

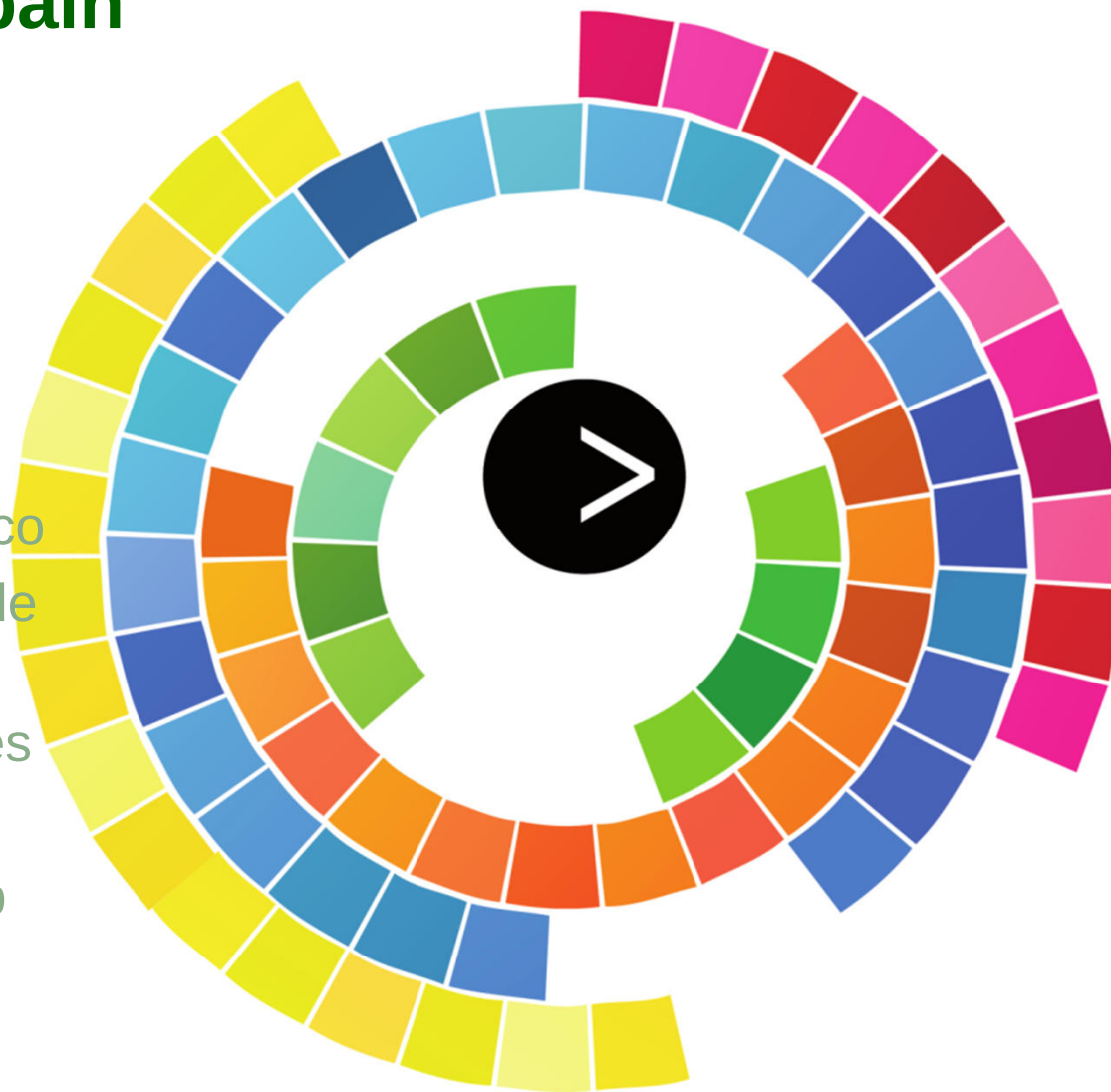
The Observatory on Sustainability in Spain

Fare i conti
con l'ambiente

Rifiuti acqua energia

Rave
nna
25/26/27
settembre 2013

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¿The observatory was not sustainable?

- Last June 2013 the Spanish Sustainability Observatory was closed by the Spanish Government, following the austerity rules, to move out the country from today's economic crisis started at least in 2008.



¿The observatory was not sustainable?

- It seems strange or at least curious that an official organism called Sustainable has been not sustainable in a short period of 7 years.
- It is true that the Observatory has generated worthy reports and valued information based in a clear methodology supported by list of indicators.
- Indicators validated for specialists and researchers communities in a wide spectrum of fields.

¿The observatory was not sustainable?

- The Observatory has failed in a key point, to survive in crises time, or to be Sustainable.
- This event of fail gives us the opportunity to make some considerations about the concept of Sustainability.



Indicators

- The use of indicators methodology helps to measure the accurate results from an activity to the previous planning, how close the processes are going on during the development of different activities before arriving to the targets.
- This methodology gives many times objective measures of the processes and lets the management or decision makers to correct or maintain the strategy.
- Unfortunately other times these indicators are only apparently objective. At the final evaluation of a project or a policy the indicators will help a lot, not only to measure real results related to previous defined targets, but also to verify or discard hypothesis and processes and to adjust and change our targets to other more plausible or realistic ones.

Indicators

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euostat
Statistical books

- This methodology has been applied,
- for example, from the European Commission
- in the elaboration of its own
- sustainability reports
- "Measuring progress towards a more sustainable Europe 2007 monitoring report of the EU sustainable development"

Measuring progress towards
a more sustainable Europe

2007 monitoring report
of the EU sustainable development strategy



Indicators

- Looking closer at environmental projects or studies related with welfare or even perception of quality of life, the concept of foot print of a process arise in many.
- A lot of projects, not only those with a clear environmental orientation, look for a reduction of the foot print of the processes, understanding this foot print as an environmental or social impact over an ecosystem or a community.

	Estado actual favorable		De interés estratégico para España
	Situación no definida o difícil de evaluar		Evolución positiva en el último año de análisis
	Estado actual desfavorable		Evolución negativa en el último año de análisis
	Falta de información o datos		Por encima de la media europea
	Señales de esperanza		En la media europea
	Situación crítica de sostenibilidad, importante distancia a objetivos		Por debajo de la media europea

Indicators

- In the same way, the indicators usually are a quantification of the increase or decrease of the consume of goods, energy, or the affection to some selected members of an ecosystem, the accessibility rate to some commodities for the population affected by the actions in process, the risk of social exclusion among many others.
- The quantification on Kw or Kg used, or the number of individual affected in a process clearly helps a lot in the task of identification of the most sustainable way to follow to preserve biodiversity and to maintain a healthy society in a better world.

The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

- I am convinced of the good labor developed from the Observatory all these years and also of the convenience and the necessity of institution like this
- But....
- I admit that it was not perfect and it is necessary to accept its closure.

The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

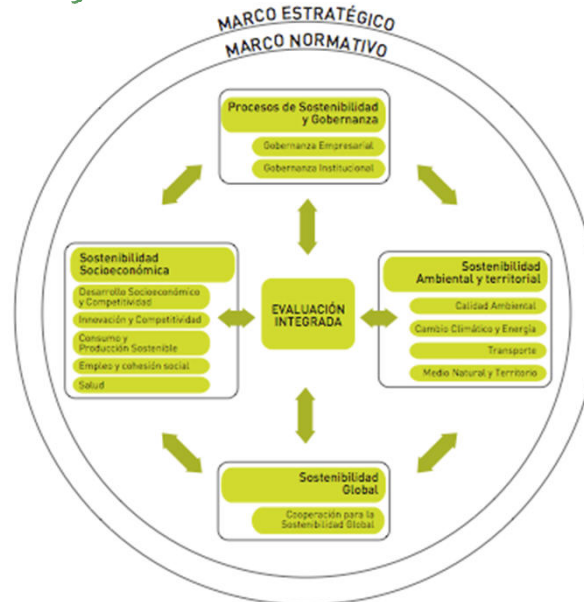
- The methodology based in indicators is not perfect.
- The indicators make reference to an ideal system adopted as "good" and it is clear that the definition of this system needs many compromise.
- The system can be good under a cultural or a social view but not under others, it can be good today but not tomorrow, or simply good in some contexts and not in others.
- Even if we admit that the system is good, indicators can occult behavior or different aspect not described in its items.

The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

- Even if the agencies have a extraordinary power to manage an incredible amount of data, the vision of the real world is still not perfect.
- The cultural and social aspects has a tremendous weight and the context can make many results less valuable or it can need the help of extra interpretations.
- To point out an extreme example, the results from a survey from a community of biologist from Netherlands can not be apply to a community of native flora experts from el Chaco in Paraguay. We tend to be extremely confident in the science method but it needs help from social and cultural knowledge.

The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

- The good results of indicators of a process, for example the decrease of energy consume, can be interpreted as good in their context, but does not tell anything about the process.
- Maybe the process itself, in a wider view, is not the adequate, even not necessary or clearly not sustainable.



The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

- What can we say about the extinction of the Spanish Observatory and what lessons can we learn from this event?
- For sure many lessons but a few that at least have call my attention and that I think they come from some general misunderstanding about the concept of sustainability.
- In some way there is a lack of connection between reality of the economical processes we live and the evaluation under the reports that have been done.
- The other question is related with the term itself, many times the sustainable way of a process is not to maintain an activity, it is to delete the process.

The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

- Of course we found indicators related with economy but there are few emphasis to translate the economic importance of the evaluation to everyone of us.
- I, as a member of a community, need to clear understand that following sustainable criteria it is not only good in environmental terms but also contribute to welfare and richness in the wide sense and it can be, and has to be, measure in Euros.



The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

- The no existing translation from indicators results to Euros, that common citizens can easily understand, was one of the key weakness of the Spanish Observatory.
- A clear measure in Euros terms and a wide spread of the reports results in the Spanish society I think it would be enough to support the Observatory against the arguments that have let close it.



The gaps in the Spanish Sustainability Observatory

- The close of the observatory is reflected, in some aspects, from what is happening with the sustainability memories that many organism and private firms and companies are producing every year.
- The objective seems to present an inform that let feel them environmentally and socially good in front of their clients, consumers, society and government.
- The objective it is not to the improve or change the process, on the contrary the report helps to maintain the activities and processes.
- It seems that a crisis is necessary to cure a sector, therapy that, for instance, would be done with the results of the reports of the Sustainability Observatory and not for the arrival of a new crisis.

Conclusions

- The use of indicators by the Spanish Observatory of Sustainability has been, and I like to think, a success to understand wrong processes but needs to get influence to change and criticize activities.
- It has failed on the wide spread of the results to the citizens, to add value in Euros (€) to these results and has transmitted wrong concepts about sustainability.
- Ravenna 2013 and previous is very good example on how to translate and share results.

Conclusions

- LinkedIn Coastal Planning Group is also a very good example
- There had been small room to different interpretations, there were not dynamic modifications of the criteria and indicators in a way less lineal or rigid on a base of a uncertain framework of what it is good or best.
- The economy aspect did not reach to what people understand or need to improve their day by day activities.

Conclusions

- The Observatory and the policy about sustainability of the Spanish Government has contributed to generate a family of reports, by many institutions and companies, that seems to help more to maintain or get a justification of their own activities or process, and not get critical of them.
- It also has generated a new class of "experts" on writing reports in an environmentally and socially correct formats.

Conclusions

- I am sure that new Observatory on Sustainability or similar institutions will be established in a near future in Spain as I am sure this crisis will pass sooner that we think.



www.ravenna2013.it

Reports

- Measuring progress towards a more sustainable Europe. 2007 monitoring report of the EU sustainable development. Eurostat Statistical books. European Communities 2007.

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Acknowledgements

- Ravenna 2013 Organizers, Team Members and Ravenna city
- Giovanni Montresori and Luigi Bruzzi
- Coastal Planning Linkedin Group
- Small baby turtle called “Greta”
- All of you

