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Introduction: The Integration of Development and Environmental Agendas

Lena Partzsch

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted Agenda 2030 in 2015 with a set of wide-ranging goals that articulate the desired outcome of sustainable development. These so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were the result of two processes: the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000, and the results of the 2012 Rio+20 Summit, which augmented Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Hence the SDGs are an effort to integrate the development and environmental agendas. Humans are dramatically accelerating global environmental change, and some scholars consider the SDGs to be example of development approaches being increasingly ‘in tune with the biosphere, of reconnecting development to the biosphere preconditions’ (Folke et al, 2016: 5). However, others argue that the SDGs mask ongoing contestations over sustainable development (Sachs, 2017; Bengtsson et al, 2018; Elder and Olsen, 2019). Humanity is already outside the ‘safe operating space’ for at least four of nine ‘planetary boundaries’: climate change, biodiversity, land-system change and biogeochemical flows (nitrogen and phosphorus imbalance) (Rockström et al, 2009; Steffen et al, 2015). Moreover, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, crucial measures of environmental protection are being postponed, have been watered down or risk being completely abandoned.

This volume discusses the Agenda’s environmental content and takes a critical account of sustainability governance over the last decades. Each chapter provides an accessible and comprehensive introduction to and

assessment of sustainability governance in a field that is crucial for the environment. Authors address three fundamental questions:

1. How have perceptions of the environment changed in sustainability governance and research since the 1992 Earth Summit?
2. Which actors and institutions have mattered most for governance efforts over the last three decades?
3. Which alternative and innovative forms of governance exist and deserve more research attention for a transition to environmentally salient sustainability?

With the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), UN member states have created a body that is mandated to implement the SDGs. However, the Forum does not have an enforcement function comparable to executive or judicial agencies at the level of the nation-state (Bernstein, 2017). The SDGs represent ‘global governance through goal-setting’ (Kanie et al, 2017), each government being responsible for implementation in its own territory. Classically, governments and other state actors have governance authority over a defined nation-state territory. Since the 1990s, however, those who have been progressive about governance action are non-state actors, including businesses and civil society organizations (CSOs) (Partzsch, 2020). At the same time, failure to implement green goals in one country frequently has consequences for the people and the natural environment beyond this individual nation-state (Gupta and Nilsson, 2017). Therefore the term *governance* is used in this book to refer to hierarchical and non-hierarchical steering activities by state and non-state actors, including transnational activities.

The first part of this chapter outlines tensions between environmental governance and socio-economic development. The central conceptual contribution of this volume concerns these tensions. Agenda 2030 has been characterized as universal, transformative and integrative (Kanie et al, 2017). Simultaneously, as its effective implementation depends on diverse actors’ priorities, there is a risk of uneven attention given to the environmental dimension. Confronted with the overshoot in planetary boundaries (Steffen et al, 2015), more and more environmental scientists are demanding that a balancing approach be given up in favour of ecosystem protection (Griggs et al, 2013; Folke et al, 2016). Countries with a high income in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, in particular, are expected to prioritize environmental over economic goals at this stage of implementation (Forestier and Kim, 2020). While some demand greater prioritization of environmental goals, others welcome Agenda 2030 for pursuing environmental goals in connection with social and economic goals, seeing planetary boundaries and human development as mutually dependent (Raworth, 2017; Swilling, 2020).

Against the backdrop of this debate, the second part of this chapter is dedicated to the environmental content of Agenda 2030. Studying the weight given to environmental concerns on the global agenda begins with identifying the SDGs that are crucial for a transition to environmentally salient sustainability. There is a broad consensus that the environmental core of Agenda 2030 consists of SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water) and SDG 15 (Life on land) (eg [Folke et al, 2016](#)). These green goals interact with other SDGs in positive and negative ways, either helping to boost ecosystems or compromising other concerns ([Bowen et al, 2017](#); [Nilsen, 2020](#)). For example, environmental synergies between SDG 13 and SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy) are emphasized in the context of renewable energy promotion (eg [Wackernagel et al, 2017](#)), depending on the energy sources, the expansion of energy infrastructure can also result in a trade-off with climate change mitigation, hence compromising environmental concerns ([Bowen et al, 2017](#): 91).

Like SDG 7, several SDGs can be expected to have environmental synergies and trade-offs, in particular, as shown later in this chapter, with SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) ([Le Blanc, 2015](#); [Bowen et al, 2017](#); [Nilsen, 2020](#)). The goals that are relevant for an environmentally sound implementation of Agenda 2030, in particular, are SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals). Empowering cities is increasingly seen as a straightforward approach to realizing sustainability on the ground ([Bansard et al, 2017](#); [Kosovac et al, 2020](#)). Likewise, multi-stakeholder partnerships have become mainstream implementation mechanisms for attaining the SDGs. However, the latter's effectiveness is increasingly being called into question ([Kalfagianni et al, 2020](#)).

The [third](#) and [final part](#) of this chapter introduces the diverse chapters of this volume. Each chapter focuses on one of the abovementioned SDGs, explaining environmental synergies and trade-offs with other goals. It has been argued that raising living standards is compatible with green growth, but the chapters demonstrate inevitable tensions between the different dimensions of sustainability. As a transition to environmental sustainability is overdue, this chapter and volume aim to bring forward informed debates on alternative and innovative forms of governance that exist and deserve more research attention.

1.1 Prioritizing or balancing environmental protection?

The preamble of Agenda 2030 highlights that the SDGs are 'integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the

economic, social and environmental’ (UN, 2022). Agenda 2030 hence takes up the Brundtland Commission’s three pillars concept. Emphasizing the need to integrate the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development, the World Commission on Environment and Development’s (WCED) report *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987) laid the groundwork for the landmark Rio Earth Summit and the adoption of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, and to the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in 1992 (Hajer et al, 2015).

While the three pillars concept has prevailed in the Rio process for the last three decades, development practice has continued to be dominated by the economic growth paradigm, giving little or no attention to environmental concerns. The Human Development Index (HDI) was created in 1990 to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone (UNDP, 1990). Still, the most recent Human Development Report ranks high-polluting countries as best in development (Norway, Ireland, Switzerland) (UNDP, 2020). Only one of eight MDGs was dedicated to the environment (UN, 2015). Hence, using an integrated approach was far from self-evident in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the SDGs. Moreover, on the positive side, there was a surprising demand for universal goals that would apply to all countries (Donald and Way, 2016; Sachs, 2017).

Prior to the adoption of Agenda 2030, a number of environmental scientists called for abandoning the three-pillar concept in favour of an approach ‘that meets the needs of the present while safeguarding Earth’s life-support system, on which the welfare of current and future generations depends’¹ (Griggs et al, 2013: 306; see also Elder and Olsen, 2019). In this vein, developed countries insisted that the SDGs take greater account of the environmental dimension of sustainability compared to the MDGs (Kamau et al, 2018; Elder and Olsen, 2019). By contrast, stakeholders, especially from developing countries, emphasized in the negotiation process that planetary boundaries and human development are mutually dependent. They welcomed Agenda 2030’s overcoming of ‘the environmental bias that plagued the latter years of the Commission on Sustainable Development’ (Bernstein, 2017: 223).

Fukuda-Parr and McNeill (2019: 9–10) explain that the North/South divide regarding the weight given to environmental concerns in the Agenda 2030 negotiations was related to political settings rather than only to discrepancies between developed and developing countries. The MDG follow-up process was dominated by donor countries. Think tanks, particularly from the UK and the US, were prominent in producing analyses and organizing discussion events on a ‘Post-2015 Development Agenda’ (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019: 10). By contrast, the Rio+20 conference was hosted by Brazil, and in this context Colombia initiated the idea of the SDGs (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019: 10).

The constituency and many of the policy makers in the Rio process were from the environmental community, including environmental ministries, academics, activists, think tanks and business. These actors ensured that the process leading to the SDGs was not perceived as donor driven (Kamau et al, 2018; Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). In response to concessions made by the environmental community, nevertheless, Sachs (2017: 2580) criticizes Agenda 2030, from an environmental perspective, for falling behind Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit by failing to acknowledge the physical limits of growth. There is no mention anywhere in Agenda 2030 of planetary boundaries.

As Gupta and Vegelin (2016: 440) point out, Agenda 2030 has a rhetorical commitment to ‘sustainable development’ (mentioning it 85 times), but does not mention ‘inclusive development’. These authors find that, while Agenda 2030 succeeds in integrating economic development and social well-being, it fares less well in respect to ecological viability. Sharpening this point, Brühl (2018) argues that the SDGs serve neither the development nor the environmental agenda. As will be discussed later, the SDGs stick to a vision of economic development serving society in a context of unlimited growth. The focus is on technology transfer and scientific solutions to address environmental problems (Braunmühl, 2017; Sachs, 2017). The integrative nature of Agenda 2030 is supposed to address interactions, in theory, but the complexity of the systems involved, limited knowledge and competing interests challenge its implementation in reality. Synergies and trade-offs between the SDGs are unavoidable and become most obvious in how subtargets were defined, as outlined later in this chapter for the environmental dimension of each goal.

The SDGs are not legally binding. No sanctions and few formal mechanisms are in place to ensure that targets and outcomes are achieved (Bowen et al, 2017: 93). On the one hand, flexibility has enabled broad participation and support for the SDGs (Gupta and Nilsson, 2017). On the other hand, there is a risk of less attention being given to the environmental dimension in particular. Governments have already been shown to prioritize economic and social over environmental goals (Tosun and Leininger, 2017; Forestier and Kim, 2020). While some speak of a bottom-up approach (eg Gupta and Nilsson, 2017; Forestier and Kim, 2020), others criticize the ‘cockpit-ism’ of Agenda 2030, ‘the illusion that top-down steering by governments and intergovernmental organizations alone can address global problems’ (Hajer et al, 2015: 1652). Although this is essentially relevant, only a few scholars are explicit about which SDGs are environmentally significant in respective debates.

1.2 Environmental content of Agenda 2030

The implementation of all SDGs is of relevance to the environment (Elder and Olsen, 2019), but only a few goals and subtargets explicitly consider

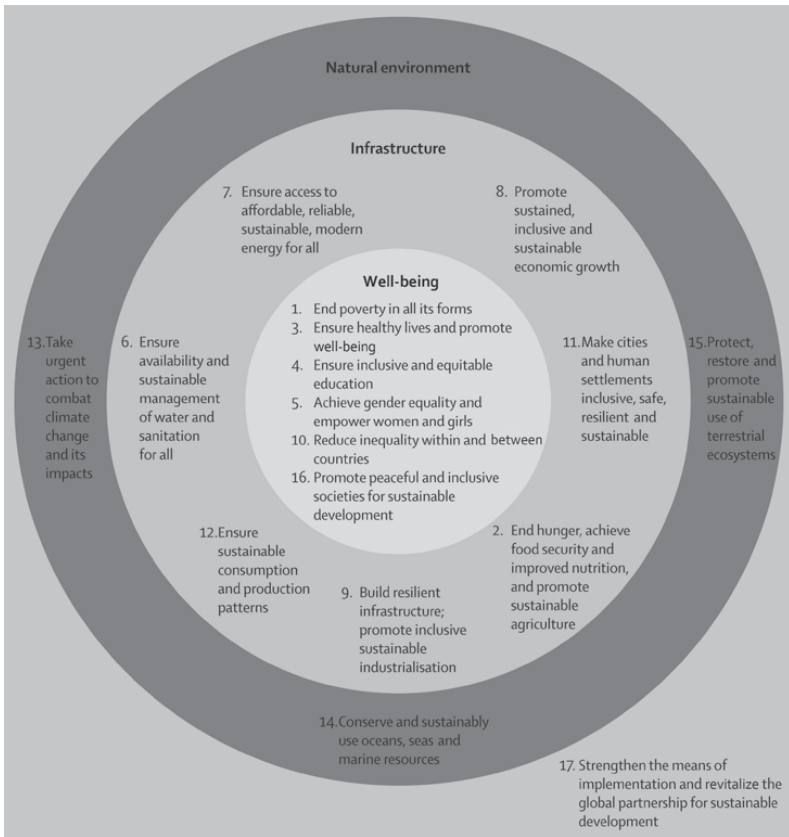
Figure 1.1: The global goals for sustainable development

Source: Folke et al (2016). Published under the terms of CC BY-NC 4.0.

biosphere protection. So, which SDGs constitute the environmental dimension of Agenda 2030? Folke et al (2016) provide the most popular SDG categorization according to Brundtland's three pillars concept. They consider SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water) and SDG 15 (Life on land) to demonstrate the biosphere. Their tripartite figure became famous as the wedding cake model (see Figure 1.1) (Elder and Olsen, 2019: 72), where the base layer consists of the four environmental SDGs, covered by a middle layer of society and a top layer of the economy (Folke et al, 2016). On the one hand, Folke et al emphasize the artificiality and arbitrary nature of the distinction between natural and social systems and, on the other hand, they argue that the global ecological system integrates 'all living beings and their relationships, humans and human actions included, as well as their dynamic interplay with the atmosphere, water cycle, biogeochemical cycles and the dynamics of the Earth system as a whole' (Folke et al, 2016: 1).

Folke et al's article had been preceded by Waage et al's (2015) SDG figure, which consists of three concentric circles (Figure 1.2). Here, only SDGs 13–15 represent the natural environment; these three goals form the

Figure 1.2: Sustainable Development Goals



Source: [Waage et al \(2015\)](#). Open access article published under the terms of CC BY.

outer circle surrounding the economic and social goals (except for SDG 17: discussed later). Several authors consider these three SDGs as ‘the green targets’ ([Bengtsson et al, 2018: 1539](#)), and every categorization has assigned these three goals to the environmental dimension of Agenda 2030. By contrast, however, there is no consensus on SDG 6 being an environmental goal, as suggested by Folke et al. At the same time, there is no explicit controversy. Scholars tend to discuss the SDGs in silos. There are separate debates for each policy field, ranging from contradictory language to respect of planetary boundaries.

SDG 6 itself has a primary focus on expanding infrastructure to ‘achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking’ (target 6.1) and ‘adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all’ (target 6.2). The goal very much follows the wording of MDG 7.C, which aimed to ‘halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

and basic sanitation' by 2015. While infrastructure was expanded and MDG 7.C was even accomplished years ahead of schedule, the environmental performance of this goal was particularly poor (UN, 2015). Not classifying SDG 6 as an environmental goal can be seen as an acknowledgement of this neglect. However, in addition to expanding water access, SDG 6 now aims to improve 'water-use efficiency ... and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity' (target 6.4.), to implement 'integrated water resources management at all levels' (target 6.5) and to 'protect and restore water-related ecosystems' (target 6.6). Hence, it makes sense to consider SDG 6 as a core biosphere and hence green goal of Agenda 2030, despite potentially ambiguous subtargets (Elder and Olsen, 2019).

In addition to SDGs 6 and 13–15, a range of publications categorize SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) as an environmental goal (Elder and Olsen, 2019: 71; Hickel, 2019: 874). Target 12.2 sets targets on production and consumption patterns including 'sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources'. Although the goal deals with efficiency improvements rather than sufficiency in the sense of self-limitation and renunciation (Sachs, 2017: 2581; Hagedorn and Wilts, 2019: 124;), SDG 12 clearly focuses on biosphere protection. In the context of this goal, several scholars have pointed out that sustainable consumption and production (SCP) has suffered from being addressed only as an add-on (Bengtsson et al, 2018). However, with Agenda 2030, actors in many areas now have to work with SCP-related targets under their goals. SDG 12 is the most connected to other goals through subtargets (14 other goals in total: see Le Blanc, 2015: 180).

Following Le Blanc (2015: 181, 182), SDG 12 is most strongly linked to SDG 4 (Quality education) and further to SDG 5 (Gender equality). Target 12.8 wants 'people everywhere (to) have the relevant information and awareness for ... lifestyles in harmony with nature'. However, there is no explicit mention of nature or the environment in SDG 4. By contrast, target 5a states: 'Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws' (Gunawan et al, 2020; UN SDG, 2022). Hence, only SDG 12 and SDG 5 constitute environmentally relevant goals on the basis of their subtargets.

Moreover, Sachs (2017: 2575) and Wackernagel et al (2017: 518) consider SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) as an environmental goal. In total, Sachs names SDG 11, 12 (like Elder and Olsen, 2019, and Hickel 2019), 13, 14 and 15 as the 'five goals to ecological vulnerability', while excluding SDG 6 (in line with Waage et al, 2015, but different from Folke et al, 2016, and others). SDG 11 sets targets for enhancing the quality of life by providing access to open and green spaces for all, sustainable transport systems, sustainable urbanization, sustainable human settlement planning and

improved air quality and waste management within sustainable and resilient cities (UN, 2022). Urbanization has significant impacts on the environment, and cities are at the frontline of global change (Kosovac et al, 2020). Cities and local governments have an underestimated potential in improving the health of citizens (SDG 3), and bring to the fore inequalities (SDG 10) in global and national contexts (Koch, 2020). In consequence, Kosovac et al (2020) find that cities are not only an ‘an environmental affair’ but play a central role in development. SDG 11 is hence not a green goal per se but is relevant to an environmentally sound implementation of Agenda 2030. Although this is also true of SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), this latter goal does not include any reference to nature or the environment. Accordingly, no authors were found who consider SDG 16 an environmental goal.

Wackernagel et al (2017) provide a list of seven ‘resource relevant goals’. Besides SDGs 6 and 11–15, these authors name SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy). Similar to SDG 6, SDG 7 is primarily focused on infrastructure expansion for ‘universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services’ (target 7.1), while increasing ‘the share of renewables in the global energy mix’ (target 7.2). However, renewable energy production does not necessarily mean protection of natural resources. Biomass-based energy, if grown on deforested land, may have a higher carbon footprint than fossil fuels (SDG 13). In addition, bioenergy productivity is widely assumed to counteract food security (SDG 2) through land competition (Nilsson et al, 2016: 321). Efforts to accelerate SDG 7 through modern agriculture ultimately impact the environment (UNEP, 2020). Even worse, using coal to improve energy access would accelerate climate change and acidify the oceans, undermining environmental sustainability (SDGs 13 and 14), in addition to impairing social well-being by exacerbating damage to health from air pollution (disrupting SDG 3) and so on (see also Nilsson et al, 2016; Nilsen, 2020). In contrast to SDG 6, there is no consideration of scarce resources and environmental restoration in SDG 7. Hence, this goal should not be categorized as a green goal per se but as environmentally relevant due to synergies and trade-offs.

Finally, Gupta and Vegelin (2016: 441–2) provide the longest list, with a total of 11 SDGs, for which they identify environmental subtargets: SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDGs 6–8 (Decent work and economic growth) and 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) and again SDGs 11–15. In addition to the scholars mentioned before, Gupta and Vegelin record that target 1.4 aims for ‘ownership and control over land and ... natural resources’. Target 2.4 mentions the need to ‘increase (agricultural) productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality’. However, Agenda 2030 does not require biosphere protection

as a necessary condition to accomplish SDGs 1 and 2. Therefore, while the two goals should not be classified as green goals, at least SDG 2 should be considered as highly environmentally relevant through its subtarget 2.4 and potential trade-off with the green goals (Breitmeier et al, 2021).

SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) is the goal that has caused most debates regarding its environmentally destructive impact (Hickel, 2019; Nilsen, 2020). The goal calls for both ‘sustained’ and ‘sustainable’ economic growth and employment. Developing countries insisted on headline goals of economic growth (SDG 8) in combination with industrialization (SDG 9) (Elder and Olsen, 2019: 77). Target 8.1 is the only one with a specific numerical objective. On the one hand, it defines per capita economic growth of ‘at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries’. On the other hand, target 8.4 aims to ‘improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation’ (UN, 2022). Considering this latter subtarget, Gupta and Vegelin (2016: 441–2) argue that SDG 8 serves environmental protection. By contrast, Hickel (2019: 875) calculates that the defined minimum growth rate translates into aggregate global GDP growth of 3 per cent per year. If the global economy grows at such a rate, so he argues, the world would need to achieve emissions reductions of 4 per cent and a decoupling (or decarbonization) of 7.29 per cent per year. Otherwise, it would not be possible to keep global warming to well below 2 °C above preindustrial levels, as defined by the Paris Agreement (Hickel, 2019: 882). Hickel outlines that such decoupling is not feasible on a global scale. In consequence, he demands that target 8.1 on GDP growth be removed (Hickel, 2019: 881). Therefore SDG 8 should definitely not be considered a green goal, but it is highly relevant in terms of environmental trade-offs.

In SDG 9, ‘sustainable industrialization’ (target 9.2) and ‘increased resource-use efficiency’ (target 9.4) recognize the concept of limited ecospace (Gupta and Vegelin, 2016: 440). However, developing countries successfully advocated a soft formulation here (Elder and Olsen, 2019: 77), and target 9.2 aims to ‘significantly raise industry’s share of employment and gross domestic product in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries’. Hence, GDP growth, defined by SDG 8, should be primarily industrial (Hickel, 2019: 874). Biosphere protection is at best a secondary goal, as SDG 9 does not recognize planetary boundaries. SDG 9, especially in combination with SDG 8, becomes highly environmentally relevant in regard to trade-offs.

Finally, there is SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals), which is the only goal outside of the circle in Waage et al’s (2015) figure. For Folke et al (2016), it is considered an integrative goal that forms the middle axis of their ‘wedding cake’. SDG 17 considers mainly economic means for the implementation

of Agenda 2030 and policy coherence for ‘global macroeconomic stability’ (target 17.14). [Hickel \(2019: 882\)](#) highlights that target 17.19 states: ‘By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that *complement* gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries’ (emphasis added). The term ‘complement’ here reveals that GDP remains the dominant indicator of progress.

Target 17.7 aims to ‘promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed’ (UNSDG, 2022). However, countries may also choose environmentally destructive technologies. As in the case of SDG 11, it is therefore crucial for the environment how SDG 17 is implemented. Both goals are particularly relevant for an environmentally sound implementation of Agenda 2030.

In sum, four green goals constitute the core of the environmental content of Agenda 2030: SDGs 6, 13–15 ([first part of this volume](#)). In addition, through their subtargets, there are the goals that consider environmental trade-offs and synergies: SDGs 5, 7, 8 (and 9) and 12 ([second part of this volume](#)). Finally, two goals that are especially relevant for an environmentally sound implementation of Agenda 2030 – SDGs 11 and 17 – also need to be considered ([third part of this volume](#)) (see [Table 1.1](#)).

1.3 Organization of this volume

The previous section made it clear that the SDGs are far from redefining an economic paradigm based on a ‘safe operating space’ ([Rockström et al, 2009](#)) and from advocating a cultural change towards cooperative economics and politics for the commons ([Braunmühl, 2017](#); [Sachs, 2017](#)). Governments

Table 1.1: The environmental content of Agenda 2030

Environmental SDGs (the green goals)	SDGs with environmental trade-offs and synergies	SDGs relevant for an environmentally sound implementation
SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation	SDG 2 Zero hunger	SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities
SDG 13 Climate action	SDG 5 Gender equality	SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals
SDG 14 Life below water	SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy	
SDG 15 Life on land	SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth	
	SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production	

have mandated the United Nations to follow up, monitor and review all commitments related to sustainable development, as well as to mobilize means of implementation. The 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development created the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to orchestrate all efforts, replacing the CSD (Ocampo and Gómez-Arteaga, 2016).

While many scholars are currently busy discussing indicators to articulate goal achievements and rank countries' efforts towards sustainability (for a critique see Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019), this volume focuses on the Agenda's environmental content and takes a critical account of sustainability governance over the last few decades. The aim is to provide a political science introduction to the most relevant topics of global environmental governance. To facilitate access to the topics, chapters of this volume are each followed by an interview with the authors. These interviews were conducted by master's students. In addition, the authors gave public lectures on their chapters and engaged in discussion. The recordings of these lectures are available online.²

The book is divided into three sections. The **first part** deals with the green goals, that is, SDGs 6 and 13–15. **Chapter 2** starts with climate action, as this is the most institutionalized field of global environmental governance. Jens Marquardt and Miranda Schreurs outline interlinkages between SDG 13 and the Paris Agreement on climate change. They demonstrate that both recognize that climate change and development need to be addressed together not only to avoid harmful trade-offs and high costs, particularly for poorer countries, but also to exploit the benefits that come from strengthening these linkages. On a more critical note, in **Chapter 3** Daniela Kleinschmit et al link discourses on 'life on land' (SDG 15) to questions of change in governance arrangement since the Rio Summit in 1992. They reveal and criticize dominant 'selling nature to save it' storylines, especially, with regard to Global North/South asymmetries.

In **Chapter 4**, Alice B.M. Vadrot continues to outline developments regarding 'life below water' (SDG 14). She shows that, although SDG 14 precedes SDG 15 in Agenda 2030, ocean governance is less institutionalized compared to biodiversity and forest governance. Vadrot shows how SDG 14 builds on previous efforts to negotiate a new legally binding instrument for the protection and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). Her chapter uses the BBNJ case to demonstrate how different principles, norms and legal systems that are applied to different maritime zones and marine resources continue to challenge the protection of the ocean. Following this, in **Chapter 5** Manuel Fischer et al discuss the development of water sustainability principles and related institutions and actors since the 1992 International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin. The output from this conference, the Dublin

Declaration, was presented at the Rio Earth Summit a few months later that year, where the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted. The authors use three case studies in Bolivia, Ecuador and Switzerland to demonstrate that global water management (SDG 6) has both synergies and trade-offs with climate action (SDG 13). Their chapter outlines types of innovative governance arrangements that local municipalities are using to sustainably address water and climate issues in the Global North and South.

The **second part** of the book contains chapters on the SDGs with subtargets that signify environmental synergies and trade-offs. Here, Lyla Mehta et al look at water (SDG 6) too, while outlining linkages to access to land and food (SDG 2) and reducing inequality (SDG 10). The authors argue for a reframing of the debate concerning production processes, waste and food consumption while proposing alternative strategies to improve land and water productivity, putting the interests of marginalized and disenfranchised groups upfront. Mehta et al highlight that land and water rights often go hand in hand, and are marked by gender, caste, racial and other exclusions. In **Chapter 7**, Sandra Schwindenhammer and Lena Partzsch demonstrate the robustness of food security in conjunction with paradigms of productivism and technological innovation in global agri-food governance. With the fourth subtarget, SDG 2 (Zero hunger) requires ecosystem protection, while there is no commonly used indicator yet for monitoring. In consequence, SDG 2 is likely to invoke multiple synergies and trade-offs with the green goals of Agenda 2030. In a similar vein, in **Chapter 8**, Nopenyo E. Dabla and Andreas C. Goldthau note that accelerating SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy) by increasing the share of renewables in the global energy mix would mitigate climate change and, hence, increase environmental sustainability. At the same time, the authors also show caution against some forms of energy production such as biomass-based renewables may counteract climate mitigation efforts (SDG 13) if grown on deforested land. In addition, biomass-based energy expansion increases competition for land with agriculture and nature.

In **Chapter 9**, Ekaterina Chertkovskaya problematizes SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) which contradicts the green targets due to the impossibility of decoupling GDP growth from material and energy throughput. Her chapter also pays attention to some of the ways in which growth is expected to be achieved, such as expansion of industrial activity (SDG 9). In **Chapter 10**, Sherilyn MacGregor and Aino Ursula Mäki present a critical assessment of how objectives of ecofeminism and gender equality (SDG 5) are articulated in Agenda 2030. Their chapter outlines risks and possibilities associated with linking developmental and environmental goals with the pursuit of gender. Following an ecofeminist interrogation, the authors suggest that rectifying gender injustice requires

both an intersectional approach and political goals for commoning care work to redress the structural dimensions of gendered and racialized inequality. In [Chapter 11](#), Sylvia Lorek et al critically analyse the notion of sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12). While much of the debate about sustainable consumption and production has revolved around efficiency and technological innovation, less attention has been given to the dimension of social innovation, such as how social power relations and actor roles are changing (or could change) in the process of making consumption and production more sustainable.

Finally, the [third part](#) of this volume is about the relevant goals for an environmentally sound implementation of Agenda 2030. It looks at the role that cities (SDG 11) and partnerships (SDG 17) might play as incubators of scalable and transferable social innovations. In [Chapter 12](#), Anna Kosovac and Daniel Pejic emphasize governance pressure to create an urban focus in Agenda 2030. Agenda 21 (adopted in 1992) had already stated that ‘by the turn of the century, the majority of the world’s population will be living in cities’ (para 7.3) and ‘urban settlements, particularly in developing countries, are showing many of the symptoms of the global environment and development crisis ... if properly managed can develop the capacity to ... improve the living conditions of their residents and manage natural resources in a sustainable way’. Kosovac and Pejic highlight, however, that the most common theme aligned with city mentions in UN documents since Rio is not the environment. They discuss the intricacies of SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), and the goal’s intersections with other SDGs. In [Chapter 13](#), Montserrat Koloffon Rosas and Philipp Pattberg explain that SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) calls for partnerships as the main vehicle of delivering sustainable development globally. Empirically focusing on partnerships that work between SDG 13 (Climate action) and SDG 15 (Life on land), their chapter scrutinizes synergies and conflicts between partnerships working in different fields, analyses the level of integration of development interests in environmental partnerships and suggests avenues for governance reform.

The volume concludes with a synthesis chapter that highlights the prevailing, but controversial perception of the environment as a global commodity. Looking at actors and institutions, it outlines the highly fragmented and polycentric landscape of global sustainability governance. Planetary boundaries do not contradict development goals per se. However, innovative and alternative forms of governance that integrate environmental, social and economic goals are limited to voluntary actions. There are alarming signs that governments are generally trading off the environment in their implementation of these goals. Therefore, what comes after the SDGs and whether humans want to continue along chosen paths need to be considered seriously.

Notes

- ¹ Griggs et al reframe the definition of the 1987 Brundtland Report here, which invented the three-pillar concept. The original definition is: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987: 41).
- ² The authors gave public lectures on their chapters and engaged in discussion with students. The recordings of these lectures are available online at www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHT9ScVgSX3mnVpPFkPwekHloNVb-WOPu [accessed 31 May 2023].

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