

The paper makes an interesting and valuable contribution. It is methodologically sound and as a contribution significant. The quantitative analysis is correct and makes sense.

However, I believe that the paper is not yet fit for publication. The reason for this is that it does not adequately address the political economy behind the SDG - it takes the SDG at face value, so to speak, and constructs a framework of analysis to investigate (according to a selection of SDG indicators) whether specific countries are on track regarding the transformation to sustainable development or not. This is methodologically speaking fine - but it does not do justice to the construct of the SDG themselves.

*We are grateful to the reviewer for pointing out that our paper would improve by addressing the political economy behind the SDGs. Indeed, the methodology we have chosen for our analysis may overlook this important matter, but it is because it focuses mainly on data collecting and index computation.*

*However, we are willing to follow your advice to fill this gap, and have added to the introduction a description of the interplay between the aspirational global targets and Governments entitlement to set their "own national targets guided by the global level of ambition" of SDG targets "but taking into account national circumstances." (UN 2015)*

*It is worth noticing that a participatory approach characterises also target-specific indicator selection. The procedure is overseen by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IEAG). When we started writing this article, the work of IEAG was still at an early stage, but now there are more elements to comment about this procedure.*

*Another important point to be added in our discussion is the central role of Governments in policy implementation; SDG achievement by 2030 will mainly depend on effective policies and efficient allocation of resources to implement them.*

*This final point connects to the initial aim of our paper: synthetic indicators can guide policymakers to focus where policy efforts are more needed.*

*UN(2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations. A/RES/70/1*

The SDG are not a neutral, objective and transparent set of indicators quantifying sustainable development - they are contradictory, conflictive, potentially damaging (growth benchmarks etc.) and maybe also too broad to serve as a real benchmark. They are the result of an international negotiation process of the UN system and reflect different aspirations and definitions of sustainable development of different countries and regions of the world. Even the fact that each and every country is allowed to formulate their own national indicators regarding the 17 headings of the SDG is problematic.

*As we said above, we will mention the participatory process in selecting SDG targets and indicators. However, our quantitative analysis can focus only of few indicators at national level. As we describe in the paper, the indicator selection is strongly conditioned by data availability, coherence with SDG targets and empirical evidences that allow projecting indicators into the future (the ex-ante analysis that is at the core of our framework, but not included in this paper).*

*We acknowledge the intricate nature of SDGs as you described it, and precisely for that very reason we propose an analysis with our methodology without claiming it is the best suitable to do it. Even our restricted set of indicators encompassing the three sustainability pillars is able to*

*capture trade-offs and conflicts in simultaneously achieving SDGs. In Section 4.4, Figure 11 highlights the positive correlation between the economic pillar and the APPS index. We could add other figures analysing the correlation among pillars; this will help discussing the trade-offs between economic development and environmental preservation.*

Within the quantitative Social Sciences, wizardry is often performed with data and numbers - but without highlighting the political context of the data. Yet, the value added of quantitative analysis is enlarged if the political dimension of the data used is not overlooked but made part of the analysis. If the authors integrate this aspect into the paper - even into the analysis of the data, the paper would make a very useful contribution indeed. It might, however, weaken the idea of creating SDG-Rankings - and this, too, is an aspect the authors should discuss.

*We are grateful for the reviewer's suggestions. Our paper was lacking in accounting for the political economy behind the SDG process and we are willing to fill this gap. Your considerations about country directionality in aspirations and measurements will be included in the discussion of our results. Within all the limitations of our methodology, we are aware that our SDG ranking depicts a world with aligned aspiration and measures quite distant from the reality.*