

DOI: 10.15838/ptd.2025.6.140.6
UDC 332.14:338.2 | LBC 65.050.22 (2Rus-12)

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METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE INTEGRATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES INTO REGIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



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In less than five years, the period of implementation of most socio-economic development (SED) strategies at both the federal and regional levels will end, which coincided with the action of a set of interrelated challenges (geopolitical, economic, demographic, etc.). In the context of the climate agenda actualization, the transition to a closed-loop economy and digitalization of management, the need to rethink the strategic tools of regional planning is increasing. The study's objective is to develop and scientifically substantiate methodological approaches to the integration of sustainable development principles into regional strategies. The article presents the results of an analysis of the current practice of integrating sustainable development principles into regional strategies. The results of the content analysis revealed significant heterogeneity in the degree and form of integration of sustainable development principles into regional strategic planning documents, as well as the fragmentary and / or declarative nature of the

For citation: Ataeva A.G., Ulyaeva A.G. (2025). Methodological approaches to the integration of sustainable development principles into regional strategies for socio-economic development. *Problems of Territory's Development*, 29(6), 82–105. DOI: 10.15838/ptd.2025.6.140.6

use of the main provisions of the sustainable development concept. Separately, it is necessary to note the preponderance of the content of the first two components (economic and social) and weak disclosure of the environmental component of sustainable development in regional strategies, as well as the lack of coordinating and corrective mechanisms aimed at implementing sustainable development in the long term. The approaches to fine-tuning the regional strategy process at its various stages (analysis, scenario planning, mission and priority formulation, implementation mechanisms, monitoring and adaptation, coordination of priorities) are proposed and described, which can ensure compliance with the achievement of long-term regional development priorities taking into account the impact of modern global challenges. The study used methods of comparative analysis and synthesis, economic and statistical analysis. The research results can serve as a basis for improving the methodological tools of strategic planning and developing new recommendations at the federal level.

Sustainable development, strategy, content analysis, socio-economic development, constituent entities of the Federation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The article was prepared in accordance with the research plan for the state assignment of UFRC RAS 075-00571-25-00 for 2025 and for the planning period of 2026 and 2027.

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SD)¹, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, establishes universal benchmarks and goals that require adaptation at national and sub-national levels. For the Russian Federation, characterized by pronounced territorial differentiation and a heterogeneous institutional environment, the issue of integrating sustainable development principles into regional-level strategic documents is particularly relevant. Despite the existence of a normative foundation for strategic planning (specifically, Federal Law 172-FZ² and methodological recommendations from the Russian Ministry of Economic Development³), the current socio-economic development strategies of the Russian federal subjects were developed and/or updated

at different times and, for the most part, conform to federally approved methodological requirements more formally than substantively (Budaeva, Klimanov, 2014; Shelomentsev et al., 2017). Insufficient methodological support, as well as the lack of regionally adapted indicators for achieving sustainable development goals, hinder the implementation of a systemic approach to strategic management.

It should be emphasized that current federal regulation does not contain a direct mandate for the federal subjects to obligatorily include sustainable development principles in their regional strategies. This adds further significance to the research: sustainability is viewed not as a formally imposed construct, but as a possible conscious choice by regional authorities aimed at ensuring long-term effectiveness and coherence of development.

¹ Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/ru/2030agenda> (accessed: 19.06.2025).

² On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation: Federal Law 172-FZ dated June 28, 2014. Available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody&nd=102354386> (accessed: 19.06.2025).

³ On Approval of Methodological Recommendations for the Development and Adjustment of the Socio-Economic Development Strategy of a Subject of the Russian Federation and the Plan of Measures for Its Implementation: Approved by Order 132 of the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia dated March 23, 2017. Available at: https://economy.gov.ru/material/dokumenty/prikaz_minekonomrazvitiya_rossii_ot_28_iyunya_2024_g_397.html (accessed: 19.06.2025).

The aim of this study is to develop and provide a scientific rationale for methodological approaches to integrating sustainable development principles into regional socio-economic development strategies. In this regard, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What models and approaches to territorial planning based on SD principles, implemented in international practice, can be adapted to Russian conditions?

2. What is the nature and content of the current strategic planning system for sustainable development at the regional level: do the current strategies of the Russian federal subjects declare and/or adapt sustainable development principles? Do regional strategies account for the influence of global challenges on the long-term development parameters of a territory?

3. How can the interrelationship between sustainable development goals and goal-setting in the strategic documents of the Russian federal subjects be formalized?

4. What should be the framework for developing a strategy based on sustainable development principles?

Answers to these questions will form a scientifically grounded and applied basis for improving the quality of regional strategic planning, taking into account the imperatives of sustainable development.

The scientific problem of the research lies in the absence of a theoretical-methodological framework that would allow for identifying and measuring the degree of institutionalization of sustainable development principles in regional-level strategic documents. Despite the practical need for integrating sustainability principles, a reproducible toolkit for comparing the declarative elements of strategies with their actual managerial implementation has not been developed to date. This creates a gap

between the substantive and institutional levels of strategic planning, the bridging of which requires the development of a methodology that combines formalized text analysis with empirical verification of implementation mechanisms.

The scientific novelty of the research is associated with the development and testing of a methodological approach to assessing the degree of institutionalization of sustainable development principles in regional-level strategic documents. The proposed model combines content analysis with elements of management practice verification, enabling a shift from the declarative description of strategies to empirically verifiable assessments of their substantive and institutional maturity.

Theoretical and methodological foundations of the research

The concept of sustainable development has become established in the international scientific and political-management agenda as a response to the escalation of environmental, social, and institutional risks that limit the effectiveness of traditional growth models. The classic definition of sustainable development, proposed in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development “Our Common Future” (1987)⁴, implies meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition laid the foundation for forming a holistic framework in which development is viewed as a balance of three interconnected dimensions – economic, social, and environmental.

In the following decades, the theoretical understanding of sustainable development evolved along several lines. In ecological-economic theories (Daly, 1991; Pearce, Barbier, 2000), the priority of environmental constraints

⁴ Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development “Our Common Future”. Available at: <https://www.un.org/ru/ga/pdf/brundtland.pdf> (accessed: 19.06.2025).

and the need to reassess the production-consumption paradigm are emphasized. Within the institutional approach (North, 1990; Ostrom, 2009), sustainability is understood as the capacity of systems for self-regulation and adaptation through robust institutions and governance mechanisms. Social theories of sustainability focus on equity, social inclusion, and participation (Sen, 1999; Raworth, 2017), complementing the economic-environmental frameworks with a humanitarian component. The contemporary interdisciplinary framework for sustainable development is enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the UN in 2015. Comprising 17 goals and 169 targets, they cover key aspects of socio-economic, environmental, and institutional transformation. The SDGs are universal in nature but assume territorial localization and adaptation considering the context of specific countries and regions.

In this regard, the importance of the regional level as an intermediary link between global priorities and local implementation is increasing.

For regional strategic planning, sustainable development represents not only a substantive framework but also a methodological guideline. However, as research shows (Spangenberg, 2004; Haughton, Counsell, 2004), integrating sustainable development into territorial planning requires rethinking the very logic of planning: shifting from linear, technocratic models to systemic, adaptive, and reflexive ones.

Several key directions can be distinguished in domestic research dedicated to territorial planning based on sustainable development principles. One actively developing direction focuses on adapting international benchmarks of sustainable development (Agenda 21, SDGs, the ESG agenda) to the Russian institutional and regulatory environment (Bobylev et al., 2025; Lanshina, 2019; Ryazanova, Menshov, 2018; Sakharov, 2025). Research is also being

conducted on the specifics of implementing the ESG concept into the system of regional and corporate governance (Zaitsev, Khapilina, 2022; Izmaylova, 2023; Kalitseva, 2023; Lektorova et al., 2024), including assessing the influence of corporate practices on territorial development. Another prominent direction is related to building ratings and methodologies for measuring the sustainability of territorial systems using unified indicators (Bobylev et al., 2018; Burenina, Byl, 2016; Ershov et al., 2022; Novoseltseva et al., 2023). Furthermore, attention is increasing towards greening territorial development management and analyzing regional strategies in the context of decarbonization and “green” modernization (Gainanov et al., 2023; Karanina, Kartavykh, 2023; Turtseva, 2022; Sakharov, 2024).

Finally, a separate branch of research is forming, dedicated to the sustainable development of urban and rural areas: circular economy and “green” infrastructure in cities (Erznkyan, Fontana, 2021; Amiantov, 2022; Gagarina, 2023), as well as inclusive and creative development of rural territories (Akimova et al., 2022; Ivanyuga, 2025; Miroshnichenko, 2023; Polushkina et al., 2022).

These directions reflect the gradual formation of a systemic approach to regional sustainable development in Russian science – from the conceptual adaptation of international principles to the search for its own methodologies and indicators. However, in Russian practice, the integration of SD principles into the socio-economic development strategies of the Russian federal subjects remains limited so far. Empirical research demonstrates that the mention of SDGs in strategies is often declarative, and their implementation mechanisms are not formalized (Korshunov, 2022). This is due to both methodological and institutional barriers, including weak interdepartmental coordination, a lack of indicative tools, and poor stakeholder engagement.

Examples of incomplete/partial implementation of sustainability principles can also be found in certain foreign countries. For instance, a study of Italian municipalities shows that the adoption of SDGs is used primarily as a rhetorical or symbolic resource, without being embedded in the procedures of goal-setting, programming, and monitoring (Guarini, 2021). Similar problems have been identified in urban planning and tourism management in Kazakhstan, where sustainability is declared but not operationalized through indicators and assessment mechanisms (Mamutova, 2020).

Several key approaches to strategic planning for sustainable development are distinguished in the scientific literature:

1) an integrative approach, implying cross-sectoral coordination and the comprehensiveness of strategies covering the economy, society, and the environment (Spangenberg, 2004; Komarov et al., 2021);

2) adaptive planning, based on continuous monitoring, strategy adjustment, and consideration of external environmental uncertainty (Walker et al., 2001);

3) an indicator-based approach, involving the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure progress towards sustainable development goals; these are not necessarily universally accepted indicators (like Gross Regional Product) but can also include various types of aggregated indices (Cobb, 2007; Moldan et al., 2012; Costanza et al., 2016);

4) context-sensitive planning, where a strategy is based on the specificities of the local context, the level of vulnerability, and the potential of regional communities⁵.

The conceptual framework of this study is built on a synthesis of integrative and indicator-based approaches, similar to the methodology of territorial system sustainability viewed as complex socio-ecological systems (SES) (Folke et al., 2010). First, sustainable development is considered a cross-cutting principle that should be embedded in the goal-setting, program measures, and monitoring of regional development strategies. Second, special attention is paid to the localization of sustainable development principles in the regional context, which involves adapting indicators, considering territorial vulnerabilities, and engaging local actors. Third, a sustainable regional strategy is understood as a document that ensures coherence between short-term development priorities and the long-term imperatives of environmental, social, and institutional sustainability.

Thus, sustainable development in regional planning represents not merely a thematic direction, but a methodological paradigm implying a systemic, reflexive, and managed process of shaping a region's future under conditions of constraints and uncertainty.

Before proceeding to the analysis of regional socio-economic development strategies, it is advisable to examine the extent to which sustainable development principles are considered in federal-level strategic documents that form the framework for regional policy. In this context, the Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030 with a Forecast up to 2036⁶ is of key importance, as it sets the priorities, mechanisms, and model for managing territorial development.

⁵ OECD. (2020). A territorial approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis report. OECD Publishing. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/e86fa715-en>

⁶ Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025: Approved by RF Government Resolution 207-r dated February 13, 2019. Available at: https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/dokumenty/rasporyazhenie_ot_13_fevralya_2019_g_207_r.html (accessed: 19.06.2025).

The Spatial Development Strategy of Russia allows for the identification of individual elements relatable to the logic of sustainable development, despite the absence of a direct declaration of sustainability principles or references to the UN SDGs. However, even though the document serves as one of the key instruments for implementing state regional policy and strategic territorial planning, sustainable development does not occupy a conceptual and methodological place within it.

The Strategy outlines several provisions related to ensuring balanced socio-economic growth of territories, reducing interregional disparities, improving quality of life, access to basic services, and adaptation to climate risks. Collectively, these priorities can be interpreted as an aspiration to form sustainable models of regional growth. Significant attention in the document is given to the climate agenda; nevertheless, the environmental component of sustainable development is considered predominantly through the lens of adapting to the global agenda, rather than as a value-normative foundation for long-term regional policy. The economic dimension of sustainability in the Strategy is implemented through a series of measures (developing clusters, cooperation); however, these are more oriented towards ensuring technological and territorial sovereignty than transitioning to a low-carbon or circular economy.

Thus, although the Strategy is not based on sustainable development as its methodological and value foundation, it contains a number of provisions that can be thematically and functionally linked to its key dimensions. These provisions could serve as a starting point for institutionalizing sustainable development in regional strategies, provided there is subsequent methodological reinforcement and the introduction of indicator-based systems.

The next analytical step involves examining how sustainable development principles are reflected in strategies at the regional level.

Data and methods

To assess the degree of integration of sustainable development principles into the regional socio-economic development strategies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, a content analysis of the official strategy texts was conducted, based on a formalized set of criteria.

In the first stage, a selection of socio-economic development strategies for the constituent entities of the Russian Federation was made using a method of clustering regions based on two indicators: 1) the value of Gross Regional Product per capita in 2022; 2) the growth rate of per capita GRP for the period 2007–2022 (indicators are presented in comparable form). Clustering of the federal subjects was performed based on the values of these two indicators using the k-means method (number of groups – 5). Subsequently, for each group, two regions were selected (from among the leaders and the outsiders), and their strategies were included in the sample.

A sample based on clustering was used to eliminate the influence of political, climatic, and geographical factors. For instance, selecting subjects from a single federal district for assessment could result in a sample containing regions with similar socio-economic profiles and exposure to the same environmental and climatic challenges. Furthermore, the existence of a common political course within a federal district could also lead to reduced variability in strategy texts. Selecting subjects from the edges of the groups (leader and outsider) will also allow for a comparison of strategies from regions with similar levels of per capita GRP and its growth rates.

In the second stage, a frequency analysis of the strategy texts from the sampled regions was conducted to determine the frequency of key

research phrases: “sustainable development”, “sustainability”, “challenge”, i.e., to identify the degree of sustainability terminology declaration. The process included the following steps: data preparation (loading strategy texts, text cleaning, standardization to a single registry); tokenization (splitting into units); lemmatization (reducing words to their base form); frequency counting; analysis and visualization of results. Clustering and frequency analysis were performed in the RStudio environment. The results of the computer frequency analysis were subsequently verified by expert review (regarding the use of terms in context).

In the third stage, an actual content analysis of the strategy texts was conducted. The goal of the analysis was to identify not declarative, but structural-functional consideration of sustainable development as a category of strategic planning. Special attention was paid to eliminating subjective interpretation by using binary logic (0/1) for each parameter.

The analysis was conducted according to six main criteria, allowing for the identification of both the fact of including sustainability principles in the document’s structure and the depth of their operationalization (i.e., the translation of goals into a list of actions).

C0 “Sustainable Development”. The presence of a direct mention of the term “sustainable development” in the strategy text – indicates recognition of the corresponding agenda at the level of conceptual apparatus.

C1 “Challenges”. Mention, classification, and ranking of global challenges in the strategy text – is important for forming a set of sustainable development priorities for the region.

C2 “Systematicity”. The presence of a systematic approach to sustainable development, i.e., its integration into key structural elements of the strategy: goals, objectives, principles, priority areas. Sustainability is considered not as a separate section but as a methodological framework for planning.

C3 “Economy”, “Social Sphere”, “Ecology” (1 point for each dimension). Reflection of the three interconnected dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. Examples of the presence of goals/tasks by dimension: economic (growth of labor productivity, economic diversification, support for small businesses), social (improving quality of life, reducing poverty, improving demographics), environmental (nature protection, reducing pollution, rational use of resources). Each dimension was assessed based on the presence of corresponding goals, objectives, or priorities.

C4 “Indicators”. The presence of specific sustainability indicators or metrics that allow for progress monitoring (e.g., emission levels, environmental quality, human development index, etc.) – indicates an attempt to operationalize the sustainability concept.

C5 “Mechanisms”. The presence of mechanisms for implementing and monitoring sustainable development goals (whether the strategy documents procedures for regular assessment, systems of indicative reporting, structural implementation mechanisms, such as special coordinating bodies or digital platforms).

“Final Score”. The maximum possible score for each document is 8. The obtained values allow for the construction of a consolidated regional ranking based on the degree of SD principle integration, as well as for identifying dominant types of strategic approach (declarative, fragmented, comprehensive).

Thus, the methodology involves collecting representative heterogeneous material to assess strategies from the standpoint of sustainable development.

Results

Characteristics of the subject sample.

The conducted clustering of Russian federal subjects based on per capita GRP levels for 2022 and GRP growth rates for 2007–2022 allowed for the identification of five regional groups, from each of which two subjects were subsequently selected (*Fig. 1, Tab. 1*).

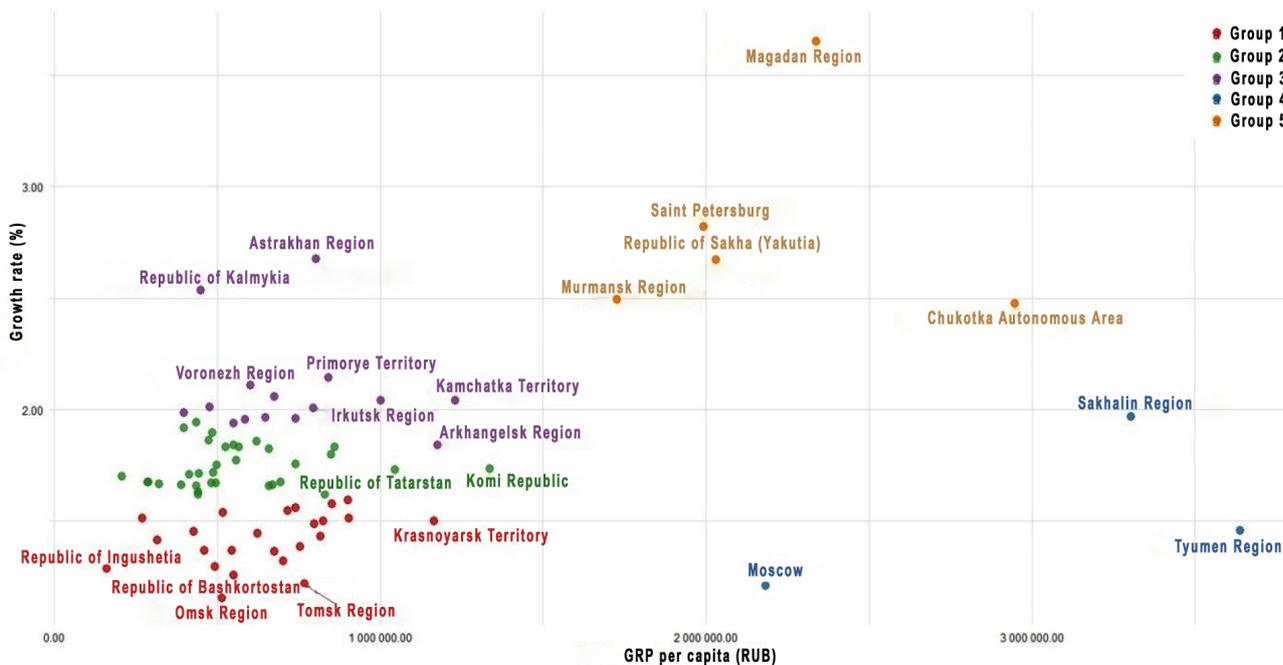


Figure 1. Visualization of the clustering of Russian federal subjects based on two indicators (per capita GRP in 2022 and GRP growth rate in 2007–2022)

Source: Calculated and visualized in the RStudio software environment.

Table 1. Characteristics and composition of the groups of Russian federal subjects obtained as a result of clustering

Group	GRP per capita value ranges in 2022	GRP growth rate ranges 2007–2022	Number of subjects in the group	List of Russian federal subjects	Group characteristics
1	159 603,50–1 164 188,70	1.16–1.59	24	Republic of Ingushetia; Karachayevo-Circassian Republic; Republic of North Ossetia – Alania; Chuvash Republic; Republic of Buryatia; Volgograd Region; Omsk Region; Tver Region; Jewish Autonomous Region; Republic of Bashkortostan; Yaroslavl Region; Chelyabinsk Region; Lipetsk Region; Kaliningrad Region; Republic of Karelia; Samara Region; Tomsk Region; Perm Territory; Sverdlovsk Region; Leningrad Region; Orenburg Region; Moscow Region ; Vologda Region; Krasnoyarsk Territory	Low level of GRP per capita; low growth rates of per capita GRP 2007–2022.

End of table 1

Group	GRP per capita value ranges in 2022	GRP growth rate ranges 2007–202	Number of subjects in the group	List of Russian federal subjects	Group characteristics
2	206 751,30 – 1 335 846,20	1.62–1.94	33	<i>Chechen Republic</i> ; Republic of Dagestan; Kabardino-Balkarian Republic; Republic of Tyva; Republic of Mari El; Ivanovo Region; Stavropol Territory; Republic of Altai ; Pskov Region; <u>Altai Territory</u> ; Republic of Mordovia; Kurgan Region; Penza Region; Kostroma Region; Kirov Region; Tambov Region; Saratov Region; Ulyanovsk Region; Orel Region; Trans-Baikal Territory; Rostov Region; Ryazan Region; Kursk Region; Republic of Khakassia; Novgorod Region; Republic of Udmurtia; Novosibirsk Region; Nizhny Novgorod Region; Khabarovsk Territory; Kemerovo Region; Belgorod Region; Republic of Tatarstan; Komi Republic	Low level of GRP per capita; medium growth rates of per capita GRP 2007–2022
3	395 639,80– 1 228 904,50	1.84–2.68	15	<i>Republic of Adygea</i> ; Republic of Kalmykia; Bryansk Region; Smolensk Region; Vladimir Region; Voronezh Region; Kaluga Region; Tula Region; Krasnodar Territory; Amur Region; Astrakhan Region ; Primorye Territory; Irkutsk Region; <u>Arkhangelsk Region</u> ; Kamchatka Territory	Medium level of GRP per capita; medium growth rates of per capita GRP 2007–2022
4	2 182 863,00 – 3 637 116,50	1.21–1.97	3	<i>Moscow</i> ; Sakhalin Region ; Tyumen Region	High level of GRP per capita; low growth rates of per capita GRP 2007–2022
5	1 735 233,40– 2 946 171,50	2.48–3.65	5	<i>Murmansk Region</i> ; Saint Petersburg; Republic of Sakha (Yakutia); Magadan Region; Chukotka Autonomous Area	High level of GRP per capita; high growth rates of per capita GRP 2007–2022

Legend:

Federal subject – group outsider based on GRP per capita value in 2022.

Federal subject – group leader based on GRP per capita value in 2022.

Federal subject – group outsider based on GRP per capita growth rate value in 2007–2022.

Federal subject – group leader based on GRP per capita growth rate value in 2007–2022.

Calculated using clustering tools in the RStudio software environment based on:

Gross Regional Product since 1998. Rosstat. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/statistics/accounts> (accessed: 17.06.2025); Consumer price indices for goods and services for the Russian Federation, federal districts and constituent entities of the Russian Federation (since 1992). Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/statistics/price> (accessed: 17.06.2025).

Table 2. Characteristics of the selected Russian federal subjects

Federal subject	Group	GRP per capita in 2022		Growth rate of per capita GRP 2007–2022		Position in group
		value, RUB/person	rank	value	rank	
Republic of Ingushetia	1	159 603,50	80	1.29	76	Outsider
Orenburg Region	1	850 040,20	18	1.58	56	Leader
Republic of Mari El	2	388 519,70	73	1.66	49	Outsider
Belgorod Region	2	859 545,10	17	1.84	28	Leader
Republic of Adygea	3	395 639,80	72	1.99	15	Outsider
Irkutsk Region	3	1 001 234,60	14	2.04	12	Leader
Tyumen Region	4	3 637 116,50	1	1.46	65	Leader
Murmansk Region	5	1 735 233,40	8	2.48	6	Outsider
Chukotka Autonomous Area	5	2 946 171,50	3	2.48	7	Leader

Calculated using clustering tools in the RStudio software environment based on: Gross Regional Product since 1998. Rosstat. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/statistics/accounts> (accessed: 17.06.2025); Consumer price indices for goods and services for the Russian Federation, federal districts and constituent entities of the Russian Federation (since 1992). Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/statistics/price> (accessed: 17.06.2025).

The subject sample (Tab. 2) includes nine representatives from seven federal districts. It should be noted that from the fourth group (high GRP level; low growth rates), only the Tyumen Region was selected (the group's outsider – the city of Moscow – currently lacks an approved strategy text).

Frequency analysis of the strategy texts of Russian federal subjects. For the selected federal subjects, the texts of current socio-

economic development strategies⁷ were downloaded, and frequency and content analyses were conducted.

The results of the frequency analysis demonstrate differences in the occurrence of key research phrases (“sustainable development”, “sustainability”, “challenges”) (Fig. 2). The leaders in the frequency of the term “sustainable development” are the Republic of Adygea and the Republic of Mari El

⁷ On the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Ingushetia for 2009–2020 and for the Period up to 2030: Decree 49 of the Government of the Republic of Ingushetia dated February 16, 2009. Available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=134037015&backlink=1&&nd=134061743&rdk=1&refoid=134061830> (accessed: 01.07.2025); On the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Orenburg Region up to 2030: Decree 551-PP of the Government of the Orenburg Region dated August 20, 2010. Available at: https://minsport.orb.ru/upload/uf/8eb/post_prav_oo_20082010_551pp.pdf (accessed: 01.07.2025); On Approval of the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Mari El for the Period up to 2030: Resolution 12 of the Government of the Republic of Mari El dated January 17, 2018. Available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=146014231&backlink=1&&nd=146077596> (accessed: 01.07.2025); On Approval of the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Belgorod Region for the Period up to 2030: Decree 371-pp of the Government of the Belgorod Region dated July 11, 2023. Available at: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/3100202307130022> (accessed: 01.07.2025); On the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Adygea up to 2030: Decree 286 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Adygea dated December 26, 2018. Available at: <https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/file/dae08b9c55943f5a7c6fefdf554abfcb/61218ra.pdf> (accessed: 01.07.2025); On Approval of the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Irkutsk Region for the Period up to 2036: Law 15-OZ of the Irkutsk Region dated January 10, 2022. Available at: https://irkobl.ru/region/gov_programms/economy/strategiya.doc (accessed: 01.07.2025); On Approval of the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Tyumen Region up to 2030: Law 23 of the Tyumen Region dated March 24, 2020. Available at: <https://sapp.duma72.ru/zakonotvorchestvo/zakonoproekty-vnesennyye-v-tyumenskuyu-Regionnuyudumu/2883> (accessed: 01.07.2025); On the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Murmansk Region up to 2020 and for the Period up to 2025: Decree 768-PP/20 of the Government of the Murmansk Region dated December 25, 2013. Available at: https://minec.gov-murman.ru/ppmo-ot-25.12.13--768_pp_20_v-red.-ot-10.07.17_.pdf (accessed: 01.07.2025); On Approval of the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Chukotka Autonomous Area up to 2030: Decree 290-RP of the Government of the Chukotka Autonomous Area dated July 16, 2014. Available at: <https://чукотка.рф/files/docs/Strateg-CEP-CHAO.doc> (accessed: 01.07.2025).

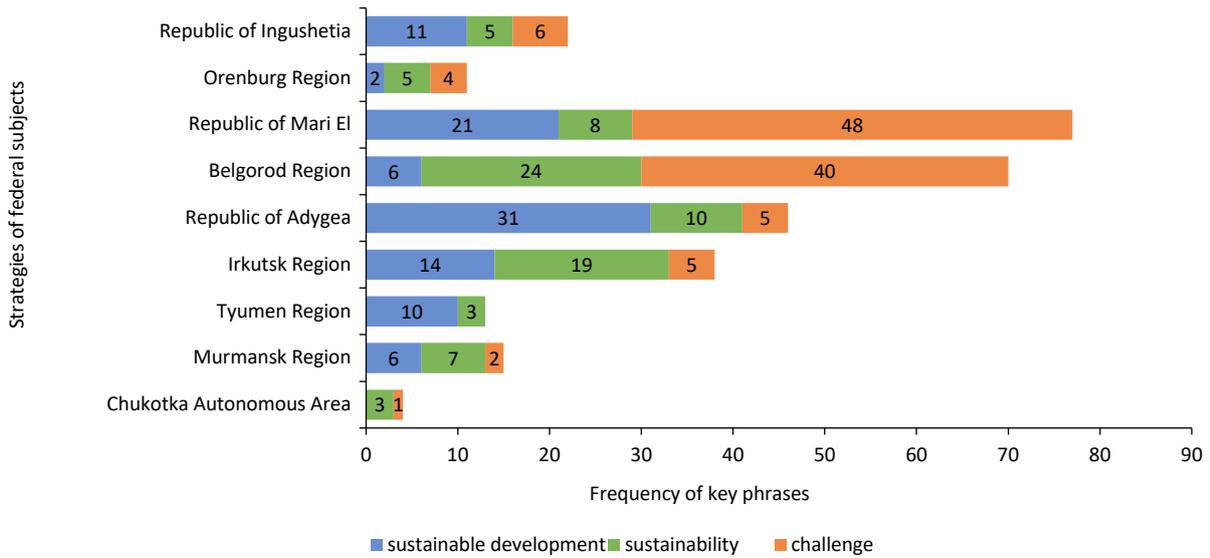


Figure 2. Visualization of the results of the frequency analysis of strategy texts after verification

Source: Calculated in the RStudio software environment.

(both regions are outsiders in their groups). At the same time, the term “sustainable development” is not mentioned in the strategy of the Chukotka Autonomous Area.

Content analysis of the texts of selected strategies of Russian federal subjects. Let us examine how the results of the frequency

analysis align with the results of the structural-content analysis of the strategy texts, as the declaration of sustainable development does not always translate into actual tools for ensuring it.

The content analysis of the selected strategies revealed significant variability in the degree of SD principle integration (Tab. 3).

Table 3. Results of the point-based assessment of socio-economic development strategies of Russian federal subjects based on content analysis

Federal subject	Group	C0: Sustainable Development	C1: Challenges	C2: Systematicity	C3: Economy	C3: Social Sphere	C3: Ecology	C4: Indicators	C5: Mechanisms	TOTAL (out of 8)
Republic of Ingushetia	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Orenburg Region	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
Republic of Mari El	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Belgorod Region	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Republic of Adygea	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	5
Irkutsk Region	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Tyumen Region	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Murmansk Region	5	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6
Chukotka Autonomous Area	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2

Source: own calculation based on content analysis of strategies of the selected Russian federal subjects.

The leaders are the Irkutsk Region (8 out of 8 points), Belgorod and Orenburg regions (7 out of 8 points). Their strategies demonstrate a systematic elaboration of sustainable development as a methodological framework. In them, sustainability is present across all structural blocks – from goal formulation to implementation mechanisms and indicator systems. In the Belgorod Region, sectoral aspects are developed, including food security, processing, and cooperation. The Irkutsk Region focuses on climatic and environmental risks, incorporating indicators for emission reduction, water resource protection, and reforestation.

The outsiders are the Chukotka Autonomous Area (2 points) and the republics of Ingushetia and Mari El (3 points each). It should be noted that both republics are outsiders within their groups and have low per capita GRP levels, while the Chukotka Autonomous Area, conversely, is a leader in the overall ranking but in fact has the least developed strategy among all. The strategies of these regions lack conceptual and structural inclusion of sustainable development, and they do not specify/describe implementation mechanisms or a monitoring system. The emphasis is shifted towards economic growth, while environmental and institutional sustainability are not established as managerial guidelines.

Regions with intermediate results (4–6 points) demonstrate the presence of individual sustainability elements (e.g., goals or indicators) but without systemic integration. In some cases, declarativeness is observed: the term “sustainable development” is mentioned but is not methodologically substantiated.

Such heterogeneity necessitates moving to an analysis of the individual criteria used to assess the degree of integration of sustainable development principles into the structure of regional strategies.

Criterion 0. Mention of the term “sustainable development”: from declaration

to institutionalization. The term “sustainable development” is present in the strategies of most subjects, but the degree of its substantive elaboration varies. In a number of cases, it appears as a rhetorical formula or a fragmentary slogan, not supported by conceptual or instrumental elaboration. For instance, the strategy of the Republic of Ingushetia, despite containing the term “sustainable development,” does not elaborate on it as a concept. The strategy text of the Chukotka Autonomous Area presents only a declarative description of the key directions for the region’s development. Thus, the formal presence of the term “sustainable development” cannot be a sufficient basis for recognizing a strategy as aligned with sustainability principles.

Criterion 1. Mention of the term “challenges”, classification and ranking of regional development challenges during strategy formulation. In half of the strategies, the study of the influence of global challenges on sustainable development is considered within a conducted SWOT analysis; however, its results are practically not used in formulating the region’s development goals and objectives.

As a positive example, one can note the strategy of the Belgorod Region, for which countering global geopolitical challenges is critically important (compared to other regions). This is reflected in the text of the Region’s strategy as a separate subsection “Development Challenges and Risks”, which lists geopolitical, economic, environmental, and demographic risks and challenges. The strategy of the Republic of Mari El can also be noted, where for each strategic task, a block is presented with key challenges the region faces in achieving the specific goal within that section. In contrast, one can highlight the strategy of the Murmansk Region; although its text includes a section dedicated to “strengthening the geopolitical and resource-economic significance of the Arctic...”, the

system of goals and objectives does not reveal directions for overcoming the challenges and negative factors identified during the analysis.

Criterion 2. Systematicity of sustainable development inclusion. Sustainable development as a methodological framework for strategic planning is recorded only in a limited number of regional strategies.

A clear example of a systemic approach is the text of the Belgorod Region's strategy, which, despite not explicitly embedding SD principles, is systematized, including in the context of coordinating the region's development across three key areas: "economy", "human capital", and "space." This is also characteristic of the Irkutsk strategy, which builds a chain of "priority – socio-economic development sphere – direction of state policy – tactical goal – tactical tasks – activities – target indicators".

Criterion 3. Representation of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The analysis of strategies showed that the economic and social dimensions of sustainability are represented in almost all regions. For example, for the Irkutsk Region, measures to combat poverty, expand access to services, social support, and justice are described: "reducing the poverty level", "systematic support and improving the quality of life for senior citizens", "developing a system for early diagnosis and identification of children with disabilities", "preventive medicine", "vagueness of social support measures... fair and effective social policy". However, there are strategies that only describe the basic strategic vision for the region's development without specifying priority areas down to SD goals and tasks for individual spheres (e.g., the Republic of Ingushetia or the Chukotka Autonomous Area).

Criterion 4. Presence of an indicative system reflecting sustainability. Indicators of sustainable development, particularly the

environmental component, are most fully disclosed in the strategy of the Irkutsk Region. It uses indicators of population quality of life (share of the population provided with drinking water meeting safety requirements; level of self-sufficiency in certain food products) and environmental development (reduction in wastewater discharge volumes into water bodies; share of eliminated unauthorized landfill sites; forest cover of the territory, etc.). In the strategies of the republics of Ingushetia and Mari El, the system of indicators is poorly formalized and not structured according to the three dimensions, which limits the possibilities for monitoring sustainability. The strategy of the Chukotka Autonomous Area lacks an indicator system altogether.

Criterion 5. Implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Only a limited number of documents have developed implementation mechanisms aligned with sustainable development goals. The strategy of the Irkutsk Region lists a set of tools: "regulatory legal acts; activities of the region's development institutions; inter-regional and intraregional cooperation, agreements with economic entities". The Belgorod strategy structures the implementation toolkit into regulatory-legal, financial-economic and investment, organizational-managerial mechanisms, and mechanisms for public-private partnerships. At the same time, in most strategies, implementation mechanisms are either absent or presented as general formulations not linked to sustainable development as a managerial category (the strategy of the Republic of Ingushetia).

The results of the conducted analysis must be interpreted considering a number of methodological and empirical limitations.

First, the socio-economic development strategies of the federal subjects considered in the study were developed and approved in different years – from the early 2010s to the mid-2020s. This leads to significant heteroge-

neity in their substantive structure, priorities, and conceptual framework. Consequently, the level of inclusion of sustainable development topics may reflect not so much the actual institutional orientation of the region, but rather the relevance of this agenda at the time of the document's preparation. This is especially evident in strategies adopted before the release of international and national benchmarks (the 2030 Agenda or updated methodological recommendations from the Russian Ministry of Economic Development).

Second, the research is based solely on documentary analysis of official strategies, without involving additional information about their development process, implementation mechanisms, and actual execution. Thus, a gap may exist between the content of strategic documents and real management practices. A document containing detailed indicators and formal mentions of sustainability may remain ineffective in implementation, and conversely – a strategy with formally limited coverage may be accompanied by active institutional work.

Third, the methodology used relies on a formalized criterion of the presence/absence of sustainability elements (e.g., indicators, mechanisms, mentions), which ensures reproducibility but limits the depth of interpretation. Such binary logic does not allow for accounting for qualitative differences between regions in the degree of elaboration, conceptual integrity, or originality of approach. Furthermore, it does not capture contextual features of regional development, including demographic pressure, climate challenges, institutional maturity, and political will.

Finally, sustainable development in strategies may manifest in an implicit form, through value orientations, institutional mechanisms, or risk management systems, which are not necessarily labeled with the concept of “sustainability”. Such an approach may elude formalized

analysis, necessitating the supplementation of quantitative methods with qualitative procedures of expert assessment and comparative analysis.

It should be noted that the applied methods of content analysis and formalized coding of strategic documents, despite their reproducibility and transparency, have a number of limitations. They do not allow for fully accounting for the context of decision-making, the motivation of strategy developers, and informal management practices. Furthermore, the results depend on the quality of the source documents and the researcher's interpretation of the categorical scheme, which introduces an element of subjectivity and requires subsequent verification with data from independent sources.

To overcome the identified gap between the content of strategic documents and real management practice, using combined methodologies in future research seems promising. First, it is advisable to include procedures for expert surveys and interviews with developers and implementers of regional strategies. This would help reveal actual managerial motivations, the degree of institutional support, and barriers to implementing sustainable development principles. Second, conducting case studies of individual regions demonstrating differences between formal and actual strategy implementation could be undertaken, followed by a comparative assessment of factors contributing to successful realization. Finally, to objectify the results of documentary source analysis, the data triangulation method can be used – comparing strategy texts with budget reporting data, program implementation statistics, and regional socio-ecological indicators.

Overall, the content analysis of regional socio-economic development strategies revealed significant heterogeneity in the degree and form of integrating sustainable develop-

ment principles into regional strategic planning documents:

1) sustainable development is not a universal methodological guide for regional strategies; although the term “sustainable development” is mentioned in half of the analyzed documents, only in isolated cases does it acquire the status of a strategic framework shaping goals, priorities, and implementation mechanisms; many strategies are limited to a declarative mention of sustainability;

2) analysis of the three dimensions of sustainable development shows a clear predominance of the first two components; economic and social priorities (GRP growth, employment, standard of living, demography) are presented in strategies quite broadly and in detail, while the environmental component is often presented fragmentarily or is absent altogether. This indicates a persistent perception of sustainable development primarily through the lens of socio-economic growth;

3) not all regions have recorded attempts to institutionalize sustainability by including specific indicators and implementation mechanisms. However, in most cases, the monitoring system is formalistic or absent, which limits the ability to assess the effectiveness of implementing sustainable strategies;

4) there is a deficit of coordinating and corrective mechanisms aimed at realizing sustainable development in the long term. Even when goals and indicators exist, the corresponding implementation tools – such as action plans, interdepartmental platforms, reporting mechanisms – are either absent or poorly formalized.

Thus, in the strategic planning of the sampled regions, models of fragmented or declarative integration of sustainable development prevail. This indicates the need for both normative-

methodological and institutional reinforcement of strategic approaches.

The necessity for methodological and institutional reinforcement of strategic approaches becomes especially pressing in the context of the current socio-economic dynamics of the regions. Current trends show that the actual conditions for implementing sustainability principles differ significantly: some regions experience growth in industrial production and increased investment activity (e.g., Tyumen, Irkutsk, Belgorod regions), creating potential for transitioning to more resource-efficient and environmentally balanced growth models; in others, a decline in manufacturing sectors, a decrease in household income, and limited budget capacities are recorded, especially in the republics of the North Caucasus and certain subjects of the Volga Federal District.

These disparities directly affect regions' ability to adopt sustainable practices: economically strong territories can invest in 'green' modernization, digitalization of environmental monitoring, and developing sustainable infrastructure, while regions with limited resources are forced to concentrate on maintaining basic social stability. Therefore, integrating sustainable development principles requires considering each region's current socio-economic cycle: for industrial subjects, it is a transition to innovative and low-carbon models; for less affluent ones, it is strengthening social and institutional resilience.

Methodological approaches to integrating sustainable development principles into regional strategies. In the current regulatory, legal, and methodological framework for strategic planning in the Russian Federation, integrating sustainable development principles into regional-level documents is not mandatory and does not constitute an imperative requirement.

This study proposes integrating SD principles into strategic planning at the regional level, as the methodology of sustainable development offers the following advantages:

1) it can serve as a productive foundation for forming long-term strategies, ensuring the integrity of goal-setting, harmonizing economic, social, and environmental priorities, as well as adaptability to changing external conditions;

2) it establishes a systemic and interdisciplinary approach, allowing not only for structuring strategic priorities but also for balancing short-term tasks with long-term challenges (global, national, and regional);

3) it contributes to strengthening institutional coherence, increasing trust among citizens, businesses, and external partners in regional policy;

4) it allows for synchronizing regional strategies with the global and national agenda – the UN 2030 Agenda, the tasks of ESG transformation, green growth, and the low-carbon transition;

5) it contributes to enhancing the instrumental robustness of regional strategies – allowing for the adaptation of accumulated international SD experience using indicator-based models, monitoring systems, assessment of climate and social risks, as well as stakeholder engagement schemes.

Given the voluntary nature of including sustainable development in regional strategies, the methodological support for such inclusion should not be universal and abstract, but adapted to the socio-economic and institutional specificities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

When adapting international sustainable development practices to Russian conditions, it is important to account for differences in the institutional environment, the distribution

of powers, and the resource capabilities of the regions. Approaches applied in OECD and EU countries are based on a high degree of autonomy for regional authorities and developed mechanisms for horizontal coordination. In the Russian context, their functional reinterpretation is appropriate: indicator-based sustainability models can be integrated into the state strategic planning system through existing instruments – state programs (federal, regional), national projects, and monitoring of sustainable development goals. Analytical tools actively used in international practice (benchmarking, stakeholder mapping, territorial impact assessment) can be adapted to domestic realities as forms of expert assessment and public consultation of strategies without creating new bureaucratic structures. Such a transfer of practices will preserve the scientific validity of international approaches without violating the principles of hierarchy and legal unity in Russian strategic management.

The approaches proposed below are oriented towards embedding sustainable development principles into the existing managerial and analytical contours of regional strategic planning, without the need to create new externally imposed constructs.

1. Analytical component: Sustainability as a risk factor and sustainability as potential. At the stage of situational analysis, a strategy may include identifying risks associated with sustainability deficits: unstable demography, single-industry dependence, infrastructure degradation, environmental pollution, or vulnerability to climate change. This does not require new categories, but merely a shift in focus: the assessment should be aimed not only at identifying potentials but also at diagnosing the sustainability of the region's current development model.

The following analytical tools are applicable: maps of environmental and climate

risks, for example, zones at risk of flooding, soil degradation, temperature anomalies; benchmarking with regions having a similar economic structure but better sustainability indicators (e.g., in waste processing, in sustainable agriculture); assessment of dependence on resources with exhaustible cycles and scenarios of their depletion; consideration of institutional sustainability: budget stability, reliability of implementation mechanisms, capacity for multi-level interaction.

2. *Scenario planning: Sustainability as an axis of differentiation.* Scenarios for socio-economic development should be constructed based on differences in levels of systemic sustainability, not just on GRP growth rates or population size. This could include a baseline (inertial) scenario, which maintains current institutional and resource practices; an adaptive scenario, which enhances economic diversification and introduces measures for the sustainable use of natural resources; and a transformation scenario – involving a reorientation towards developing ‘clean’ production, ecological modernization, and community engagement.

This approach allows for linking sustainability to manageable variables: economic structure, investment priorities, and the nature of migration.

3. *Formulating mission and priorities through sustainability principles.* When formulating the mission, goals, and objectives of a strategy, it is proposed to rely on the basic principles of sustainable development rather than on external indicators. Among the applicable principles are: intergenerational responsibility (long-term protection of natural resources, minimization of infrastructure wear); balance (harmonizing sectoral, territorial, and social interests); inclusivity (engaging various population groups in decision-making processes); resource efficiency considering regional specifics: minimizing losses in production cycles, energy saving, water conservation, recycling.

Targets can be formulated in the logic of “minimizing vulnerabilities and stabilizing basic development conditions” – this is closer to the managerial practice of Russian regions than concepts like “green growth” or ESG, which are perceived as external.

4. *Implementation: Sustainability as an investment and organizational priority.* In the implementation block, it is important to establish mechanisms that make sustainability not a declaration but a basis for project management. This can include: prioritizing financing for infrastructure projects with sustainable effects (e.g., modernization of water supply, energy-efficient lighting, renovation of public spaces); support programs for local production and processing, especially in agricultural and forested territories; expanding mechanisms for local public-private partnerships (PPP) focused on urban improvement, transport, and utilities with social or environmental returns; developing standard solutions for sustainable settlements – considering energy efficiency, compactness, integration with the natural environment.

Continuing the list of mechanisms, the environmental dimension can be addressed through a separate section via a set of project selection and management criteria integrated into existing procedures. For infrastructure, local processing, PPP, and standard settlement solutions, 4–5 KPIs are established, correlated with relevant UN SDGs (water, sustainable cities, responsible consumption, climate): share of the population with access to safe drinking water and share of wastewater treated to standard; share of municipal solid waste processed; energy intensity/specific greenhouse gas emissions per unit of GRP; provision of green urban infrastructure. Implementation is ensured by SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment) of key programs, a regional MRV (Monitoring, Reporting and Verification) system for emissions and

pollution, and 'green' procurement / budget tagging; monitoring of KPIs is integrated into the overall indicator system of the strategy, which eliminates the identified deficit in environmental operationalization found in practice.

5. *Monitoring and adaptation: Tracking sustainability without excessive bureaucracy.* The monitoring system can be based on accessible and already collected indicators, transformed from a sustainability perspective: share of budget expenditures on maintaining/modernizing infrastructure; share of recycled waste; resource intensity coefficients (water intensity, energy intensity of the economy); employment indicators in sustainable sectors (processing, agroecology, social economy).

6. *Approval stage: Sustainability as a social contract.* Realistic mechanisms for engaging stakeholders in the context of Russian regions could include: public discussion of the strategy via executive authority platforms, considering public comments; conducting expert panels with representatives from science, business, and local self-government; introducing observer or advisor status for major public associations (environmental, youth, professional) during the monitoring of strategy implementation. This approach enhances the social legitimacy of the document and facilitates the consideration of risks overlooked in a purely administrative logic.

Unlike previous works focused primarily on the quantitative accounting of SDG mentions or environmental indicators, this study reveals the institutional level of sustainable development inclusion – through the analysis of management mechanisms, coordination structures, and implementation tools recorded in the strategies.

Overall, the proposed methodological approaches suggest a gradual institutional incorporation of sustainability as a managerial logic. This is especially important in the context

of Russian federalism and the limited resource and personnel capabilities at the regional level.

Conclusion

Integrating sustainable development principles into regional socio-economic development strategies is not a normatively prescribed but a substantively significant task. The conducted analysis has shown that, despite an active international and federal sustainability agenda, the inclusion of its principles in regional strategic planning remains predominantly fragmented, declarative, or implemented in an implicit form. The main obstacles are the lack of methodological guidelines, institutional imperative, as well as limited resources and managerial inertia on the ground.

At the same time, examples of successful institutionalization of sustainable development in the strategies of a number of subjects have been identified, where sustainability is interpreted not as an external mandate but as a managerial logic that allows for balancing economic, social, and environmental priorities. This confirms the potential for scaling and adapting such approaches.

The methodology for content analysis of strategies proposed in the article has allowed for identifying both the level of formal recognition of the sustainability concept within them and the depth of its operationalization – through goals, indicators, and implementation mechanisms. Furthermore, a set of realistic methodological solutions applicable in the context of Russian regional policy has been developed. These are focused on adapting sustainability principles to the analytical, scenario-based, goal-setting, and managerial elements of a strategy, without the need for direct borrowing of external conceptual frameworks.

Thus, sustainable development can be considered a strategic resource for regional policy – not only in the long term but also

in the current managerial perspective. Its institutionalization in the strategies of the Russian federal subjects requires a comprehensive approach, including regulatory adjustments, the development of standardized methodological solutions, the creation of

incentives for sustainable practices, and the growth of an expert community. This will not only improve the governability of regional development but also ensure its alignment with modern challenges and requirements for comprehensive effectiveness.

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