



IDENTITY, TERRITORIES, AND SUSTAINABILITY

*Challenges and Opportunities for Achieving
the UN Sustainable Development Goals*

SALVATORE MONACO

Identity, Territories, and Sustainability

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Identity, Territories, and Sustainability: Challenges and Opportunities for Achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Contents

Foreword	<i>vii</i>
Introduction: Integrating Territorial Identity into SDGs	<i>1</i>
Chapter 1 SDG 1. End Poverty in All Its Forms Everywhere	<i>15</i>
Chapter 2 SDG 2. End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture	<i>25</i>
Chapter 3 SDG 3. Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages	<i>33</i>
Chapter 4 SDG 4. Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All	<i>43</i>
Chapter 5 SDG 5. Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls	<i>51</i>
Chapter 6 SDG 6. Ensure Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All	<i>63</i>
Chapter 7 SDG 7. Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable, and Modern Energy for All	<i>71</i>
Chapter 8 SDG 8. Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment, and Decent Work for All	<i>81</i>
Chapter 9 SDG 9. Build Resilient Infrastructure, Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization, and Foster Innovation	<i>87</i>
Chapter 10 SDG 10. Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries	<i>95</i>

Chapter 11 SDG 11. Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient, and Sustainable	<i>107</i>
Chapter 12 SDG 12. Ensure Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns	<i>117</i>
Chapter 13 SDG 13. Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts	<i>129</i>
Chapter 14 SDG 14. Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas, and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development	<i>137</i>
Chapter 15 SDG 15. Protect, Restore, and Promote Sustainable Use of Terrestrial Ecosystems, Sustainably Manage Forests, Combat Desertification, Halt and Reverse Land Degradation, and Halt Biodiversity Loss	<i>145</i>
Chapter 16 SDG 16. Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All, and Build Effective, Accountable, and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels	<i>157</i>
Chapter 17 SDG 17. Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development	<i>167</i>
Conclusions: Moving Forward with Territorial Identities – Concluding Perspectives	<i>177</i>
Index	<i>189</i>

Foreword

The separation of the environment from its social contexts may be seen at the root of the interlocking social, environmental, and climate crises we face today. With the adoption of Agenda 2030 in 2015, the international community finally acknowledged the need to address questions of the economy, society, and environment in one frame. This acknowledgment has entered international agreements through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030. But what might this mean in practice for different places and for the people living in these places in different parts of the world? As a recent issue on rural sustainability in Europe showed us ([Arora-Jonsson et al., 2023](#)), what sustainability means in one place may be quite different from another. This is where Salvatore Monaco's book on *Identity, Territories, and Sustainability* comes to our aid. The author takes on the arduous and much needed task of getting to the bottom of the relationship between territorial and collective identities, territorial policies, and what that might imply for sustainability.

Territories have been defined as bounded spaces – regulated, policed, and given meaning by the state and people. Territorial policies, including those seeking to promote sustainable development, may be seen as ways of influencing and controlling resources and people in a bounded space. The disregard of peoples, territories, and culture in policy-making in favor of the belief in science and economic development to solve our environmental and social problems are what I have come to see as the blind spots of policy-making. These blind spots lead us to overestimate our ability to do what is right and to act undemocratically without necessarily meaning to do so. Policymakers continue to treat as merely technical matters and decisions that are actually social and political ones and disregard the insight that culture too is politics ([Arora-Jonsson, 2017](#)).

Through the various chapters in his book, Salvatore Monaco brings culture, identity, and everyday relationships back into a discussion on sustainability. He stresses the importance of considering the complex interweaving of social, cultural, political, historical, and biophysical factors in shaping different sustainability trajectories in each place. Drawing on diverse case studies from around the world, the author demonstrates how environmental and social justice concerns have gained prominence in public debates and how territorial policies shape sustainability actions.

Sustainability in policy-making could be both positive and negative. As [Stiernström \(2023\)](#) shows us, defining a policy as sustainable can make it appear “just and good” regardless of what the policy infers and even if this entails the sacrifice of rural territories, such as by mining operations.

Salvatore Monaco's case studies examine diverse sustainability outcomes through the examination of grassroots movements and their role in shaping environmental and social justice discourses. He shows the pitfalls of territorial policies, such as those promoting the "green revolution" in countries in the global South, that disregarded traditional practices and local identities in favor of Western agricultural models. This resulted in the loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation, economic vulnerability, and lasting health problems.

Importantly, the book highlights the importance of taking the natural environment seriously and the differences that arise in different environments in relation to inland water bodies, land, forests, seas, or mountains. He brings attention to the work carried out by people, eco-social work, and championing social justice critical for sustainable territorial development.

As we navigate the many challenges with him, the book brings home to us all the importance of how collaboration and territorial identities can be catalysts for positive change, ushering in an equitable, inclusive, and prosperous future.

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