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## **ESSENCE AND FACTORS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF THE REGION**

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### **Abstract**

*This article summarizes and provides some definitions for the concepts of “sustainability”, “sustainable development”, “socioeconomic sustainability of a region”. Socioeconomic sustainability refers to economic growth, which includes practices that maintain a preferred percentage of development in a region. This “special form of activity of regional development” will be that where the population of a given territory will live better. From a social sustainability perspective, economic sustainability recognizes the impact of production entities on workers and society as a whole. This includes human rights, health, and security, work-life balance, charity, diversity, and equality. The article analyzes the essence of the economic sustainability of a region, examining the main factors, including negative ones, of its economic sustainability because no concept of transition to sustainable development will produce the desired result without taking into account the regional component. It is, therefore, necessary for a region to improve all its components and to make the best use of the factors influencing socio-economic sustainability. The author concludes that the unsustainable development of a region may lead to even greater risks, which will be difficult to manage in the future.*

### **Keywords**

Region, Sustainability, Development, Factor

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## **1. Introduction**

In order to develop a country's economy in a sustainable way, it is necessary to maintain

the stability of the final parameters of the development of production, social and economic indicators not only for the whole country, but also for its regions, and no concept of transition to sustainable development will produce the desired result without taking into account the regional dimension. It requires not only an assessment of the social, economic, and environmental situation of regions but also analysis and diagnosis of the factors influencing these processes.

Sustainable development is also one of the primary goals and priorities of Kazakhstan's national policy. And today, the urgency of increasing economic health is growing and very important. The regions of Kazakhstan are not homogeneous in terms of the current condition, and they also differ in basic parameters' trends of their further development. Some of them have significant economic potential, but due to the social processes underway, including COVID-19, they risk losing their socio-economic sustainability. It is not only Kazakhstan that faces such a threat.

The aim of the study is to determine the essence, identify and analyze the factors affecting the socioeconomic sustainability of a region's development in order to prevent their negative impact on its future development. To this end, it is necessary to study and analyze the basic provisions and approaches for defining the concept of "sustainability", "sustainable development", "socio-economic development of a region" and factors that have both positive and negative effects on socio-economic sustainability.

As is known, there is no common interpretation of the "sustainable development" concept in the literature.

In her scientific work, Uskova T.V. systematized various interpretations of "sustainable development" and highlighted the following main features of sustainable development:

1. Sustainable development is the integrity, security, reliability, and strength of the economic system;
2. Sustainable development is the ability of the economic system to maintain dynamic equilibrium;
3. Sustainable development is the relative continuity and stability of the economic system;
4. Sustainable development is the capacity of the economic system to develop (Uskova, 2009).

The scientific novelty of the study lies in an integrated approach to the study of the specific factors that determine the socioeconomic sustainability of a region's development.

## **2. Literature Review**

A region is a territorial economic system, which is defined as a “whole entity, qualitatively different (higher, better) than the sum of its constituent parts, which must be considered from the point of view of the whole” (Kurnyshev, 2011).

A region can be influenced by various internal and external factors. They can cause both growth in the economy and living standards of the population as well as drop-in basic socioeconomic indicators. Therefore, in order to prevent the negative influence of these factors, it is necessary to ensure “sustainable development of the region”.

As it is known, there is no single generally accepted interpretation of "sustainable development", "sustainable development of the region" in the literature.

Helliwell, J., R. Layard, and J. Sachs identified Sustainable development as a normative concept calling for all societies to balance economic, social, and environmental objectives in a holistic manner (Helliwell et. al., 2015).

According to Justice Mensah, the most frequently cited definition of sustainable development is the definition proposed in the Brundtland Commission report (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). According to this report, sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Justice, 2019).

In literature, there are different definitions of the essence of the socioeconomic sustainability of a region and its development.

Vassilenko V., in his paper *Scientific and Methodological Principles of Formation of Sustainable Development Management System of a Region*, considers “sustainability” as crisis-free (or secure) development of the territory (Vasilenko, 2017).

Seleznev A.Z. defines the concept of “sustainable development” as follows: it is the solution of economic and social issues and the preservation of the resource potential of the environment in order to meet the needs of the future and present generations, emphasizing the need for ongoing management of balanced development (Seleznev, 1999).

Gizatulin Kh.N., Troitsky V.A., view the concept of sustainable development as the ability of the environment to meet human needs (Gizatulin & Troitsky, 1998).

Tsapieva O.K. defines the sustainability of a region as an indicator depends on the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the regional system (Tsapieva, 2010).

Some authors of the pragmatic approach, such as Grekov A.N., define sustainable development as the “improvement of living standards with the stable development of a region, ensuring the economic reproduction and preservation of the natural and moral resources of the whole region” (Grekov, 2015).

The conceptual approach is presented in the works of Kalinchikov M.Yu. In his work *Theoretical and Methodological Principles of a Region's Sustainable Development Concept*, he writes: "Sustainable development is a balanced movement of a region in the development of ecological, economic, social and political spheres towards equilibrium to improve people's lives" (Kalinnikov, 2005).

Skopin A.O., in his paper *Issues of Sustainable Development of the Russian Regions in the Context of Developing Market Relations*, specifies: "Sustainable development of a region is the development of the region, which is characterized by an improved quality of life of the community and which contributes to the expanded reproduction of potentials (Skopin, 2010).

Some authors, for example, Ushvitsky L.I., Vassilyeva N.K., Ushvitsky M.L., in the article *Socioeconomic Sustainability of a Region: Status and Challenges*, argue that, in the present circumstances, the socioeconomic situation and development of regions depend to a large extent on the sustainability of the production, financial, investment and social sectors of the economy (Ushvitsky et. al., 2005).

Other authors, such as Bryachikhin A., in his work *Moscow - the Western Administrative District. 1991-1996*, links the sustainability of a region to the restoration of a normal social, economic and political situation therein (Bryachikhin, 1997).

Petrov V.K., Selivanov S.G., in their academic paper *The Sustainability of the State*, understand the sustainable development of a region as a status when the population can really improve their livelihood, feel the guarantees of stability, confidence in the future of their children (Petrov & Selivanov, 2005).

Loktev Andrey Vladimirovich and Menshchikova Vera Ivanovna view the innovative potential of a region as a necessary condition for its economic development (Loktev & Menshchikova, 2012).

In our view, the following definitions provide a more complete picture of socioeconomic sustainability: 1) Socioeconomic sustainability is the state of the economic and social system with all the resources, taking into account the reduction of risks in production and the stable performance of entities in a given territory; 2) socioeconomic sustainability means a practice that leads to continuous growth of a region's economy, without adversely affecting the social, external, other aspects of society (Rybakov, 2011).

Socioeconomic sustainability takes into account both the current and the future socioeconomic indicators of a region's development. In a given region, it is necessary to improve all its components and to make the best use of the factors influencing socio-economic sustainability.

The economic literature also provides different views on the factors of a region's socio-economic development.

In his doctoral thesis *Economic Sustainability of a Region's Transformative Economic System*, Kretinin V.A., considering the economic sustainability of a region, highlights innovations and investments, financial sustainability, economic efficiency, environmental sustainability, and reproductive complexity as its main components. While the latter component is considered to have an impact on environmental sustainability, investment activity, and economic efficiency (Kretinin, 2007).

In the article *Factors of a Region's Economic Sustainability* by Menshikova V.I., the *economic sustainability of a region* is presented as an immanent category of territorial socio-economic organization. He highlights self-sufficiency as a key factor in the economic sustainability of a region (Menshikova, 2008).

Other authors, like Rosenberg G.S. and Krasnoschekov G.P. when considering the factors of sustainable development, highlight, among all the factors of sustainable development, the need to ensure high rates of economic development for future generations without the threat of resource depletion (Rosenberg & Krasnoschekov, 2007).

Tsomartova L.V., in her article *Factors of Sustainable Development of Regional Socioeconomic Systems*, writes: "Sustainable development means that the regional system ensures a relatively dynamic continuity of its composition and properties while applying at the same time the whole set of complex adaptive reactions of various kinds, aimed at eliminating or maximally limiting various disturbance factors threatening the duration and continuity of existence and acquisition of new qualities" (Tsomartova, 2011).

The level of sustainable development of regional socioeconomic systems is the result of a combination of factors of the external and internal environment of the region that affect and influence the region's economic activities, whether positively or negatively, and determine, for example, its competitiveness (Porter, 1999).

As can be seen, the review of the literature shows that there is no consensus on the factors influencing the socioeconomic development of a region.

### **3. Research Issues**

The regional dimension and the dynamic development of regions have a great influence on the processes of socio-economic transformation in the country.

In Kazakhstan, regional development is uneven. Each region has its own aspects: its own conditions for development and its economic and social potential. Moreover, they differ in the

variety of production and level of resources. All this has led to the uneven development of the regions of Kazakhstan. Since the regional economy is a subsystem of the “national economy” macrosystem, there is a need to ensure the socio-economic sustainability of all regions of the country.

Sustainable socio-economic development in the region will not only yield benefits that bear fruit year after year. There are many short-term advantages that lead directly to profitability. The transition to the sustainable development of the country will be possible only if all regions achieve sustainable development. Developing a strategy for the sustainable development of regions is a complex task. Measuring sustainable development requires systematic monitoring and assessment of the social, economic, and environmental situation, analysis, and diagnosis of the factors influencing these processes (Porter, 1999).

It is important to make better use of existing resources, to find new ways to increase productivity, stability, professionalism, to ensure human resource sustainability. In addition to the components of socioeconomic sustainability, it is influenced by various factors. It is, therefore, necessary for the region to improve all its components, make the best of the factors influencing social and economic sustainability.

#### **4. Methodology**

Materials for writing this article were collected by reviewing articles, conference papers, and other documents available on the Internet. The documents were identified by combined searches using keywords and terms such as sustainable development, economic sustainability, and socioeconomic sustainability. When searching for the materials, we did not set a date limit because there are many definitions that are given at different times. However, attempts were made to use fresh sources of literature to reflect the increasing relevance of the topic. The review included selected materials relevant to the topic in question.

The study used methods of analysis and synthesis, comparative and factor analysis, economic grouping, and generalization.

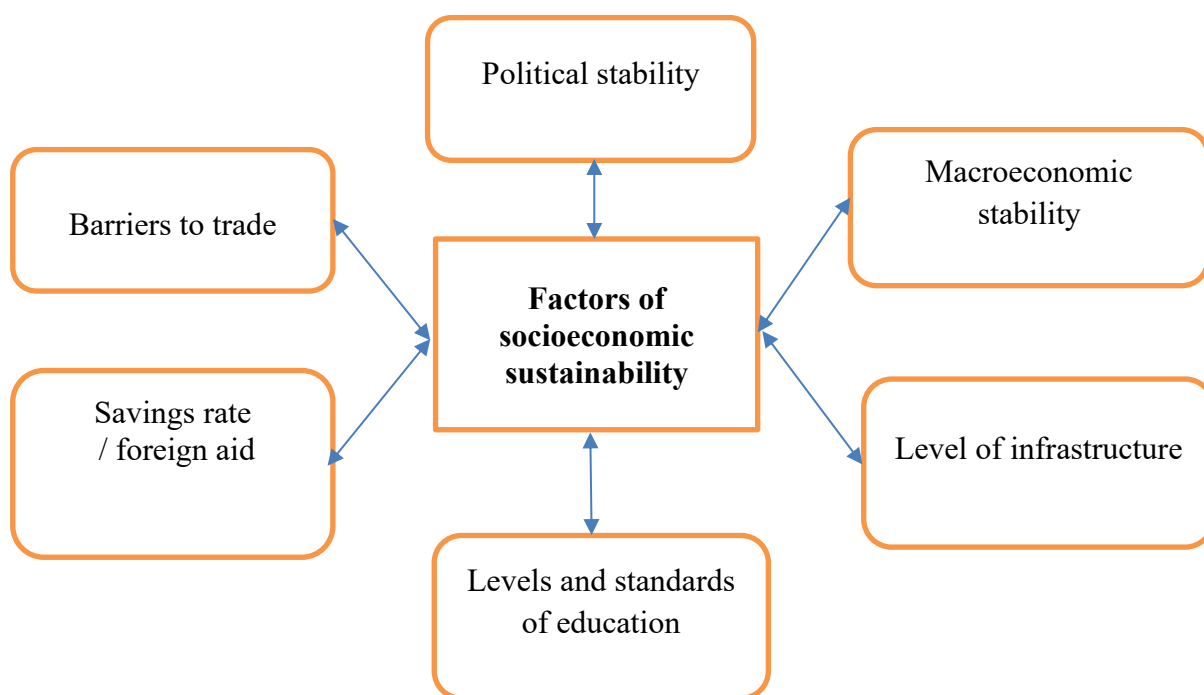
#### **5. Results and Discussions**

Stable socioeconomic sustainability can refer either to the continued success of an economy over time or, more recently, to how an economy performs in a sustainable manner while protecting its social and economic elements.

The external environment, society, and socioeconomic development interact as a model of nested dependencies. It is impossible to achieve socioeconomic sustainability, given the long-term

perspective for the region, without having a stable healthy external environment and society, effective political processes, state support, a stable exchange rate, cooperation, investments, and others, with the target indicator being an income below 2% - unless it recovers from the recession. Economic and social sustainability means achieving long-term economic growth of 2% (Whiteshield Partners, 2016).

In our view, the main factors influencing socioeconomic sustainability include (Figure 1): political stability, barriers to trade, macroeconomic stability, level of infrastructure, education, savings/capital levels.



**Figure 1:** *Main Factors of Socioeconomic Sustainability*  
*(Source: Author's Own Illustration)*

### 5.1. Political Stability

Political stability and protection of private property were identified as the most important factors motivating companies to invest in national enterprises. Any sign of instability increases the economic and personal risk of investing in an enterprise.

Until recently, Kazakhstan was considered one of the most stable countries in the post-Soviet area. According to the 2012 poll, 60% of Kazakhs considered their country to be politically stable, whereas in Kyrgyzstan only 16% of its population was confident in political stability (Political stability in Kazakhstan is noted by 60% of the country's population – poll, 2012).

In the first days of 2022, protests broke out in Kazakhstan, which escalated into riots and clashes with the security forces. The initial course of events suggested the possibility of a change

of power in the country - but this did not happen. One of the main outcomes was the resignation of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev from his last official post, which he retained (How will events in Kazakhstan affect the future of Russia and the CIS? Opinions of political scientists, 2022).

## **5.2. Barriers to Trade**

Trade barriers limit the potential for the economic development of both the country (with the countries of Central Asia) and its regions.

Thus, protectionist sentiments exist in the countries of the EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union).

Despite the fact that the food products of Russian manufacturers have long taken their place on the shelves of Kazakhstan stores, Kazakhstan producers of dairy products, semi-finished meats, vegetable oils, and even the Kazakhstan car industry often face a number of barriers that limit their access to Russian consumers. A similar problem exists throughout the Union (Saruar, 2019).

According to the data of the Eurasian Economic Commission, there are 46 trade barriers for other EAEU countries in Kazakhstan, 45 - in Russia and Belarus, 43 - in Armenia, and 42 - in Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, members of the union still maintain hidden mechanisms for protecting the domestic market (Saruar, 2020).

## **5.3. Macroeconomic Stability**

Like political stability, macroeconomic stability encourages investment and development. This implies low inflation and stable exchange rates. Rapid devaluation could lead to capital outflow and lower growth.

Macroeconomic stability is the most important indicator of Kazakhstan's development prospects.

According to a preliminary estimate by the National Statistics Bureau of the Republic of Kazakhstan (NSB), the country's gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by 2.6% in 2020. The decline in services totaled 5.6%. Overall industrial output declined by 0.4%. Consumer activity has decreased. All of this was due to the restrictive measures imposed during the worsening of the epidemiological situation (Vinokurov, 2021).

An analysis of regional contributions to national growth revealed that an important contribution to the country's aggregate growth is made by the regions, specializing in the mining industry, and the country's two largest agglomerations. Between 2013 and 2018, the cities of Almaty, Atyrau, and Nur-Sultan accounted for more than half (74%) of the total national growth (Regional Policies to Promote Diversification and Productivity Growth in Kazakhstan, 2020).



The highest per capita gross regional product (GRP) accounts for the western regions (Atyrau, Mangistau, and West Kazakhstan) and the two largest cities in the Republic – Almaty, and Nur-Sultan. The western regions are home to the main oil and gas deposits. In Pavlodar and Karaganda regions, this indicator was at the national average. In the remaining 10 of the 16 regions of Kazakhstan, the level of the per capita GRP was lower than the national average. In 2017, Atyrau scored the highest, more than three times the national average. The lowest rate was recorded in Turkestan, with just under a third (Regional Policies to Promote Diversification and Productivity Growth in Kazakhstan, 2020).

Inflation remained high at the beginning of 2021. The consumer price index increased by 7.4% (7.5% y.y. in December 2020). Food continued to make a key contribution to the inflationary background (11.4% y.y.). The macroeconomic review noted that the Kazakh tenge had appreciated by 0.8% against the United States dollar since the beginning of 2021. Despite this, higher inflation in Kazakhstan compared to trading partner countries is an additional factor in the nominal devaluation of the tenge (Macroeconomic Overview. Strong recovery growth in 2021, 2021).

At the regional level, annual inflation accelerated in 13 regions and slowed down in 3 regions. The cities of Almaty and Nur-Sultan continue to make the largest contribution to price growth. Only in one region, the rate of price growth remains unchanged. The greatest slowdown from 9.2% in August to 8.8% in September was recorded in Pavlodar Region. The greatest acceleration occurred in Kyzylorda Region (from 8.2% to 8.8%). Annual inflation turned out to be higher than the national level in 6 regions, with the highest value in Mangistau Region (9.8%). In October 2021, the prices for food products in Kazakhstan increased in annual terms by 11.5% (in August - by 11.4 %) (Annual inflation accelerated in 13 regions, slowed down in 3 regions. – 2021).

#### **5.4. Level of Infrastructure**

For example, transport and communication. The higher and more developed the transport infrastructure and other facilities, the better is the regional performance. A region that can attract domestic investment can see significant growth in development due to higher levels of capital and the benefits of attracting large companies to its economy.

Infrastructure is an essential issue for Kazakhstan. This is due to the existing communication challenges caused by the size of the country, its location, landlocked status, low population density, and climate. In addition, many of the infrastructures are outdated. Given all these factors, transport infrastructure remains an important area for Kazakhstan (Regional Policies to Promote Diversification and Productivity Growth in Kazakhstan, 2020).

In recent years, economic development in the regions of the country has improved thanks to increased investment in roads and railways. Some of this investment came from foreign companies interested in transporting raw materials to other countries. Despite this, the transport infrastructure situation in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries is very negative. As of 2018, the LPI infrastructure index of the Central Asian states still lagged behind that of 90% of the countries. In Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, this index is 2.5, and in Tajikistan - 2. In 90% of the countries, this index is much higher (Saruar, 2021).

### **5.5. Education**

Levels and standards of education have a significant impact on productivity. Without basic literacy and numeracy, it is difficult for an economy to evolve from manual labor to new high-tech service industries.

Kazakhstan approved the state's general compulsory standards for all levels of education.

In Kazakhstan, there are also regional disparities in access to education services and a shortage of school seats. The country takes certain steps to address these and other educational problems.

### **5.6. Savings/Capital Levels**

In growth models, such as the Harod-Domar growth model, levels of savings and capital are seen as a key determinant of economic sustainability (Porokhovskiy et.al., 2017).

As regards savings, it should be stated that only 16% of Kazakhs have savings (It's not the time to procrastinate. Only 16% of Kazakhstanis have savings - poll, 2020).

Investment activity declined in 2020 (minus 3.4% compared to 2019), mainly due to lower investments in the mining industry. Its negative contribution amounted to 11.8 p.p. The total contribution of the industries with increased capital investments was 10.6 p.p. The growth of capital investment in these industries was due to an increase in budget allocations (health care, water supply, electricity supply), as well as a low exposure of certain industries, such as agriculture, telecommunications, to the negative consequences of the pandemic (Vinokurov et. al., 2021).

Although investment activity in the country has continued to recover rapidly, the mining sector in Kazakhstan still has a low level of investment. There was a decrease in the investments financed by the budget. There has been a decline in public funding in almost all areas, especially in infrastructure and education. It should be noted that manufacturing has become the main area of investment.

Uncertainty about the epidemiological situation in the country and the world carries with it the risks of slower recovery of the economy.

There are other factors that affect the economic development and socio-economic sustainability of the region, such as:

- Levels of domestic investment: Developing regions that can attract domestic investment can see significant growth in development through higher levels of capital and the benefits of attracting multinational companies to their economies. For the newly industrialized countries, domestic investment has played a significant role in accelerating the economic sustainability of development.

- Political system. Many countries have successfully managed a partial transition to a free-market economy with political regulation.

- Development of small and medium-sized businesses in the region. The experience of many developed countries shows that small and medium-sized businesses solve many social and economic problems.

Sayles, Michael C., in *Instructions on Where to stand When It Hits the Fan*, includes, among the factors affecting the indicators of sustainable development of a region, threat factors, and unpredictable factors. He sees in the manifestation of the negative effects on the sustainability of the development of regional socioeconomic systems that they are wide-ranging and affects a large part of the subsystems, elements, and links of the region's socioeconomic system, violating the optimal organization and the established order of things (Sayles & Michael, 1990).

Negative factors disrupt sustainability and dramatically degrade the structure of economic potential, diverting its resources to overcome negative factors. In addition, the pace of social and economic development (performance growth) is declining, leading to a further imbalance in the sustainability framework (Tsomartova, 2011).

The results of the study showed that there was no consensus on the socioeconomic sustainability of a region. All the definitions of a region's socioeconomic sustainability are based on the quantitative and qualitative changes which, in the current circumstances, are characterized by the dynamic development of the economy, dependence to a large extent on the sustainability of the production, financial, investment, and social sectors of the economy, manufacture and other sectors, improved quality of life of the people living in the region.

The level of sustainable development as a whole is determined by the interaction of a number of environmental, political, public, economic, and social factors.

The economic factors that have the most significant influence on the sustainability of a region's development largely determine the priorities of regional social and economic policies and the effectiveness of the mechanism for managing its sustainable development.

Negative factors, such as threats and unpredictable factors, have a negative impact on the region's sustainable development indicators, namely:

- 1) disturbed stability of a region;
- 2) sharply deteriorating structure of economic potential;
- 3) declining pace of socioeconomic development (growth rates).

In the present circumstances, it is important not only to foresee but also to make the best use of the factors that influence the socioeconomic sustainability of a region to respond to any changes in the external environment.

## **6. Conclusions**

1. The social and economic transformation of a country is strongly influenced by the regional dimension and the dynamic development of regions.

2. Today, the urgency of increasing the economic resilience of a region is essential, as no concept of transition to sustainable development will achieve the desired result without taking into account the regional dimension.

3. The negative factors that worsen a region's sustainable development indicators must also be addressed in order to prevent their negative impact on its future development.

4. It is necessary for a particular region to improve all its components and to make the best use of the factors influencing socio-economic sustainability. Unsustainable development of a country and its region could lead to even greater risks, which would be difficult to manage in the future.

### **6.1. Research Limitations**

Studies demonstrated that many authors have considered the concept and factors of the region's stability. Some authors propose mechanisms to increase the stability of the region, however, the study on an increase in the socio-economic stability of the region based on the implementation of the economic corridor concept is not sufficient. The issue of improving the methodology for assessing the socio-economic stability of the region also requires future research. In addition, it is necessary to study in the future the economic potential and role of small and medium-sized towns in their socio-economic sustainability.

### **6.2. Future Research**

In this article, we have considered mainly the theoretical aspects of the problem under study. The practical aspects will be considered in more detail in the following studies.

The improvement of the methodology for assessing the socio-economic stability of the region can be the direction of future research in theoretical terms, in practical terms - increase in

the socio-economic stability of Shymkent city in the southern region of Kazakhstan and its increase based on the formation of Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan economic corridor.

The results obtained can be applied in the analysis of the theory of sustainable development of regions and their sustainability indicators for a certain period.

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