that affect the regional environment such as traffic planning or energy production- the use of nuclear energy is a major topic in Austria's relation to its neighbouring countries- are mostly dealt with at the national level and can hardly be influenced in the region.

Table 3: Potentials of cross border cooperation

<b>Fields</b>	<b>approval (%)</b>
Reduction of prejudices	76,2
Cultural stimulation	63,2
Economic stimulation	61,9
Traffic solutions	27,8
Solution of enviromental problems	22,2

Table 4 summarizes the most important targets that are pursuit in actual INTERREG projects in the region. Generally, economic targets rank higher than ecological and social targets. 44% of all INTERREG projects in the sample try to enhance the regions competitiveness on global markets, 36% aim at cross-border business cooperation and the support of cross border tourism. Social aspects are less intensively covered by INTERREG projects. The most important ones, which about a third of the projects aim at are: “the reduction of unemployment”, “the upgrading of a broad social, cultural and economic infrastructure”, and “the establishment of cross border institutions”. Ecological targets seem to be given less importance by project managers, although two individual targets, the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the upgrading of bicycle paths are important issues for almost a third of the sampled projects. Strengthening renewable energy production and upgrading of public transport play only minor roles, although both were considered crucial challenges for regional development (see Table1).

Table 4: Targets of INTERREG projects

<b>Economic targets</b>	<b>followed by (%)</b>
Reduction of external dependency	28
Cross-border business cooperation	36
Global competitiveness	44
Cross-border tourism	36
<b>Ecological targets</b>	
Public transport	24
Renewable energy production	28
Reduction of CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	32
Upgrading of bicycle paths	32
<b>Social targets</b>	
Economic, Social, Cultural infrastructure	32
Upgrading of educational infrastructure	32
Cross-Border institutions	32
Reduction of unemployment	32

In order to find out if individual projects can be considered as sustainable projects, it is necessary to make sure, if they pursue economic, ecological and social targets at the same time. Otherwise they have to be considered as conventional sectoral projects. To find out, if economic, ecological and social targets are combined in a sustainable fashion, a correlation analysis was executed. The results show (Table 5), that there are some projects, which follow a holistic, sustainable approach. Tourism projects are positively correlated with the project targets “creation of regional trade marks”, “upgrading of bicycle paths”, “upgrading of public transport”, and the “establishment of cross border institutions”. If projects aim at the creation of regional trademarks, they usually also take other economic (“support of cross-border tourism”), ecological (“upgrading of bike paths”, “reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions”), and social (“establishment of cross border institution”) targets into account. The same holds true for projects that aim at the upgrading of bicycle paths and public transport. Both targets are also positively correlated with the target “enhancing participation”, which represent a fundamental procedural sustainability goal. Beside these project targets, which correlate with targets of all three sustainability dimensions, there are a number of targets that correlate with targets of only one other dimension. There are projects that aim at economic and ecological goals, others that combine ecological and social aspects and again others that operate at the intersection of the economic and the social dimensions. What is striking is the fact, that there is no correlation between economic project goals and participation.

Table 5: Correlation of project targets

		Economic Targets			Ecological Targets				Social Targets		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Economic T.	1	1		,781++	,802++			,590+	,541+		
	2		1							,557+	
	3			1	,554+	,617+			,525+		
Ecological T.	4				1			,731++	,667++		,567+
	5					1	,911++	n.s.		,559+	
	6						1	n.s.		,61+	
Social T.	7							1	,687++	,552+	,578+
	8								1		,837++
	9									1	
	10										1

+ Correlation is significant at the 0,05 level, ++ Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level

Legend		
1	Cross-border Tourism	Economic Targets
2	Cross-border business cooperation	
3	Creation of regional trademarks	
4	Upgrading of bicycle paths	Ecological Targets
5	Reduction of CO2 emissions	
6	Strengthening of renewable energy production	
7	Upgrading of public transport	Social Targets
8	Establishment of cross border institutions	
9	Broad economic, social and cultural infrastructure	
10	Participation	

To find out more about the concrete work in individual INTERREG projects we selected ten projects for in depth qualitative interviews. All six priorities (see Figure 6) of the INTERREG programme were represented.

Generally, the results of the quantitative analysis were confirmed by the interviews. All projects showed very little participatory elements. The broad public was not engaged in the development of the projects. Few project managers tried to disseminate the results in open fora or via the regional media. Others tried to involve the regional business community and the chamber of commerce. A distinct group of projects was closely tied to the public sector. These projects were developed inside the bureaucracies and had a clear focus on planning, infrastructure and transport logistics and were conducted exclusively by the technocratic elite.

Concerning the cooperation with the Slovak partners, the structural asymmetries of the INTERREG programme had strong implications on the operation of the projects. As all the projects were developed and lead by Austrian partners and as all the budget had to be spent in Austria, cross-border cooperation in many cases was not very intense. In some cases the Slovak partners were included at the very end of the project development phase, simply because it was obligatory to have a Slovak partner on board to receive funding. The Slovak partners had little possibility to shape the projects according to their interests and had little chance to influence decisions. Some public sector projects would have been executed anyway sooner or later, as they had already been developed years ago within Austrian bureaucracies. INTERREG was seen as an additional financial source, which allowed for an earlier project start. In projects which were lead by NGOs, however, consensual decision making was a major aim and was implemented right from the start.

Surprisingly, most of the project managers had very little knowledge about other INTERREG projects in the region. Some projects were linked informally to the CENTROPE project, which represents a large initiative to foster cross border networks in eastern Austria, western Hungary, western Slovakia and southern Moravia. The majority of the project managers, however, had no contact to other projects. Some of them criticised the INTERREG programme administration for the lack of an exchange platform, which would allow for cooperation and knowledge transfer among project managers. The lack of knowledge of other projects corresponds to a lack of knowledge of the region. The projects seem to operate in their sectoral fields, but are not linked to a coherent vision of regional development and cross-border cooperation in the Vienna-Bratislava region. Thus, most of the INTERREG projects seem to be rather sectoral than regional projects.

Concerning the projects' contribution to sustainable regional development, the overall assessment is negative. On the one hand, some projects explicitly referred to the three dimension of sustainability: e.g. projects that aimed at the support of renewable energy production also aimed at the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, supported regional value added production, and helped to substitute imports to reduce external dependency. The majority of the projects, however, had a rather conventional economic bias and directly supported regional entrepreneurs to cross the borders and enlarge their market areas. In the interviews, the term “sustainability” was frequently used by project managers, but mostly understood in a very narrow way. The concept of sustainability was reduced to the aspect of durability and the social and the environmental dimension were treated as mere residuals within conventional economic, growth oriented strategies.

## 8. Conclusions

This article tried to review approaches to sustainability and to formulate a working definition of regional sustainable development. This definition was used to analyse and critically assess INTERREG projects in the Vienna-Bratislava region and their presumed contribution to sustainable regional development.

The analysis has shown that only few projects effectively combine elements of all three sustainability dimensions. Moreover, fundamental procedural sustainability targets, namely the inclusion of large parts of the population in the process of project development, as well as concrete steps to encourage bottom up initiatives were almost absent. Thus, the contribution of INTERREG projects to sustainable regional development must be considered as rather disappointing.

However, the lack of holistic, sustainable projects is not surprising, as the INTERREG programme does not consider sustainability as an overarching goal, which has to be followed by each individual project. Sustainability is defined as an isolated issue within priority 5 “Sustainable Spatial and Environmental Development”. It is rather surprising that despite the “unsustainable” design of the INTERREG programme, there are projects, which explicitly or implicitly try to make a contribution to sustainable regional development and include at least two dimensions of sustainability. To make EU regional policy sustainable, “sustainability” should be implemented as a binding horizontal goal and must not be considered as a mere sectoral topic. Surely, there will be severe tensions with the central target of European regional policy, enhancing regional competitiveness and growth in a liberalized common market, which can be considered as strong impediment to sustainability, as ecological economists like Herman Daly have pointed out.



## References

- [1] WCED (1987): Unsere gemeinsame Zukunft- Brundtland Report.
- [2] UNCED (1992): Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro.
- [3] Daly, H. E., Hg. (1973): Toward a steady-state economy. San Francisco: Freeman.
- [4] Daly, H. E. (1996): Beyond growth. Boston: Beacon Press.
- [5] Markandya et al. (2002): Environmental Economics for Sustainable Growth. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- [6] Munasinghe, M. and Swart R. (2005): Primer on Climate Change and Sustainable Development. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [7] Feichtinger, J. and Pregernig M. (2005): Participation and/or/versus sustainability? Tensions between procedural and substantive goals in two Local Agenda 21 processes in Sweden and Austria. In: European Environment 15, 212-227.
- [8] Nijkamp, P., Lasschuit, P. und Soetemann, F. (1992): Sustainable development in a regional system. In: Breheny, M., J. (Hg.): Sustainable development and urban form, London, Pion, 39-66.
- [9] Spehl, H. (1995): Nachhaltige Regionalentwicklung – ein neuer Ansatz für das Europa der Regionen. In: Gahlen, B., Hesse, H. und Ramser, H.J. (Hg.) (1995): Standort und Region. Neue Ansätze zur Regionalökonomik. J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen.
- [10] Hesse, M. (1996): Nachhaltige Raumentwicklung. Überlegungen zur Bewertung der räumlichen Entwicklung und Planung in Deutschland im Lichte der Anforderungen der Agenda 21. In: Raumforschung und Raumordnung 2/3 1996, Bonn, Hannover.
- [11] Gabriel, I. and Narodoslawsky, M. (Hg.) (1998): Regions - Cornerstones for Sustainable Development. In: Proceedings of the international workshop series on sustainable regional development, Graz.
- [12] Geenhuizen, M.S. van and Nijkamp, P. (1999): 'The Local Environment as a Supportive Operator in Learning and Innovation'. In: D.G. Tremblay, J.M. Fontan, C.H. Klein (eds.), *Entre la Métropolisation et le Village Global*. Quebec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 303-317.
- [13] Schleicher-Tappeser, R. et al. (1999): Instruments for Sustainable Regional Development. EURES Report 9, Freiburg.
- [14] Thierstein, A. and Walser, M. (1999): Sustainable Regional Development: Interplay of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches. Conference Paper, St. Gallen.
- [15] Gaube, V. and Sedlacek, S. (2007): Nachhaltige Regionalentwicklung– Die Rolle regionaler Institutionen in Österreich. In: Zeitschrift für angewandte Umweltforschung 18/2, 113-132.
- [16] Segert, A. and Zierke, I. (2005): Regionale Ungleichheiten aus der Perspektive nachhaltiger Regionalentwicklung. Brandenburgische Umweltberichte 16, Potsdam.

- 
- [17] Zuideau, B. (2006): Spatial Approach to Sustainable Development: Challenges of Equity and Efficacy. In: *Regional Studies* 40.5, 459-470.
  - [18] Martinez-Alier, J. (1993): Distributional obstacles to international environmental policy: the failures at Rio and prospects after Rio. In: *Environmental Values*, S. 97-124.
  - [19] Martinez-Alier, J. (2002): *The Environmentalism of the Poor- A study of ecological conflicts and valuation*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
  - [20] Clement, K. (2005a): Editorial-Environment and Sustainable Regional Development. In: *European Environment* 15, 263-265.
  - [21] Clement, K. (2005b): Environment and Sustainable Development in the EU Structural Funds: a Review of Nordic Performance. In: *European Environment* 15, 294-312.
  - [22] Macleod, C. (2005): Integrating Sustainable Development into Structural Funds Programmes: An Evaluation of the Scottish Experience. In: *European Environment* 15, 313-331.
  - [23] Kidd, S. (2005): The Environmental Dimension of Sustainable Regional Development in the English Regions: Reflections upon the Experience of North West England. In: *European Environment* 15, 266-281.
  - [24] SDC (2004): Shows Promise. But Must Try Harder: an Assessment by the SDC of the Government's Reported Progress on Sustainable Development over the Past Five Years. London, paragraphs 8 and 9.
  - [25] Bertrand, F. and Larrue, C. (2005): Regional Sustainable Development in France: Assessing Environmental Implications. In: *European Environment* 15, 282-193.

### **Internet sources**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development)

<http://www.at-sk.net/sk/sub-1-de/seite-1.htm>

<http://www.at-sk.net/sk/sub-1-en/seite-3.htm>

[http://www.at-sk.net/data/SK\\_umsetzungsstand\\_monitoring.pdf](http://www.at-sk.net/data/SK_umsetzungsstand_monitoring.pdf)