

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH THE APPROACH TO THE CAPABILITIES OF AMARTYA SEN AND MARTHA NUSSBAUM

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Abstract

As we know, the five key concepts of Sustainable Development of the UN 2030 Agenda are: People, Prosperity, Peace 4) Partnership 5) Planet, articulated in 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This implies adopting an integrated approach and concrete measures to address a major paradigm shift and consider interconnected global policy processes and a common concept of human development, to understand and respond to global challenges for the definition of an enhanced scoreboard for public policies and investments inspired by sustainability. This means, therefore, redefining the concept of human development according to criteria and parameters that enhance not only the economic aspect but above all the ethical-political aspect. My contribution intends to examine this objective in the light of the approach to the capacities of Sen and Nussbaum, according to which human development, social justice and care for the environment are closely linked, and need a system of precise indicators capable of determining which basic principles and which measures can allow a life worthy of respect, well-being and social justice.

Following this perspective, the reference to the condition of women and gender policies also becomes central, lagging behind for a real possibility of achieving the objectives set by the UN 2030 agenda.

Keywords: Sustainability, Global Politics, Human development, Social justice, Capabilities Approach

Introduction

The difficulties faced by traditional policies of democracy and social justice are merging with the issues now facing the field of global justice and sustainable development.

The fast mobility of financial capitals on a planetary level affects the economic policies of states, while the decision-making power of multiple institutions of supranational government is growing.

Extensive migration flows and increasing population mobility make the determination of the boundaries of the *demos* increasingly uncertain, with the risk that citizenship could be reduced to a privileged status of a part of the population, from which many people who live and work in the territory of the state remain excluded.

The globalization scenarios, so, strongly pose the problems of what rights, justice and democracy might mean on a global scale. And, consequently, asks us fundamental questions about the future of the planet and about what kind of human, social and economic development can prove capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

The principle of Social, Economic and Environmental Sustainability, better known as “Sustainable Development”, originates from the first United Nations intergovernmental conferences and began to take shape in the late 1960s.

However, the concept of Sustainable Development itself, as Serge Latouche rightly points out, is an oxymoron, a strong principle of contradiction as sustainability does not match with development. The Western world therefore, in formulating the principle of Sustainable Development, has already made a huge mistake in the ideological setting of the principle.

But what is important is that sustainability and ethics are closely united, indeed sustainability connected to the principle of responsibility, is an ethical category¹.

Sustainable development, in fact, implies respect for limits in use of technologies and consumption of resources that takes into account the capacity of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. It implies an appeal to a politics of sustainable development, to an ethics of development, to an equity in meeting the needs of all populations, current and future, of the Earth².

After all, sustainability and equity are linked because only if there is equity you can avoid conflicts in the exploitation of the limited resources of planet Earth. Sustainability is thus equitable and lasting satisfaction of needs, in a global sense, that is not being confined to privileged areas or historically advantaged populations.

Sustainability is thus a concept that must contemplate ethical principles before anything else, as a premise for those rights that must be laid as foundations for a new planetary constitution, declining into social, economic and environmental sustainability.

UNESCO has formulated a distinction between sustainability and sustainable development as follows: “Sustainability is often thought of as a long-term goal (i.e., a more sustainable world), while sustainable development refers to the many processes and pathways to achieve it.”³

¹ Cf. LATOUCHE S. (2008). *La scommessa della decrescita*, tr. it. Milano: Feltrinelli; (2021) *Il tao della decrescita. Educare a equilibrio e libertà per riprenderci il futuro*, tr. it. Trento: Il Margine; (2005), *Come sopravvivere allo sviluppo: dalla decolonizzazione dell'immaginario economico alla costruzione di una società alternativa*, tr. it. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

² BEXELL M., JÖNSSON K. (2021). *The Politics of Sustainable Development Goals. Legitimacy, responsibility, and Accountability*, New York: Routledge.

³ According to the “Brundtland Report” Our Common Future of 1987, sustainable development is defined as a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. POHOAȚĂ I., ȚIACONAȘU D. E., ȚI MIHAI CRUPENȘCHI V., (2020). *The Sustainable Development Theory: A Critical Approach Vol. I*, Berlin: Springer International Publishing, pp. 16-23.

1. *The theoretical debate between A.Sen and M.Nussbaum*

The *capabilities approach*⁴ offers insights of considerable importance in addressing the problems presented, through a different lens than the traditional one based only on reliance on law for the erosion of socioeconomic inequalities.

The first organic formulation of capability theory is provided to us by Amartya Sen, an Indian economist who won the Nobel Prize in 1998. He developed it gradually, beginning in the early 1970s, as a continuation of a reflection focused on more strictly economic issues and on social choice theory -in controversy with traditional welfare economics and the social choice theory inspired by it-giving it an explicit formulation in the 1979 *Tanner Lecture, Equality of What?*, in which also appears the expression *capability approach*, commonly used to define it.

Despite some disagreement among scholars about the best description of the *capabilities approach*, it is generally understood as a “conceptual scheme for a series of normative exercises”⁵, which can be summarized as the following: 1. the analysis of individual well-being; 2. the assessment and analysis of social organization; 3. the development of policies and proposals for a change in society⁶.

During the 1980s Martha Nussbaum collaborated with economist Amartya Sen on issues of development and ethics which culminated in *The Quality of Life*, published in 1993 by Oxford University Press. Together with Sen and a group of younger scholars, Nussbaum founded the Human Development and Capability Association in 2003. With Sen, she promoted the “capabilities approach” to development, which views capabilities (“substantial freedoms”, such as the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, or participate in political activities) as the constitutive parts of development, and poverty as capability-deprivation. This contrasts with traditional utilitarian views that see development purely in terms of economic growth, and poverty purely as income-deprivation. It is also universalist, and therefore contrasts with relativist approaches to development. Much of the work is presented from an Aristotelian perspective⁷.

Deeply convinced that economic analysis could offer a contribution to ethics and that some of the most lacerating problems of an ethical-social nature are of economic origin, Amartya Sen defends a conception of public morality that recognizes individual freedom as a central role in any evaluation of the social system as an

⁴ This approach is first and foremost used for the assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements and for the identification of appropriate social policies. The innovation lies in considering material resources, such as goods and income as means that will then be converted into operations for the achievement of well-being, moving away from a GDP- and welfare-oriented view of development in economic terms, to promote the development of human progress and people’s living conditions.

⁵ ROBEYNSI., *The Capability Approach*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), a cura di E. N. Zalta, 2011, p. 3. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/capability-approach/>>.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Cf. NUSSBAUM M., SEN A.(1993). *The Quality of life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

essential element of social arrangements⁸.

The author also believes that this perspective has some advantages over other approaches and may also have far-reaching implications for an assessment of social institutions and policy choices. It is a social, or public, ethics because it lacks a purely individual character.

The primary interest is not so much to provide criteria for assessing the “rightness” of individual actions or to guide the individual in his or her personal conduct, but rather to provide criteria for making choices in the public interest, “for the formulation of judgments on social structures and public policies”⁹.

He wants to try to offer a solution to deal with problems such as inequality, poverty, famine, or that is functional to the evaluation of different policies and social models. The boundary between public ethics and political philosophy is therefore really fleeting: the interest in these issues is both ethical and political.

Amartya Sen introduces two characteristic concepts for his reflection, those of *functioning* and *capability*: the concept of functioning (being fed enough, not suffering from avoidable diseases etc ...) concerns what a person may desire, as it gives him value to do or to be. The capability of a person is a kind of freedom: the substantial freedom to realize multiple alternative combinations of functioning.

According to Sen, the desirable society is not the one that maximizes the endowment of primary goods for individuals, but the one that maximizes their substantial freedom. Not all functioning have the same importance: ethics and political theory must also deal with the question of what are the functionings to be included in the list of important things to be achieved¹⁰.

People’s quality of life, according to Sen, cannot be well understood through a standardized measure such as income. We need to enter the field of value judgments, or public discussion on what are the functioning that we consider most essential. The problem of the Good is at the fore in the reflection of political theory.

This perspective is enriched by the contribution of Martha Nussbaum, who rehabilitates an Aristotelian approach and a theory of the Common Good. The theories of a fair and good approach can interpenetrate each other, in the sense that a theory of justice establishes how and why everyone must have access to fundamental goods, while a theory of goods deals exclusively with the nature of these.

⁸ Cf. SEN A. (2000). *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press. Development must be understood as a process of expanding the real freedoms of human beings, in the private, social and political spheres. The challenge of development is therefore to eliminate the various types of “ilfreedom”: hunger and misery, tyranny, intolerance and repression, illiteracy, lack of health care and environmental protection. V. also, SEN A., *Development as Capabilities Expansion*, in Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A.K. Shiva Kuma editors. (2003). *Readings in Human Development. Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development Paradigm*, Oxford University Press, pp. 3-16.

⁹ SEN A. (1987). *The Standard of living*. Edited by G. Hawthorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 94.

¹⁰ SEN A. (1989). *Development as capability expansion*. *Journal of Development Planning*, 19 (1): 41–58.

Martha Nussbaum outlined the capability approach – general, not its specific version – as formed by two main clusters: one focused on comparing quality of life and the other on formulating a theory of justice.

The two main themes share a focus on what individuals *are* and *do*, as well as on five fundamental principles: 1. Treating people as ends (and not as means); 2. The focus on freedom and choice rather than on results; 3. Pluralism of values; 4. Deep concern for the most deeply rooted social injustices; 5. Assign an urgent mission to governments.

In Sen's interpretation, on the other hand, another characteristic of the capability approach is that it presents itself as a normative theory of a *consequentialist* and *teleological* character: the consequences themselves are evaluated by reason of the purpose, or value, that they contribute to achieve¹¹.

A social order and a given public policy are all the better the more they allow individuals to have the ability to acquire *valuable functionings*: "The capability approach", Sen writes, "is fundamentally attentive to the identification of valuable objects and conceives the space for evaluation in terms of functioning and ability to function"¹².

Nussbaum, from this point of view, differs quite markedly from his colleague, because, while Sen's goal is to develop a theory that has as its basis the consequentialism, in order to fill the gaps that precisely classical consequentialism brings with it, for Nussbaum the respect of a set of fundamental capabilities does not even seem to fit into a consequentialist perspective; instead, it is recognized as a fundamental normative principle, regardless of considerations based on the consequences of an action.

The capability approach in Nussbaum's version is, therefore, presented as a conception of a non-consequentialist character: the realization of a set of fundamental capacities is a normative principle capable of determining the value of the action, regardless of the consequences.

Thus, while Sen recognizes in the capability approach¹³ a more adequate function than the theories mainly used for the assessment of *quality of life*, Nussbaum intends instead "to overcome the merely comparative use to elaborate an examination of how capacities, together with the idea of the threshold level of capacities, can provide a basis for the elaboration of fundamental constitutional principles, that citizens have

¹¹ Cf. KUKLYS W., (2005). *Amartya Sen's capabilities Approach: Theoretical Insight and Empirical Applications*, Berlin: Springer.

¹² SEN A., (1994). *Inequality. A Critical Review*. Bologna: The Mill, p. 68.

¹³ The notion of *capability* in Sen has two distinct meanings: depending on the case, capacity or opportunity, or both at the same time. In this way the theory gains in rhetorical appeal and persuasive force, but loses in clarity and rigor, presenting, precisely in its own core, a possible source of ambiguity and confusion. In recent years Sen has used the concept of opportunity in a broader sense, as an opportunity to acquire value combinations of human functions. Thus developed, the definition is used to refer not only to the possession of the means or tools by the subject to pursue what he likes to do, but also to the possession of the actual ability to do so.

the right to demand from their governments”¹⁴.

The realization of a set of fundamental capacities is, therefore, a normative principle capable of determining the value of the action, regardless of the consequences.

The most important contribution that Nussbaum makes to the Theory of Capabilities is the precise formulation of a list of basic, fundamental capabilities, each of which, at least respecting a minimum threshold (threshold) of these capabilities, as mentioned must be “provided” to each individual to allow him to really live in a human way.

It is the main difference from the original formulation of Sen’s theory of capabilities, which does not consider at all the possibility of including, a list of fundamental capabilities, which in his view had to be the result of a democratic process, nor the concept of *threshold*, introduced only by Nussbaum¹⁵.

This list is the result of years of intercultural discussions, of comparisons between old versions and newer ones, as well as still open to modification by the will of the author herself, who suggests that it “represents what she proposes: a kind of shared consensus by people with very different conceptions of human life anyway”¹⁶. Here is Nussbaum’s list:

Life – Able to live to the end of a normal length human life, and to not have one’s life reduced to not worth living.

Bodily Health – Able to have a good life which includes (but is not limited to) reproductive health, nourishment and shelter.

Bodily Integrity – Able to change locations freely, in addition to, having sovereignty over one’s body which includes being secure against assault (for example, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, domestic violence and the opportunity for sexual satisfaction).

Senses, Imagination and Thought – Able to use one’s senses to imagine, think and reason in a ‘truly human way’ – informed by an adequate education. Furthermore, the ability to produce self-expressive works and engage in religious rituals without fear of political ramifications. The ability to have pleasurable experiences and avoid unnecessary pain. Finally, the ability to seek the meaning of life.

Emotions – Able to have attachments to things outside of ourselves; this includes being able to love others, grieve at the loss of loved ones and be angry when it is justified.

¹⁴ NUSSBAUMM. (2000). *Women and the Human Development*, New York-Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 26.

¹⁵ Cfr. ALEXANDERJ.M.(2008). *Capabilities and Social Justice. The Political Philosophy of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum*, Aldershot-Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.

¹⁶ Ivi., p. 95. The expression “shared consensus” is taken from Rawls’ work, to define the concept that different individuals would accept this conception as the basic moral nucleus of a political conception, without sharing any particular metaphysical interpretation of the world, no ethical-religious vision, or, even, no particular conception of the person or of human nature. Cfr. RAWLSJ.(1993). *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 133-172; NUSSBAUMM.(2003). *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, New York-Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 479.

Practical Reason – Able to form a conception of the good and critically reflect on it.

Affiliation: (1) Able to live with and show concern for others, empathize with (and show compassion for) others and the capability of justice and friendship. Institutions help develop and protect forms of affiliation. (2) Able to have self-respect and not be humiliated by others, that is, being treated with dignity and equal worth. This entails (at the very least) protections of being discriminated on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, religion, caste, ethnicity and nationality. In work, this means entering relationships of mutual recognition.

Other Species – Able to have concern for and live with other animals, plants and the environment at large.

Play – Able to laugh, play and enjoy recreational activities.

Control over One's Environment: (1) Political – Able to effectively participate in the political life which includes having the right to free speech and association. (2) Material – Able to own property, not just formally, but materially (that is, as a real opportunity). Furthermore, having the ability to seek employment on an equal basis as others, and the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure.

The functionings are, therefore, closely linked to the capacity of a person: they are understood as the realization of a potential state, constituted by the capacity. They are “beings and doings,” or states of human beings as well as activities that a person can engage in: being well fed or being underfed, being educated or illiterate, being part of a favorable social organization or being part of a criminal gang are examples of “beings” (good and not).

The philosophical reflection of Martha Nussbaum¹⁷ focuses, much more than Sen, on the theme of social justice, human dignity and the conditions that allow it to develop fully.

The comparison with the major contractualist theories, modern and otherwise, is considered by the author to be a natural fundamental step for the development of her own thought, in order to be able to “modify our theory and also our judgments, seeking an overall global agreement between judgments and principles”¹⁸ and the prevalent recourse to the work of John Rawls¹⁹ is justified by the relationship of friendship

¹⁷ Martha Nussbaum fits into a historical-philosophical context, the Anglo-Saxon context of the second half of the twentieth century, in which authors such as Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Bernard Williams, have the ambition to actualize Aristotelian thought, taking up the concepts of *virtue*, *phrōnesis*, and *eudaimonia*, in order to elaborate an ethics that departs totally from both Kant and the utilitarian ethics to calculate an objective good of the totality of subjects.

¹⁸ NUSSBAUM M.(2006).*Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ John Rawls played an important role in the philosophical-political debate of the 1970s. In contrast to the utilitarian doctrines dominant in Anglo-Saxon ethico-political thought, R. developed a neo-contractualist theory of social justice, taking up the tradition of Locke, Rousseau and especially Kant. This theory is based on the assumption of the rational choice, by each member of a hypothetical “state of nature,” of the principles to which institutions should conform in order to be considered just.

and collaboration that existed between the two great thinkers, but especially because of Nussbaum's consideration that reserves of Rawlsian theory of justice as the best available²⁰.

The author, however, wants to show how her theory more “adequately” addresses some of the problems of social justice, which are the focus of this discussion of mine, namely those related to the situation of some groups of social vulnerability - in particular: disability and global justice but also justice towards non-human animals - which turn out to be more critical and difficult to read than the traditional discourse on justice, equality and the social contract.

The relationship between her theory of justice and that of human rights, in a typically liberal sense, is intended to show that Nussbaum's understanding of this theory is deeply intertwined with that of human rights, and in particular with the concept of “negative freedom”, but she also wants to show that this concept is insufficient and inconsistent, as all capabilities require active government intervention to be realized²¹.

Nussbaum, constantly quoting Aristotle, criticizes anyone who considers wealth as a primary good, which has value in itself and which should be what, made available to associates by the legislator, would contribute to the achievement of justice, arguing instead that what really constitutes a primary good is the set of abilities that allow for the full realization of the human being, acting and living well²².

This is not intended to deny the individual's freedom of choice; rather, it rejects the argument that instrumental goods have independent value with respect to freedom of choice. The value of a good is not absolute, but must be considered on the basis of the ability of individuals to make proper use of that good: “To take a concrete example, one will not have a good distribution of available food resources nor will the purpose of that distribution be properly understood unless one first asks what it means for individuals to have or not to have the food resources they need to feed themselves. The activity of distribution cannot be limited to making “things” available to the consociates as if these had value in themselves. The ultimate goal of redistribution must be to empower people to live and act in certain concrete ways”²³.

This theoretical commitment is also a political and global justice commitment, to which Nussbaum devotes much work and many studies²⁴. Through this cognitive

²⁰ Cf. NUSSBAUMM., *Frontiers of Justice*, cit.

²¹ Ivi, p. 11.

²² Cf. NUSSBAUMM. (1990). *Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristoteles on Political Distribution, in Aristoteles' "Politik. Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum Friederichshafen/Bodensee*, edited by PATZIGG., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 152-186.

²³ NUSSBAUMM., *Frontiers of Justice*, p. 49.

²⁴ More specifically, Nussbaum's work translates into a transposition to the concrete of political theory in order to provide answers to three fundamental issues: 1. disability; 2. multiculturalism; and 3. gender difference. The permeability of the idea of vulnerability is the glue that unites these “categories” of inequality: the purpose of such a discourse is to demonstrate how the differences between different social strata are nothing but different declinations of the state of perennial vulnerability that is an

effort Nussbaum wants to lead us to a reform of the welfare system that is clearly outdated and no longer able to meet the needs of the most vulnerable individuals.

Discrimination arises, as there is an inherent difference in the power relations between individuals with disabilities and able-bodied individuals, and at the point diversity is recognized, from that diversity, an attempt is made to produce *different rights* for the most vulnerable.

Highly committed to what concerns discrimination against women, the author believes that feminism is the discriminatory factor that has most shaped human history, that has shaped society as it is structured today and that it will be the most difficult discriminatory phenomenon to eradicate²⁵.

2. *UN's Human Development Report and Human Development Index*

Nussbaum's theory, as well as Sen's, has found operational translations at the international level, providing the theoretical basis for a radical change in the way of conceiving human development, well-being, and consequently, the politics of dealing with vulnerabilities and inequalities, even as well as climate and environmental protection as part of development and as a responsible action towards future generations.

This is where institutions and associations are born and developed, with the difficult task of disseminating and at the same time guiding politics.

The United Nations Development Program²⁶ is a subsidiary body of the United Nations, established on January 1, 1966, following the General Assembly resolution of November 22 of the previous year. It is an international organization whose range of action includes 177 States and whose basic mission is the eradication of poverty, the reduction of inequalities, trying to support States in the development of active policies that promote human development in all its dimensions.

essential characteristic of human beings as such. V. NUSSBAUM M., *Creating capabilities. The Humana Development Approach*, Harvard University Press, 2011.

²⁵ Cfr. NUSSBAUM M. (2004). *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 119.

Martha Nussbaum tries to show how, for the transition from a sexist society to a nonsexist one, a change in people is necessary at a much deeper level than that required for a homophobe to become a non-homophobe. On this point, important is the theme of adaptive preferences, which leads Nussbaum to consider women's "non-choices," the cessation of discrimination and marginalization. Cf. NUSSBAUM M., GLOVER G. (1995). *Women, Culture and Development. A study of Human capabilities*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

²⁶ "The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Countries have committed to prioritize progress for those who're furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls. The creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources from all of society is necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context". Cfr. <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

The UNDP is also working to protect the planet, to reduce climate change and, at the same time, also economically helping the populations affected by environmental disasters. The peace and prosperity goals, in addition to those mentioned above, have been summarized in an official document, signed by the nations that adhere to the program: the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. In addition to this, the Program is proposed as an instrument to guarantee human rights, and works for the empowerment of women, minorities and the most vulnerable sections of the population²⁷.

One of the key tools, commissioned by the UNDP, is the *Human Development Report* is the tool through which the United Nations, through the Development Program, annually announces the challenges it intends to face and the results achieved by the program itself, thus serving as a guideline for both the domestic policy of individual states and international policy.

The first report is dated 1990²⁸, and the publication of this document marked an epochal turning point, particularly in the way of conceiving poverty, not only in quantitative terms, but especially in qualitative terms.

With this report, the United Nations translates the fervent interest in the new way of conceiving human well-being and development into a new index for measuring well-being that would be supportive of the Gross National Product, which until then had been used as the only indicator: the *Human Development Index* (HDI)²⁹.

The fact that we commonly associate the amount of wealth produced by a state with its own well-being brings to light quite many issues, and-writes Nussbaum-”even if we decided to measure quality of life in strictly monetary terms and wanted to use a single average instead of looking at the distribution, it is not a given that GDP

²⁷ “This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognise that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which we are announcing today demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet” Cfr. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

²⁸ *Concept and Measurement of Human Development*, da *Human Development Report*, Published for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. URL. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/219/hdr_1990_en_complete_nostats.pdf.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 13;104. The HDI can be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. Cfr. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>

per capita would be the most interesting element to consider”³⁰.

A change in this sense is not only desirable, but necessary, because being able to “snapshot” as accurately as possible is the first step to build national and international policies that are effective in achieving the intended outcome, on time.

The idea that the mere wealth of a nation is not enough to measure the well-being of its citizens is now out of academic debates. Institutions around the planet have long been working to seek new criteria capable of saying how well people “live,” so that this level of well-being can be raised. A first step toward a common international policy project that is *human-centered*.

The *Human Development Index*, devised by Pakistani economist Mahub ul Haq, with the help of Amartya Sen, has performed, and continues to perform, the very important task of coadjutant to purely economic indices, as a guide in the implementation and monitoring of public policies.

Originally the *Human Development Index* was the result of the arithmetic average of the indices of the 3 different dimensions, which in turn were calculated through the ratio of the global maximum value of each dimension to the value of the state for which the index is to be calculated. The strengths of this system should be noted above all in the ease with which the results can be read, even by people who are not exactly “experts” in statistical data. Policy makers are, therefore, facilitated in the work of interpretation and, consequently, correction.

Despite the theoretical scope of this innovation, at the practical level there is no shortage of criticism, both in relation to the quality of the data retrieved: the statistical data used, in fact, are not directly collected by the UNDP, but rather data made available by UN agencies or directly by national agencies are used, which often, devote more attention to purely economic surveys, leaving out those important for the human development approach, as well as at the structural level, since, first of all, the use of the arithmetic mean as an aggregation system does not turn out to be the most appropriate, furthermore, the index omits dimensions of a fundamental nature, such as environmental sustainability, technological development, etc...³¹.

To remedy, even partially, the criticisms of the HDI, in the 2010 Report, the UNDP made some absolutely relevant changes in the measurement of well-being and development. First of all, the geometric mean is used as the aggregation system for the 3 “sub-indices,” which makes each value carry considerable weight in the

³⁰ NUSSBAUMM.(2011).*Creating capabilities,The Human Development Approach*, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p. 53.

³¹ The criticism was by Amartya Sen himself. See Introduction by Amartya Sen, in *The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*, da *Human Development Report*, Published for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. VI-VII. URL: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/270/hdr_2010_en_complete_reprint.pdf. The critique was by Amartya Sen himself. See Introduction by Amartya Sen, in *The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*, from *Human Development Report*, published for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. VI-VII. URL: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/270/hdr_2010_en_complete_reprint.pdf

calculation; but more importantly, 3 other key indices are included that capture additional significant aspects of a population’s well-being and human development³²:

1. *Inequality anjusted Human Development Index*
2. *Gender Inequality Index*
3. *Multidimensional Poverty Index*

3. Developments capability approach for research institutions and the measurement of BES in Italy

ISTAT, like the other National Statistical Institutes, is called by the United Nations Statistical Commission to play an active role of national coordination in the production of indicators for the measurement of sustainable development and the monitoring of its objectives. Periodically, therefore, the Institute presents an update and an extension of the disaggregations of the statistical measures useful for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Every year Istat publishes the Report on the SDGs.

The project curated by ISTAT and CNEL in Italy, with the collaboration of experts in the fields of statistics and sociology, aims to measure the multidimensional well-being of Italian citizens, taking into account equity in the distribution of resources, and the sustainability of welfare levels for future generations.

In fact, sustainability is one of the key aspects of the environmental transition envisaged by the Recovery Fund. A theme, moreover, that the CNEL was among the first to address in Europe with the elaboration, conducted together with ISTAT, of the BES, the indicators of fair and sustainable well-being, which have recently been started to adopt also by companies.

Based on these macro-dimensions, the BES Steering Committee (Istat, CNEL and civil society) has identified 2 groups of domains: 9 of them having direct impact on human and environmental well-being and 3 constituting the functional elements of improving social well-being. An entire chapter of Istat’s annual report on BES 2021³³ is devoted to each of them, listed as follows:

1. Health;
2. Education and training;
3. Work and life-time balance;
4. Economic well-being;
5. Social relations;
6. Politics and institutions;
7. Security;
8. Subjective well-being;

³² HUCH W.(2022). *Sustenaible Development Goals*, Baden Baden:Nomos Verlag.

³³ The Bes Report is an in-depth portrait of the state of the country, carefully drawn by official statistics through the lens of citizen well-being. Well-being is, or should be, the ultimate goal of policies. For more, <http://www.istat.it/it/benessere-e-sostenibilit%C3%A0/misure-del-benessere/il-rapporto-istat-sul-bes>.

9. Landscape and cultural heritage;
10. Environment;
11. Innovation, research and creativity;
12. Quality of services.

But the main achievement, the result of the BES group's interaction with domain experts, is the addition or replacement of indicators in the original framework. The new set consists of 152 indicators, 33 of which are new (Table 1³⁴), integrating eight of the twelve domains of the BES. The integration was done in coherence with the main thrust of the #NextGenerationEU program, by which Europe is redesigning its strategic vision for inclusion and growth, and responds to specific knowledge needs, including enriching the available information on health aspects, digitalization, human capital (both on the training and labor sides), and climatechange, with choices strongly geared toward policy action³⁵.

In 2020, the health emergency forced a sudden shift to working from home in many areas; in order to monitor this mode of operation in the Work and Life Time Reconciliation domain, a new indicator on working from home was included and a trial was conducted to make available annual estimates of the indicator on asymmetry in family work. Finally, on the environmental data front, the indicator set was strengthened especially for aspects related to climate change, with the introduction of new meteoroclimate measures and a subjective indicator on climate change concern.

Therefore, CNEL and ISTAT have taken on as a task of a society that wants to promote the most important human capacities to encourage the development of internal capacities, through education, resources to enhance physical and emotional health, support for family care and love, an educational system and more. And this is thanks to the studies and theory of the approach to skills of Sen and Nussbaum that today constitutes the criterion and goal for measuring the quality of life and sustainable human development: it is not possible to conceptually think of a society that produces combined capacities without producing internal capacities.

So the political purpose for all members of a nation should be the same: each should reach a certain threshold of combined capacities, not in the sense of imposing functions but of enjoying the substantial freedom to choose and act. Given the many spheres of human life in which people move and act, this is an approach to social justice that in a nutshell asks: what is needed for a life to live up to human dignity?

Conclusion

The capability approach allows us to focus on the real (substantial) freedom that individuals have to achieve the achievements they deem valuable in life. It indicates a different approach to consider development, well-being, quality of life, the role of policies.

³⁴ ToTable 1.,cf. *New indicators introduced in the Bes 2020 framework*, in BES 2020*Ten years of Equitable and Sustainable Well-being (Bes)*, <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/10/Ten-years-of-Bes.pdf>.

³⁵ Cfr.SALAS R., VILLENEUVE R., (2005). Edit by, *Europe and capabilities Approach.Introduction: Europe and the politics of capabilities*, New York-Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In short, the theory of the capabilities approach, really wants to become a practice to be implemented, it cannot remain a single initiative of small realities, but it needs to be an imperative first of all ethical and moral of the entire international community. The capabilities approach is presented as a contribution to the national and international debate [...] it is made to be weighted, assimilated, compared with other approaches.

Although Nussbaum did not claim her list of capabilities as definite and unchanging, she strongly advocated for outlining a list of central human capabilities. On the other hand, Sen refuses to supply a specific list of capabilities. Sen argues that an exact list and weights would be too difficult to define. Sen argues that the task of weighing various capabilities should be left to the ethical and political considerations of each society based on public reasoning.

Along with the concerns raised about Nussbaum's list, there are also those who argue that Nussbaum's methodology goes against an essential push of the capabilities approach that has been an attempt to redirect developmental theory from a reductive focus on a minimally decent life toward a more holistic account of human well-being for all people.

That said, applications to development are now numerous to the point that the capability approach is widely accepted as a paradigm in development. Many work programs that operationalize the capability-based approach rely heavily on Nussbaum's list as a relatively comprehensive, high-level account of the space in which human well-being or quality of life is experienced.

As Ingrid Robeyns writes, “The capability approach has also been influential in developing the right to education and educational justice (Walker and Unterhalter 2007). Most prominently, Walker (2003; 2006) and Unterhalter (2005; 2007; 2013) have been at the forefront of conceptualizing social justice within education, while Terzi (2008) argues that social justice and equality in education require particular attention to special educational needs and disability”³⁶.

In summary, the innovative scope of the Sen's and Nussbaum's theory lies in having proposed a departure from the ethical-juridical tradition based only on the protection of rights towards a new way of conceiving society, politics and ethics connected to them, which projects towards innovative scenarios regarding the consideration of well-being, human development, and the measurement of values indicating the development of society. Nor should we forget, especially thanks to Nussbaum, the contribution of a psychological-social nature in helping to restore value to women, in terms of individual awareness, leadership skills, bargaining

³⁶ As writes Ingrid Robeyns, the potential applications of the capability approach are wide-ranging and possible areas where nascent research has begun, or more research is needed, include the philosophy of technology and the ethical aspects of artificial intelligence and surveillance; business ethics and corporate social responsibility; animal ethics and the rights of non-human animals; and professional ethics and the rights of employees. ROBEYNS I., *The Capability Approach*, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, op. cit.

power, active presence in political decisions, and is a virtuous example of translating theories on human development into actions of *empowerment*³⁷.

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³⁷ Per un approfondimento consultare il sito internet del SEWA, URL: http://www.sewa.org/About_Us_Structure.asp; e inoltre, R. DATTA, *From Development to Empowerment: the Self-Employed Women's Association in India*, in «International Journal of Politics», Culture and Society, 16, marzo 2003, pp. 351-368;

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