

# Influence of the 2030 Agenda in the Design of Policies to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural and Urban Contexts

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In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, establishing a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be pursued until 2030, acknowledging the need to adopt a more inclusive and sustainable development model at the global level. The achievement of the SDGs requires a global collective action; however, they must be implemented at the domestic level on a non-binding basis. The adoption of these aims increases tensions, as the pursuit of domestic interests may detract funds from the international commitments for global development. This is especially relevant for countries in the Global South, as they will be unable to reach the proposed goals without the help of more developed countries. In general, the 2030 Agenda lacks rules to reconcile such tensions.

In this Special Issue, we wanted to focus on the articulation of the 2030 Agenda at the domestic level on policies addressing social exclusion in rural and urban contexts, both in countries from the Global North and the Global South. In such contexts, a complex multiactor governance mechanism is required to guarantee the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the policy cycle to avoid the most powerful groups co-opt the process. This democratic governance is especially relevant to effectively address the problems faced by the most vulnerable people and groups in rural and urban areas.

Many elements that define the situation of vulnerability and deprivation that people face occur in relation to and are caused by the characteristics of the place where they live, be it a city or a rural area. It is well known that the rural milieu shows higher levels of poverty, hunger, unemployment, economic stagnation, and inequality, as well as a worse endowment of resources related to health, education, water, and sanitation, just to mention some issues included in different SDGs. Additionally, and according to the United Nations, in 2030, 60% of the population will live in urban areas, especially in developed countries. However, the major shift will take place in developing countries, where the percentage of people living in cities will grow from the current 52% to 57%. Consequently, cities will gain relevance as a space of social exclusion, vulnerability, and inequality; hence, the 2030 Agenda encourages us, in SDG 11, to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. Finally, rural and urban vulnerabilities should not be studied as two separate realities, not only because they share common features, but also because the most deprived people in cities are likely to have migrated from the rural milieu in search of a better life. Thus, they can be regarded as two stages in time and space of a continuum of underdevelopment.

In this Special Issue, we invited scholars to explore questions such as: How is the 2030 Agenda influencing the design of domestic policies dealing with rural and urban poverty and inequality in those countries that are adopting it as an inspiring framework? How is the conflict between global and domestic interests being incorporated in the design of such policies? What elements of the policy design deal with the participation of the most vulnerable local stakeholders in the process? What learnings may be drawn from similar



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experiences of multilevel policy design (e.g., EU directives or EU recommendations) that could be applied to the 2030 Agenda? How and what diffusion models of the 2030 Agenda are being implemented? Most of these questions are still underexplored in the academic literature, in part due to the still recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

The topic attracted the attention of many scholars, and 10 research papers were published after a pertinent review process. Some figures might illustrate the outreach of the Special Issue:

- Scholars from seven different countries participated in this Special Issue, from countries in the Global North, such as the USA [1], Germany [2], Spain [3–8], Poland [5] or Australia [9], to countries in the Global South, such as Malaysia [10] and Colombia [8]. Despite being a small sample, it shows how analyses from institutions in the North are still predominant in the field.
- Regarding the spatial sphere where the studies are focused, 50% of the contributions analyze policies addressed to urban areas [1–4,10], 20% to rural areas [5,8], while the remaining contributions consider their interrelation of effects on both sides [6,7,9]. The attraction of more contributions focused on processes of inequality in urban areas is a sign of renewal in the field, traditionally more centered on issues of poverty in rural areas.
- In regard to the geographic scope of the contributions, half focus their analysis on countries in the Global North [1,3–6] and half on countries in the Global South [2,7–10], showing the deep transformation brought by this agenda to the territorial focus of research on development studies. It has to be determined whether this attention to development issues in the North does not come to the detriment of the interests of the Global South. According to the contributions in this Special Issue, such attention on the Global South could not only be lacking in terms of the research conducted by scholars but also missing cutting-edge themes.
- Considering the facet of the 2030 Agenda under analysis, 30% of the contributions question the influence of the 2030 Agenda as a whole [1,8,10], while the remaining 70% focus on specific SDGs. Within this body of papers, two contributions analyze the influence of all the SDGs [3,6], while the others focus, respectively, on SDG 2 [4], SDG 8 [5], SDG 11 [2] and a mix of certain SDGs [7,9].
- Finally, regarding the methodology, there is a certain bias towards qualitative approaches. Half the contributions are case studies [1–4,8], either individual or comparative, while only 20% are quantitative approaches with more sophisticated techniques such as structural equation modelling [10] or spatial analysis [7]. The remaining 30% also rely on qualitative approaches via content analysis [6,9] or descriptive analyses of indicators [5].

We believe that this Special Issue has shown the diversity of interests and approaches that this topic inspires in academia. The contributions collected here help us to better understand the links between the 2030 Agenda and social exclusion analyzed from a territorial point of view, but they do not cover all areas of the debate. There remain unanswered questions that, in turn, give rise to new questions, especially focused on other elements of the policy cycle, such as its implementation or its monitoring and evaluation. Perhaps it would be appropriate to open a second Special Issue more focused on these lessons, always in rural and urban contexts, and from the point of view of how the 2030 Agenda could contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion.

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