

# ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS AND PARAMETERS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE EXAMPLE OF ASTRAKHAN REGION

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## ABSTRACT

Contemporary sociocultural dynamics shows constant renewal of challenges and practices caused by them. As in the case of technological progress, constant development and renewal in social sphere is an attributive, integral feature of modern society. The purpose of our article is to analyze modern factors affecting sustainable development of the territory, to characterize parameters of sustainable development in the assessments of the population of the Astrakhan region, as well as to identify the most risky points that impede achievement of a stable state of the region. On-line survey was chosen as a method for sociological research, the questionnaire for which was developed on the basis of materials from surveys of such European projects as European Social Survey and European Values Survey. The conducted research has shown that most of the parameters of sustainable development of the region are positively reflected in public opinion and attitudes of its inhabitants.

**Keywords:** *sustainable development, safety of society, factors of society destabilization, sociological assessments of sustainable development, sustainable development of Astrakhan region.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, issues of social sustainability have become firmly on the main agenda around the world, since they have a direct impact on social, environmental, political, and personal security. The value of progress and superfast development in economy, environmental management and other areas of life have been replaced in the system of modern priorities by the value of social sustainability. In this case the resources expended do not cause irreversible damage to nature and allow it to be preserved for future generations. From environmental agenda, the topic of sustainable development has expanded to a wide range of economic, socio-political, demographic problems. Currently, the strategy of sustainability in the world is perceived as a combination of actions, approaches, attitudes, and values that can provide a balanced solution to the problems of social, ecological and economic development and preservation of the environment, meeting the needs of the present and future generations. Nowadays achieving sustainable development is determined primarily by solving urgent social problems, improving quality of human life, guaranteeing individual rights and freedoms,

involving civil society in managing its own life, etc. At the same time, practical steps to implement sustainable development policies in the world and in Russia are carried out unevenly. It is associated with different levels of understanding of significance of these changes in society and with economic and political development of the states themselves. To evaluate the level of sustainability of social systems or their elements, monitoring studies of the sustainable development parameters are important for their subsequent comprehensive analysis. Hence the study will be aimed at investigation of the parameters of sustainable development in the Astrakhan region, which is of great geostrategic importance for Russia and the Caspian region. To allocate the main indicators for assessing sustainability, the basic principles of the theory and strategy of sustainable development will be systematized, taking into account its development.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "sustainable development" first received an international sound in the 1987 report "Our

Common Future" at the International Commission on Environment and Development (ICEDD). Its main ideas were also outlined there, which subsequently formed the basis of the concept of sustainable development:

- "Striving to avoid ecological catastrophe and possible self-destruction of mankind;
- Achievement of sustainable development on a human, planetary and global scale with participation of each country in solving their problems as part of the global one;
- Ensuring development of the modern world community so as not to harm living conditions of future generations;
- Ensuring at least a minimum decent standard of living for every inhabitant of the Earth, gradual establishment of the principles of social justice, acceptable consumption standards to achieve sustainable development;
- Development of modern cutting-edge technologies in all directions instead of environmentally harmful ones" [1].

These principles have become the basis of sustainable development strategy, which has been established in all developed countries of the world as the most important imperatives.

The principles of the theory of sustainable development (SD) were laid down in a number of UN policy documents, which in many cases was a response to the concerns expressed in the report "The Limits to Growth. Report to the Club of Rome" on the limits of technological and demographic growth of D. Meadows and his team, made in 1972 in Washington. As you know, Dennis Meadows, on behalf of his mentor, Professor of Applied Mathematics and Cybernetics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) J. Forrester, modeled the development of modern civilization, taking into account five main interdependent variables: population, investment volume, use of non-renewable resources, environmental pollution and production food [2]. The results were disappointing under all twelve simulated scenarios, with the growth rates actual for the 20th century, a resource crisis, as well as a crisis from overpopulation, were inevitable. In these years, the report drew wide resonance, criticism, and numerous recalculations, but despite this, the problem of finding factors for stabilizing civilization on the condition of its constant exponential growth came to the agenda of international community. Subsequently, two more studies by D.L. and D. K. Meadows and J. Randers "Beyond Growth" (1992) and "The Limits to Growth: 30 Years Later" (2002), taking into account the dynamics of the turn of the century and China's development [3]. The idea of "limits to growth" received both its supporters and opponents, but the main result of these reports was to draw attention to the global problems of humanity and the international community and to form a philosophy of

sustainable development as an alternative to the strategy of forced progress. Over the past 50 years, this has given impetus to development of an initial idea, and later a sustainable development strategy, which has found practical application in the developed countries of the world, albeit with different achievements and results.

The idea of sustainable development entered the political agenda of most states in the 90s of the XX century. Policy documents in the field of sustainable development at the international level appeared after the World Environment Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992), which set the course for reducing technological and demographic growth [4], and then at the summit in Johannesburg (2002). The results of these events were disappointing: it was still not possible to slow down development of civilization in key risk-generating areas [5].

After that, development of documents was carried out to regulate certain areas of economy, ecology, population, and others, taking into account the principles of the philosophy of sustainable development through state and public control over business. Key documents in this area were adopted at the UN conferences: 2012 (Rio de Janeiro), 2015 (New York and Paris). The conferences confirmed the course for transition to sustainable development of mankind based on alternative energy, fight against climate change and a low-carbon economy. A significant role in shaping the world outlook was given to education in the interests of SD; a number of meetings within the framework of UNESCO were devoted to this issue [6, 7].

The main parameters of sustainable development were initially related to demography, ecology, economics and human rights. In recent years, with development of information society, as well as globalization of migration processes and conflicts, new factors began to influence stability of society. Their role is beginning to be comprehended and analysed in many countries. Cyberthreats have been on the international agenda since 2011 (UNESCO Code of Ethics), although these issues have been raised at UN, UNESCO and ITU conferences before. The migration factor has become the focus of attention of the EU countries since 2016, when more than 1 million refugees and labour migrants from the Middle East and Africa entered Europe. Thus, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [8] states: "We recognize the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and sustainable development. We also recognize that international migration is a multidimensional reality that is essential for the development of countries of origin, transit, and destination, which requires a coordinated and comprehensive response" [8, section 29].

Analytical review of the adopted documents in the field of SD allows allocating the following main destabilizing factors for modern society:

1. Environmental factor (environmental pollution, disappearance of species and biological resources);

2. Demographic factor (exponential population growth).
3. Economic factor (lack of resources for industrial economy, economic crises);
4. Socio-economic factor (hunger, poverty, high mortality in Asia, Africa, low quality of life)
5. Socio-political factor (inequality in various forms, totalitarian systems in domestic policy, aggressive foreign policy);
6. Socio-cultural factor (lack of basic education, lack of access to cultural heritage; cult of consumption and individualism);
7. Normative factor (absence or lack of guarantee of human rights and freedoms).

In the last decade, the SD agenda also included several issues of security in the field of intercultural interactions related to globalization and migration, which was highlighted in the SD agenda until 2030 [8]. In this regard, two more new ones can be attributed to the destabilizing factors, starting from the 2000s:

8. Multicultural factor (protection of citizens' rights in the context of intercultural transformations, migration processes).
9. Gender factor (ensuring equal rights of men and women, protection from violence, etc.)

In recent decades, such leading international organizations as the UN, the World Bank, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development Countries (OECD), the European Commission, the Scientific Committee on Environmental Issues (SCOPE), and others are actively involved in development of assessing SD effectiveness. Design of modern projects for SD key parameters researching and assessing its effectiveness is diverse.

Based on statistical data on the socio-economic development, cluster analysis allows to identify typical regions, describe their features and capabilities. Clustering makes it possible to form a forecast of the socio-economic development of regions of a certain country and indicate their sustainability for the medium term. This approach avoids the need to carry out calculations for each of the 85 entities separately, and the results obtained can, to one degree or another, be applied to all regions included in certain clusters. [9]

Typologization allows to determine the type of region in terms of GRP (gross regional product) per capita, which makes it possible to improve the strategic planning of the development of the sustainability of the region, taking into account its starting capabilities [10, p. 17].

Another promising approach to study SD parameters is sociological research, though it is rarely used. The main conclusions of scientists are usually only illustrated by certain information obtained in researches in certain areas related to the parameters of sustainable development (for example, medicine, ecology,

education). Comprehensive sociological studies of SD parameters of Russian regions have not been carried out. However, sociological information seems to be one of the most important components of the information base for assessing the sustainability of a territory development. It helps to analyse subjective characteristics of sustainable development of a region, to study social attitudes of population, which can both contribute to and hinder the achievement of sustainability. Finally, sociological research helps localizing "pressure points" of a region development, which need to be worked on to increase potential of its sustainable development.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The method of on-line questioning was chosen as an empirical research method. It was carried out on the Google forms platform. This made it possible to reach the respondents in all districts of the Astrakhan region without direct travel to the studied territories. The research sample is quota; the quota features are gender, age and respondents' place of residence. Thus, a total of 650 respondents were interviewed. The sex and age distribution is presented in the table. The distribution by place of residence is as following: 350 people were interviewed in Astrakhan city, and 300 people in all districts of the Astrakhan region.

**Table. Sample distribution by age and sex**

Age	Total of each age	Men	Women
18-24	111	57	54
25-34	130	65	65
35-44	102	54	58
45-54	127	57	70
55-64	107	41	66
65+	73	21	52
Total	650	295	365

In compiling the survey questionnaire, the materials of the European Social Survey and European Values Survey were used for the purpose of subsequent comparison of the data.

### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

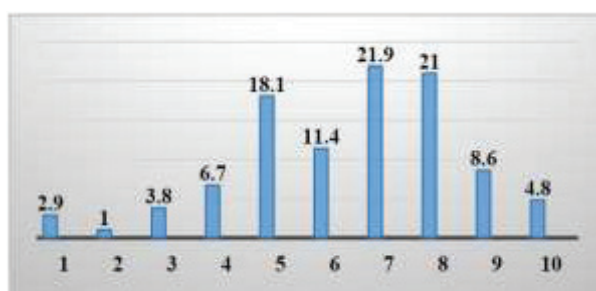
The region of the South of Russia and the Northern Caspian region, as well as the territory of the Astrakhan region acts as a kind of mirror of the current changes in the world, since various technological structures, multicultural traditions, migration flows, and unique climatic conditions are concentrated here. The study of this region from the standpoint of assessing its sustainability and social security is important due to the fact that it finds itself in the zone of vital and political interests of various forces and states.

One of the important aspects of region sustainable development studying is sociological diagnosis of SD parameters of society and their reflection in opinion and attitudes of the local population. For this purpose, a

sociological research of Astrakhan region population was carried out. The study was conducted in 2020-early 2021. The following SD parameters were selected for assessment: 1) health care; 2) environmental issues; 3) interaction with immigrants and relationships in local communities; 4) the socio-economic situation in the region as a whole.

Considering the socio-economic situation in the Astrakhan region, the overwhelming majority of the region's residents (69.7%) are not satisfied with the current state of affairs. Every fifth Astrakhan citizen is rather satisfied and only 2.8% are completely satisfied with the situation in the socio-economic sphere of the region.

The next indicator is associated with assessment of the socio-economic situation. It should be noted here that against the background of the population's dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the socio-economic sphere, the level of satisfaction with their lives is quite high. The scale of rivalry-cooperation, developed by Chinese scientists from the Institute of Contemporary International Relations of Tsinghua University under the leadership of Y. Xueting was applied to assess the level of satisfaction [11, p. 263], in which: 1-2 - dissatisfaction with life; 3-4 - low life satisfaction; 5-6 - average life satisfaction (neither good / bad); 7-8 - high satisfaction with life; 9-10 full satisfaction with life. Hence more than half of Astrakhan residents (56.3%) are now highly satisfied with their lives. Thus, we can say that the economic component is not so important for respondents. We might assume that high level of satisfaction with lives can be associated with spiritual, traditional values prevail. (see the figure 1).



**Figure 1. Satisfaction with respondents' live (%): 1 - completely dissatisfied, 10 - highly satisfied.**

One of the basic vital values for a person is health and his assessment of health is influenced by many objective and subjective factors: from the psychophysical state and the quality of the service provided by medical institutions to weather conditions. In general, residents of the region assess their health quite positively or rather positively (83.7%). Such a positive assessment is surprising given the critical level of the sanitary and epidemiological situation (coronavirus infection COVID-19 and seasonal diseases) and the unfavourable environmental situation in the region. Only every tenth resident of Astrakhan notes that he has serious illnesses or is not satisfied with his health.

Developed in 2011, the Comprehensive Public Program "Population Health" and the national project "Healthcare" (2015) prioritize the opportunity for each person to receive high-quality professional assistance on time, but as a study showed, over the past year, 37.9% of Astrakhan residents could not get medical help. The reasons are very different, among the top leaders are:

- a long-term appointment with a doctor became an obstacle in obtaining services for half of the respondents (52.5%) among those who indicated having troubles with medical help;
- absence of a necessary doctor of narrow specialization was a problem for every fifth Astrakhan citizen (22.5%) who happened not to get medical help;
- 12,5% of people who didn't get medical help were not being able to pay for it.

Serious concern is also caused by such respondents' answers as: "I called a doctor at home for several days, but the doctor did not come," "the ambulance did not come to call," "they did not receive sick leave". The percentage of answers is not great, but the trend is alarming.

The crucial thing for health is not only receiving quality medical services, but also a healthy lifestyle. That factor mostly depends on the person himself: he himself forms his living space, based on the understanding of a "healthy lifestyle". A significant part of Astrakhan residents (68.7%) claim to lead a healthy lifestyle.

The federal project "Strengthening Public Health" provides consultations on proper nutrition, prevention and cessation of bad habits such as smoking, which can be obtained on the basis of polyclinics. The national project supports corporate health promotion programs: in 2020 they were implemented in 300 companies. Model programs for enterprises suggest revising the menu of cafeterias and canteens, excluding unhealthy foods and drinks from sale, and providing access to fresh fruits and healthy snacks [12].

Vegetables and fruits are the most important part of a healthy diet as the basis for a healthy lifestyle. Both in fresh and processed form, they maximally enrich the body with useful trace elements, fibre, minerals, and vitamins. In other words, they give "green, vital" energy to our body, at the same time, an active lifestyle and proper nutrition allows you to maintain health for a long time. This postulate is clear to everyone, but how do Astrakhan people follow it? The study showed that there are no Astrakhan residents who do not eat vegetables and fruits. But vegetables (excluding potatoes) and fruits are consumed daily by only 41.7% and 36.5%; weekly - 47.9% and 47.4%, respectively. It should be noted that WHO recommends: "A daily intake of at least 400 g, or five servings, of fruits and vegetables helps to ensure a daily intake of fibre" [13].



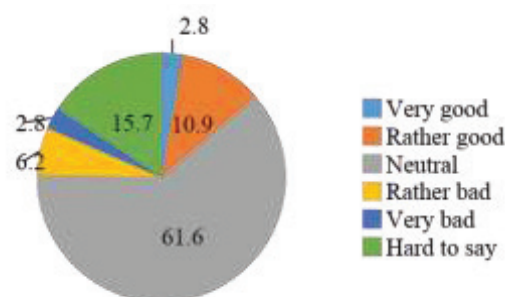
Another aspect of a healthy lifestyle is smoking cessation. WHO statistics show that tobacco kills more than 8 million people annually, while more than one million people die from secondhand smoke [14]. As the study showed, the Astrakhan region can be classified as a low-smoking region, only 14.7% smoke every day, 61.6% have never smoked and 15.6% have given up this addiction.

For sustainable planetary development, while meeting the various needs of a modern person (including the need for professional realization), it is necessary to take care not only and not so much about socio-economic progress, but about the environment, which affects both life of each person, and society as a whole. Nowadays humanity, progress, development, and the environment are closely interrelated due to the anthropogenic processes [15]. That's why it's important to study the people's attitude towards the ecological issues. Almost a third (30.3%) of Astrakhan residents found it difficult to answer what their priority is: economic growth and new jobs or environmental protection. For a quarter of the respondents (26.1%), economic growth and new jobs are a priority, and for a significant part of the population (43.6%), environmental protection is important, even if this will delay economic growth and lead to a reduction in jobs.

In addition to the perception of environmental issues, environmental mental sets of the population are quite important points for assessing the SD potential of the region. The obtained data allows us to make optimistic forecasts regarding this parameter: the majority (56.8%) of the population is ready to sacrifice part of their income for the sake of saving the environment; 63.4% believe that even an ordinary person can contribute to improving the environmental situation and a significant part of Astrakhan residents (63.1%) do not intend to give up these actions, even if the rest do not.

The interrelationship between people creates a special microclimate of the local community, which determines the comfort of living in a particular territory. Interfaith and interethnic interactions are the basis for balanced development of society, social stability, economic growth of the region, human security, regardless of his racial, ethno-confessional affiliation, social status, economic status [16]. In order to study the way how these interrelationship flow in Astrakhan region we asked people who they don't want to have as neighbours. So, for residents of the Astrakhan region, the neighbourhood with drug addicts (91.9%), alcoholics (90%), gypsies (64%) and homosexuals (50.2%) is unacceptable. Only a quarter (26.1%) of Astrakhan residents are intolerant to migrants / foreign workers and would not want to live next to them. Relationships in local communities are as following: respondents are loyal to Jews, (only 7.1% of people would not live in their neighbourhood), to people of other nationalities (6.2%), to Muslims (5.2%), and to Christians (1.9%).

Residents of the region are generally neutral in their assessment of the impact of migrants on the development of Russia (see Figure 3). We believe that these results also contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the region, since it is rather difficult to expect positive assessments on such a sensitive issue. This is due to the rather intensive flows of migration to the Astrakhan region, which entails certain problems similar to those associated with the migration crisis in Western Europe, the United States and other parts of the world. In this regard, even neutral assessments to a certain extent contribute to the formation of tolerant attitudes towards immigrants.



**Figure 2. Influence of migration on Russia.**

To solve the problems of integrating migrants into a new community, it is necessary to develop programs of cooperation in the field of culture that will promote intercultural dialogue and unite different ethnic communities into a single sociocultural continuum, while maintaining their cultural identity. Such programs contribute, getting acquainted with the culture of "one's neighbour", to better understanding of the new contexts of modernity [17, p. 53].

As mentioned above, it is people who create a comfortable microclimate of living space. Relations between people form such a local community in which everyone feels comfortable, i.e. an atmosphere of accomplishment in a psychological, social, and economic sense. When asked about trust in relations with people, the overwhelming majority of Astrakhan residents (79.1%) answered that one should be very careful in relations with people, and only every fifth (18%) believes that the majority of people should be trusted.

Subsequently, we analysed the influence of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents on the obtained results. For this purpose correlation coefficient was calculated for variables measured in ordinal scales, for variables measured in nominal scales, contingency tables were used. The relationship of such characteristics as sex, age, income and place of residence of the respondents was studied.

Summarizing the obtained results, we can say that income is the most influential variable that determines the difference in the estimates of the region SD parameters. Thus, those surveyed with higher incomes assess the situation in the Astrakhan region more

positively, are more satisfied with their health and life in general, they rarely have situations in which they could not receive medical care. Wealthy respondents were less likely to agree with such theses as "it is difficult for a person like them to do something to protect the environment," "many threats to the environment are exaggerated," and also less likely to believe that immigrants have a negative impact on the development of Russia.

Age turned out to be another influential parameter: young respondents more positively assess their state of health (which is quite expected) and their life in general, are more satisfied with the situation in the Astrakhan region. Young people are less likely to believe that it is difficult for them to do something to change the environmental situation in the region and are more likely to share part of their income for environmental needs. In addition, young respondents are less likely to believe that immigrants are causing an increase in crime in Russia.

The sex of the respondents is somewhat less related to the assessment of SD parameters. Thus, women more often than men stated that they were in situations where they could not receive medical care. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to give part of their income to environmental needs, while women are less likely to agree that it is difficult for a person like them to do something to protect the environment.

The most homogeneous results of the study were found among people living in the Astrakhan city and in the districts of the region. Thus, residents of the region districts are less likely to believe that people like them find it difficult to do something to protect the environment, as well as the fact that the threats to the environment are exaggerated.

It is also worth noting that if the issues of health care, ecology and interaction with migrants differ depending on the studied parameters, then the issues of interaction in local communities are rather homogeneous. In particular, most of the questions regarding interpersonal trust and the desire to live closely to certain social groups do not statistically significant differ depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Summing up the results of the study, we can say that, despite the presence of some problematic points, most of the parameters of the region SD development have been positively reflected in public opinion and attitudes of its residents. This allows us to make accurate positive forecasts for the sustainable development of the Astrakhan region.

The analysis of the research variables conjugation showed that the income and age of the respondents significantly affect the assessment of the SD parameters. Young people with high income have the greatest potential for positive assessment of the studied parameters. Thus, in order to increase the efficiency of sustainable development of the Astrakhan region, it is necessary to focus our efforts primarily on the poor

population, as well as on the elderly. It is interesting that the assessment of SD parameters differs slightly depending on the gender and place of residence of the respondents. This allows us to conclude that the potential for sustainable development of the Astrakhan city and districts of the Astrakhan region does not differ significantly.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, complex sociological studies of Russian regions SD parameters have not been carried out, however, the obtained data can be compared with the results of European studies.

Previously, we analysed attitudes towards migrants in Central European countries based on the results of the European Values Study [18]. The findings are generally quite similar to the results of our study. Thus, the negative attitude towards migrants among the population of Central European countries is accumulated primarily among the elderly, less educated, low-income people who are more interested in politics. Our survey data also showed a more positive attitude towards migrants among young people and wealthier respondents.

With regard to satisfaction with their lives, we can say that this indicator is quite high in the South of Russia. According to the results of the survey conducted in Stavropol Territory, 62.9% of residents are satisfied with life to varying degrees (25.3% in full, 37.6 - in part). The assessments of men and women on this issue differ insignificantly. It is possible to note only a higher degree of confidence in the answers in men [19, p. 47]. In Astrakhan this figure is 56.3%.

Environmental protection activities are one of the most important factors for assessing the sustainable development potential of Primorsky Region. The index of the significance of this factor is very high (0.10) [20, p. 206], which confirms the conclusions of our study.

Despite the fact that human health is one of vital importance issue, a healthy lifestyle is not yet ranked first among the needs and values of a person in our society [21, p. 48].

In conclusion it can be noted that:

1. Implementation of the sustainable development strategy faced a number of significant obstacles (both economic and political).
2. It turned out to be an unresolved task for the world community to fulfill the set strategic tasks in full measure.
3. The practice of sustainable development remains relevant in the context of the demographic transition, the development of a high-tech economy, the democratization of political systems in the world community.
4. Sociological support for the study of processes, factors, dynamics of sustainable development makes it

possible to predict unfavourable multifactorial situations and simulate scenarios (socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural, environmental) for solving these problems.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The article was written by a team of authors, each of them took an equal part in the work on the text. L.V. Baeva prepared a literature review on sustainable development issues and contributed to the development of a theoretical model of sociological research. A.V. Grigorev contributed to development of an empirical research plan and was engaged in collection and analysis of primary sociological information. I.S. Bocharnikova also contributed to development of the empirical research plan and processing of its results and was engaged in generalizing the results, drawing conclusions.

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