

# Important elements for good territorial public governance focused on sustainable local development

*Elementos importantes para uma boa governança pública territorial focada no desenvolvimento local sustentável*

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## ABSTRACT

**Research Purpose:** Sustainable Local Development (SLD) is an endogenous process – based on the resources and needs of the territory – that aims to improve the quality of life of society by balancing several territorial factors. Despite the potential benefits of SLD, it is not something random, but requires the coordination and appropriate direction of the efforts of territorial actors, that is, good territorial public governance. Based on this issue, this study aims to identify the fundamental elements for good territorial public governance focused on SLD.

**Methodology:** The research was conducted through an integrative literature review, focusing on open access articles available in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The data were interpreted using thematic content analysis, creating categories associated with the purpose of this study.

**Findings:** The results indicate that the main attributes of good territorial governance for SLD are: access to governance mechanisms; engagement of local stakeholders in governance; local representativeness in governance; transparency of governance actions; governance sustainable responsibility; and effectiveness of governance.

**Originality/Value:** This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors that qualify territorial public governance for SLD, offering practical benefits for territorial management while advancing the existing literature.

**Keywords:** good territorial public governance; sustainable local development; integrative literature review; thematic content analysis.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo da Investigação:** O Desenvolvimento Local Sustentável (DLS) é um processo endógeno – baseado nos recursos e necessidades do território – que visa melhorar a qualidade de vida da sociedade pelo equilíbrio de vários fatores territoriais. Apesar dos potenciais benefícios do DLS, ele não é algo casual, mas que necessita da articulação e direcionamento adequado dos esforços de atores territoriais, ou seja, da boa governança pública territorial. A partir dessa problemática, este estudo objetiva identificar os elementos fundamentais para uma boa governança pública territorial voltada o DLS.

**Metodologia:** A pesquisa ocorreu através de uma revisão integrativa da literatura, direcionada a artigos de acesso aberto disponíveis nas bases Scopus e Web of Science. Os dados foram interpretados através de uma análise de conteúdo temática, criando categorias associadas à proposta deste estudo.

**Resultados:** Os resultados indicam que os principais atributos de uma boa governança territorial para o DLS são: acesso a mecanismos de governança; engajamento de atores locais da governança; representatividade local da governança; transparência das ações da governança; responsabilidade sustentável da governança; e eficácia da governança.

**Originalidade/Valor:** Este estudo contribui para uma compreensão mais profunda dos fatores que qualificam a governança pública territorial para DLS, oferecendo benefícios práticos para a gestão territorial ao mesmo tempo em que avança a literatura existente.

**Palavras-chave:** boa governança pública territorial; desenvolvimento local sustentável; revisão integrativa da literatura; análise de conteúdo temática.

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## 1. Introduction

Sustainable Local Development (SLD) is a developmental approach that considers local peculiarities and balances various territorial factors to promote societal well-being (Gomes, 2023; Sant'ana et al., 2022). It is characterized by endogenous development that stems from the locality's specific resources and potential.

The importance of SLD, compared to other sustainable perspectives, lies in its prioritization of harmonizing diverse factors - mainly social, environmental, and economic - while considering the culture, interests, and needs of the local population (Olivera et al., 2020; Rizzo et al., 2021). Achieving such objectives does not occur randomly; it requires management instruments that articulate and direct territorial actors' collective efforts, such as territorial public governance mechanisms (Almeida & Emmendoerfer, 2023).

Territorial public governance mechanisms involve state and non-state agents to manage public issues concerning a specific territory (Dallabrida, 2003). In this sense, territorial public governance serves as a fundamental tool for the development of territories by providing a space for collective discussion, reconciling interests, and coordinating actions among territorial actors (Dallabrida & Becker, 2011; Jørgensen & Fallov, 2022; Ravagnan et al., 2022; Richmond & Magri, 2025; Santos et al., 2021).

According to Sant'anna et al. (2020), territorial development relies on effective governance and its proper functioning. This indicates that territorial public governance is essential but does not ensure effective SLD promotion; it must be well-structured and adequately executed, or simply put, "good". Good territorial public governance relies on principles that vary depending on the context and theoretical framework underlying each study (Pires et al., 2011).

Therefore, it is important to identify which principles can characterize good territorial public governance aimed at SLD, especially since this topic requires more academic discussion (Santos et al., 2021). Thus, this research addressed the following question: What are the main attributes of good territorial public governance for SLD?

This study employed an exploratory qualitative approach, using a literature integrative review to analyze articles retrieved from the Scopus and Web of Science platforms. Thematic content analysis was applied to interpret the data, identifying key categories within the analysed texts that correspond to the objectives of this paper.

The study aims to identify the essential attributes characterizing good territorial public governance for SLD by analyzing the consulted studies. Consequently, this research theoretically contributes to understanding the factors delineating ideal territorial public governance, specifically for SLD. According to Santos et al. (2021), this is a problem that needs further debate.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this investigation can support actions aimed at improving territorial public governance mechanisms for SLD - an important developmental approach (Almeida & Emmendoerfer, 2023; Assis et al., 2019; Sant'ana et al., 2022; Verschoore et al., 2023), but one that requires well-established and

effectively managed collective management tools (Almeida & Emmendoerfer, 2023; Sant’anna et al., 2020).

This article is structured as follows: this introduction contextualizes and presents the studied problem; two theoretical framework sections discuss the concepts of SLD and good territorial public governance; the methodology section outlines the type of research and data collection and analysis procedures; the results and discussion section present the findings of the literature integrative review; and the final considerations address conclusions, limitations, suggestions for future studies.

## 2. Sustainable local development

Development is a widely discussed topic, defined and studied from diverse perspectives (Alves et al., 2020; Bresser-Pereira, 2014). Generally, development can be defined as the aspiration to improve societal living conditions (Bresser-Pereira, 2014). Given its semantic diversity, this study focuses on a specific type of development to prevent overly broad or indiscriminate applications.

This study adopts the concept of SLD, a specific approach within the broader territorial and sustainable development framework. SLD focuses on enhancing a population’s well-being through ongoing socio-territorial interactions, encompassing the tangible and intangible elements of a territory (Kronemberger & Costa, 2016).

Local development should not be viewed as a micro-scale adaptation of territorial development, as its benefits and influences often extend beyond the local sphere (Silveira, 2010). Rather, it represents a form of territorial development rooted in distinctive socio-territorial characteristics specific to a given locality (Tenório, 2012).

In this context, local refers to a territorial scope defined by its own tangible and intangible elements (Kronemberger & Costa, 2016). It may encompass different scales, such as a neighborhood within a municipality, a municipality within a state, or a state within a larger region. Thus, the definition of local is highly context-dependent. However, it is generally understood as a more specific territorial unit within a broader framework.

SLD is closely linked to the principles of sustainable development, aiming to balance various territorial factors. As noted by Feil and Schreiber (2017), Nurwidyaningrum et al. (2022), and Rytova et al. (2021), sustainable development seeks to enhance the population’s quality of life by harmonizing social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of each dimension.

**Table 1**  
*General dimensions to be balanced for sustainable development.*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Social	Achieved through fair social relations that respect diversity and human dignity.
Economic	Involves generating and equitably distributing economic gains to ensure widespread sustenance.
Environmental	Focuses on preserving and conserving natural resources to maintain their availability and quality for future generations.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

While these are the most widely recognized dimensions, some definitions of sustainable development include additional aspects, such as cultural, historical, and political dimensions (Carvalho, 2019). Moreover, perspectives on sustainable development vary; some scholars consider it a consequence of sustainability, whereas others view it as a process leading toward sustainability as a final goal (Sartori et al., 2014).

This study views SLD as a process, given the dynamic nature of its socio-territorial relationships. The dimensions to be balanced are considered illustrative rather than exhaustive, as they depend on the specific practices analysed, focusing on the most commonly addressed dimensions: environmental, social, and economic.

Building on the concepts of local and sustainable development, it is now possible to examine the emergence and scope of SLD. While discussions on sustainable development date back to the 1970s, predating the Brundtland Report of 1987- which introduced the first widely accepted definition - the integration of sustainability with the territorial scale only gained prominence in the 1990s (Fernández et al., 2019).

For many years, local populations were passive recipients of development rather than active participants in shaping sustainability efforts (Sant'ana et al., 2022). SLD gained prominence by recognizing that local communities should be more active in managing sustainable development (Fernández et al., 2019). This shift highlighted the need to consider the locality's culture, interests, and resources (Oliveira et al., 2020).

Thus, SLD can be defined as a developmental approach that balances territorial factors to generate lasting benefits for individuals, responding to local demands and identity ties (Assis et al., 2019; Rizzo et al., 2021; Sant'ana et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2021; Verschoore et al., 2023). SLD is characterized as an endogenous process, acknowledging that improving living conditions requires understanding the potentials and interests of local actors directly involved in its implementation.

Understanding these potentials and interests requires spaces for local actors to interact and engage in collective decision-making, such as territorial public governance mechanisms (Almeida & Emmendoerfer, 2023; Santos et al., 2021). Therefore, examining these mechanisms and assessing their effectiveness is crucial. The following section focuses on good territorial public governance.

### **3. Good territorial public governance**

The discussion on governance gained prominence in the 1930s, initially within the private sector (Álvares et al., 2008). This movement was tied to the idea that company owners and other stakeholders needed mechanisms to express and align their expectations with managerial actions (Bovaird & Löffler, 2003; Teixeira & Gomes, 2019).

In the public sector, governance emerged as a management mechanism only in the 1990s (Tribunal de Contas da União, 2014). Its proposal is similar to corporate governance, aiming to create a space for dialogue and reconciliation of interests, but with a key distinction regarding the agents involved. Public governance is based on the understanding that society owns public resources and the state (Teixeira & Gomes, 2019). Thus, public managers must be accountable for their actions (Bevir, 2011; Bovaird & Löffler, 2003).

Public governance mechanisms were developed to address citizens' problems and demands, aiming to respond effectively to their needs (Carneiro Neto et al., 2019; Lima & Ronconi, 2018). Over time, public governance has evolved to encompass various areas, including collective territorial management. Within this framework, territorial public governance - often referred to simply as territorial governance - emerged as a distinct approach.

Territorial public governance can be defined as initiatives involving different actors dedicated to managing public issues within a specific territory (Dallabrida, 2003). Complementarily, Calvo and Fernández (2021) and Jørgensen and Fallov (2022) suggest that territorial public governance fosters a diverse and collaborative environment for developing strategies that enhance territorial development.

The central objective of territorial governance is the development of territories (Alaoui & Mamoun, 2021; Lara et al., 2021; Pires et al., 2018), which requires listening to the population and enabling their interaction with other key actors in this process, such as government representatives (Dallabrida, 2003).

Although public governance is fundamental to territorial development, including its sustainable and local dimensions, its mere existence is insufficient. Governance must be well-structured and effectively implemented (Dallabrida & Becker, 2011; Sant'anna et al., 2020). In other words, interaction between government and society in decision-making must be meaningful and effective. Therefore, examining the characteristics of good territorial public governance is necessary.

Good public governance is associated with creating and maintaining a sustainable collective management system (Besley & Persson, 2011; Ostrom, 1990; Rothstein, 2011). Historically, this term has also referred to strengthening civil society's participation in public policies to ensure legitimate, transparent, efficient, and responsive allocation of public resources (Vieira & Barreto, 2019).

In general, territorial public governance is considered good when its mechanisms effectively achieve their objectives, both in terms of outcomes and the processes involved (Pires et al., 2011; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia, 2009). The attributes of good governance vary depending on the specific goals of these mechanisms. However, they commonly include fundamental principles such as transparency, representativeness, and equal participation.

In this study, the goal of territorial public governance analysed is to promote SLD. Therefore, the primary requirements for an effective collective management system focused on this developmental approach will be identified. The following section outlines the methodological procedures employed to achieve this objective.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study is classified as exploratory qualitative research. Qualitative research does not aim for generalizations and investigates the problem from a subjective perspective (Flick, 2007), while exploratory research seeks to explain and describe a relatively diffuse topic to enhance understanding and support subsequent studies (Oliveira, 2011).

Data collection was conducted through a literature integrative review. According to Snyder (2019), this technique summarizes the findings of various studies on a specific subject. Importantly, this is not done merely descriptively but through the analytical articulation of dispersed ideas (Snyder, 2019).

The integrative review focused on articles in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. After conducting multiple tests to capture works addressing the studied topic - using synonymous terms and different languages - the following search terms were defined: "territorial governance" and "local development"; "territorial governance" and "sustainable development". These terms targeted the abstracts, titles, and keywords of open-access articles published in any year or journal. Table 2 below presents the number of studies found by search terms and database:

**Table 2**  
*Articles found by search terms and database.*

Search Terms	Journal Databases	
	Scopus	Web of Science
"territorial governance" and "local development"	19	14
"territorial governance" and "sustainable development"	27	26

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Data collection occurred between December 3 and 13, 2024. The data was collected using an institutional account (by CAFE login) on the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education- CAPES Journals Portal. This allowed access to otherwise restricted articles from Scopus and Web of Science. Many articles were found in both databases. Abstracts were read to assess their relevance to the research topic, resulting in the selection of 39 articles for full-text analysis.

These articles were analyzed using the thematic content analysis technique. According to Bardin (2018), this technique identifies semantic cores in the data relevant to the study's goals. These semantic cores were organized into codes and categories. Codes represent observations from the articles contributing to this study's objectives, while categories are codes with similar meanings. Table 3 describes the steps for data collection and analysis that comprised the quality and scientific rigor protocol of this study supported by this literature integrative review protocol:

**Table 3**  
*Literature integrative review protocol.*

Steps	Description
1st	Defined the general scope of the articles to be mapped. Based on the study's objectives, selected articles had to address the relationship between governance mechanisms (implicitly public in some cases) and SLD (or represented by terms like "local development" or "sustainable development").
2nd	Delimited the search terms through preliminary tests with synonyms and different languages. The final search terms were "territorial governance" and "local development" and "territorial governance" and "sustainable development".
3rd	Conducted searches in Scopus and Web of Science, focusing on abstracts, titles, and keywords of open-access articles from any year or journal. Duplicate articles across databases were identified.
4th	Reviewed the abstracts of all identified articles, excluding those irrelevant to the research topic. This filtering process reduced the dataset to 39 articles for full-text analysis.
5th	Conducted a detailed reading of the selected articles to extract codes - observations relevant to the study's objective.
6th	Categorised the codes based on their semantic similarities to present and discuss the results.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

## 5. Results

This section presents and discusses the results of literature integrative review. Thirty-nine studies were analysed, and relevant codes were identified in alignment with the research objectives. Table 4 lists the analysed articles in reverse chronological order.

**Table 4**  
*Articles analysed in the literature integrative review.*

Ackrén (2024)	Andrews et al. (2024)	Albornoz et al. (2023)
Berisha et al. (2023)	Bianchi e Richiedei (2023)	Cubas e Pérez (2023)
Majambu et al. (2023)	Robert-Boeuf (2023)	Akdim et al. (2022)
Kniec e Goszczynski (2022)	Sosa e Morales (2022)	Vercher (2022)
Castanho et al. (2021)	Knickel et al. (2021)	Lopes e Mota (2021)
Castanho, Couto, Pimentel, Carvalho e Sousa (2020)	Castanho, Loures, Cabezas e Velarde (2020)	Gómez et al. (2020)
Jørgensen et al. (2020)	Miedes-Ugarte et al. (2020)	Niang et al. (2020)
Salcido et al. (2020)	Aubin et al. (2019)	Castanho (2019)
Castanho et al. (2019)	Furmankiewicz e Campbell (2019)	Loperte et al. (2019)
Pereira et al. (2019)	Pineda e Orduz (2019)	Sánchez (2019)
Jarrige (2018)	Mello et al. (2018)	Saviano et al. (2018)
Schmitt e Wiechmann (2018)	Perret e Abrika (2014)	Amisse et al. (2013)
Vincent et al. (2012)	Itçaina (2010)	Leloup et al. (2003)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Analyzing the codes from these bibliographical sources created six categories representing the main attributes of good territorial public governance for SLD. Figure 1 presents these categories along with their descriptions.

**Figure 1**  
*Main attributes of good territorial public governance for SLD.*



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Figure 1 shows that the main factors for qualifying territorial public governance focused on SLD as good are access to governance mechanisms, engagement of local stakeholders in governance, local representativeness in governance, transparency of governance actions, governance sustainable responsibility, and effectiveness of

governance.

These factors should not be regarded as the sole criteria for defining ideal territorial public governance in the context of SLD. The appropriateness of governance depends on the objectives of each mechanism, its outcomes, the mode of interaction, and collective decision-making processes. In other words, good territorial public governance must be analysed within its specific context.

This study identifies and discusses the essential elements highlighted in the literature on the subject. Figure 1 illustrates these elements, which will be examined in detail in the following subtopics based on their associated codes.

### **5.1. Access to governance mechanisms**

The first attribute of good territorial public governance for SLD, and arguably the most fundamental, is the openness and accessibility of governance mechanisms to local actors willing and able to participate. According to Pereira et al. (2019), territorial governance mechanisms that support local development must establish a robust participatory system, ensuring the engagement of civil society, as well as public and private sector representatives.

Aubin et al. (2019), Bianchi and Richiedei (2023), and Cubas and Pérez (2023) emphasize that governance mechanisms should increasingly promote stakeholder participation. Similarly, Sosa and Morales (2022) argue that local actors must actively engage in governance spaces, as this is essential for managing conflicts of interest and developing broader strategies for SLD.

Consequently, SLD, which depends on local resources and needs, must be based on inclusive access and participation from diverse local actors (Lopes & Mota, 2021). Furmankiewicz and Campbell (2019) highlight that collective effort and cooperation among local actors are essential for fostering sustainable territorial development.

### **5.2. Engagement of local actors in governance**

This category highlights that beyond accessible governance mechanisms, it is crucial for local actors to feel motivated to participate. To achieve this, they must trust the governance networks and feel comfortable being part of them (Itçaina, 2010).

Perret and Abrika (2014) demonstrate that mobilizing the local population to engage in territorial governance spaces was critical to achieving desired outcomes. This mobilization stemmed from trust relationships, which fostered an "associative and solidary spirit" within the community (Perret & Abrika, 2014).

Studies by Ackrén (2024), Albornoz et al. (2023), Castanho et al. (2020), and Vincent et al. (2012) also note that the active involvement of stakeholders is vital for territorial governance focused on sustainable development. Therefore, participation alone is insufficient; local actors must be engaged and committed to actions related to SLD (Niang et al., 2020).

### **5.3. Local representativeness in governance**

Representativeness refers to governance representatives' balanced composition and participation, ensuring that diverse local interests are addressed. Andrews et al. (2024), Salcido et al. (2020), and Vercher (2022) highlight this as a key attribute of territorial governance, as it decentralizes decision-making and prioritizes collective needs.

It is common for public policy management spaces to be dominated by government representatives (Leloup et al., 2003). However, Leloup et al. (2003) and Sánchez (2019) argue that effective territorial public governance requires horizontal power distribution among state, private, and civil society actors.

Studies by Akdim et al. (2022) and Schmitt and Wiechmann (2018) indicate that various local social groups must be present in governance interactions to discuss their demands and align interests for sustainable development. Centralized decisions and individual efforts hinder the promotion of SLD.

### **5.4. Transparency of governance actions**

Another key category is transparency, which means that governance mechanisms' actions and decisions must be widely communicated. Transparency should be the norm, only limited by uncontested reasons such as security or data privacy.

Mello et al. (2018) describe transparency as an essential requirement for good governance of territorial resources. It is a fundamental element for open and democratic territorial management (Miedes-Ugarte et al., 2020), enabling local populations - whether directly involved or not in collective decision-making - to understand what occurs in deliberative spaces (Knickel et al., 2021).

Governance mechanisms must continuously implement policies to strengthen and enhance transparency (Castanho, 2019). Transparent communication between stakeholders improves the integration and alignment of governance strategies for territorial planning (Castanho, Couto, Pimentel, Carvalho & Sousa, 2020).

### **5.5. Governance sustainable responsibility**

Sustainable Responsibility refers to the commitment of governance mechanisms to balancing various territorial factors - economic, environmental, social, cultural, and political - ensuring that no single dimension dominates over time. Amisse et al. (2013) illustrate this by emphasizing that local development must address multiple priorities, such as preserving historical and cultural heritage.

Gómez et al. (2020) and Majambu et al. (2023) stress the importance of incorporating environmental dimensions into governance processes while integrating them with socio-economic growth initiatives. Castanho et al. (2021) and Jarrige (2018) also argue that governance mechanisms should adopt a systemic perspective, considering the multiple elements involved in sustainable development.

According to Berisha et al. (2023) and Saviano et al. (2018), sustainable development is a complex process that requires reconciling diverse interests and territorial factors, particularly the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. One of the primary roles of territorial governance is to ensure that actions respect the balance among these dimensions (Berisha et al., 2023). Therefore, sustainable responsibility is a key attribute of good territorial public governance for SLD.

## **5.6. Effectiveness of governance**

Finally, this category addresses Effectiveness of Governance, which refers to implementing and realizing decisions collectively made in governance spaces. Jørgensen et al. (2020), Kniec and Goszczynski (2022), and Robert-Boeuf (2023) highlight that effectiveness of governance is crucial for local development, as it materializes the ideas developed by territorial actors.

Castanho et al. (2019) argue that the success of territorial governance depends on the effectiveness of its decisions. This perspective aligns with the view that dialogue alone is insufficient for territorial public governance to promote SLD; deliberations must also be effectively implemented.

Therefore, it is essential to assess how governments work to ensure public policies stem from their interaction with society and other territorial stakeholders (Pineda & Orduz, 2019). Additionally, governance management tools must be refined to make the objectives of territorial governance mechanisms viable and actionable (Loperte et al., 2019).

## **6. Final considerations**

This study identified the main attributes of good territorial public governance for Sustainable Local Development (SLD): access to governance mechanisms, engagement of local stakeholders, local representativeness, transparency in governance actions, sustainable responsibility, and effectiveness of governance.

It is important to emphasize that these attributes are not considered the only necessary factors for qualifying territorial public governance, nor are they universally indispensable for all cases promoting SLD. However, the reviewed literature demonstrates that these factors are fundamental to fostering adequate interaction among different local territorial actors to manage and promote SLD.

This study has certain limitations, particularly in analyzing specific journal databases, such as Scopus and Web of Science. Future studies could expand this research by exploring additional databases. Furthermore, conducting theoretical-empirical research based on the categories identified here would be pertinent to validate them or reveal new contextualized insights.

Despite these limitations, this study offers significant contributions to the subject. Theoretically, its findings enhance the understanding of how territorial public governance for SLD can be characterized as good or

satisfactory - a topic that, according to Santos et al. (2021), requires further exploration in the literature.

From a practical perspective, this review's findings underscore essential elements for improving territorial governance mechanisms aimed at an endogenous and balanced form of development. SLD is a necessary developmental approach (Assis et al., 2019; Sant'ana et al., 2022; Verschoore et al., 2023), but it depends on the effective articulation of collective efforts by territorial actors within a given locality (Almeida & Emmendoerfer, 2023; Sant'anna et al., 2020).

## Informação Suplementar

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