Integral Green Economy for a Sustainable Future in the Context of the EU Policies: The Case of the Integral Green Slovenia

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Abstract

The paper presents the conceptual framework of Integral Worlds approach, its application in the economic field, and the model of Integral Green Slovenia as a case of Integral Green Economy for Sustainable Development in the context of EU policies. The starting point is the recognition that global challenges are taking place in the here and now, and in the future we can expect even more of them, most likely with further increases in intensity, speed and complexity. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, is the response of global community to these challenges. While this UN document provides a comprehensive catalogue on the major development issues, a new, integrative conceptual framework and process to bring forth practical solutions in implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and offering alternative(s) to the mainstream non-sustainable economic paradigm, is needed.

The Integral Worlds approach represents such a conceptual framework and process, and is geared to holistically and transformatively address the burning issues of our time. It emphasizes dynamic balance among four mutually reinforcing dimensions and the centre – the moral core, and incorporates an inbuilt transformational rhythm, called the GENE (an acronym for Grounding, Emerging, Navigating, Effecting). Integral Economics, based on the Integral Worlds approach, is building on and connecting alternative economic theories and models (e.g. Mondragon in Spain, Grameen in Bangladesh, SEKEM in Egypt, Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka, Interface in USA, …) that are already successfully implemented today.

Good practices of Integral Green Economy and Society exist and are emerging also in Slovenia. This country has valuable experiences and knowledge with regards to integral conceptual framework and is the first nation to integrate them into a comprehensive national model with practice cases that is presented in the Routledge and Gower book Integral Green Slovenia. As an innovative and holistic societal and economic agenda for sustainable development, including also the concept of smart integration of EU policies for SD, Integral Green Slovenia represents in itself a social innovation and can serve as a pilot case to the European community on its path towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It may even inspire a movement for an Integral Green Europe as part of a new European Renaissance.

1. The Complexity of Challenges that Humanity Faces Today

World leaders, gathered in New York in September 2015, at the Seventieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, summarized the findings about the most pressing challenges and concluded that the survival of many societies, and of the biological support systems of the planet, was at risk (Figure 1). (UN General Assembly, 2015)

So we can easily conclude that our world is out of balance. This is not a simple state of imbalance. Rather, we are experiencing imbalances taking place on a larger scale, with increased intensity, interdependency and complexity on a local and global dimension.

From an individual and collective perspective, that leaves us with higher levels of uncertainty, fear and confusion. This complexity makes us confused – since the cognitive maps we possess, composed of compartmentalised knowledge, are no longer adequate for coping with the challenges of today. (Figure 2)
The recognition of immense challenges to sustainable development, complemented by the acknowledgement that we also live in a time of immense opportunities, led world leaders to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs (Figure 3) and as much as 169 associated targets. (UN General Assembly, 2015)
The 2030 Agenda is probably the most ambitious agenda in the history of humankind and it will have to be strongly supported by equally ambitious and integrally framed, holistic, trans-sectoral policies for sustainable development.

On the other hand, and largely unconnected to the global sustainability movement framed by institutional UN processes, we are witnessing an emergent “Integral Age”. Actually, a number of integral approaches, many originating from Europe, have helped shift our global perspective towards a more integral viewpoint over the past 200 years, including that of Central Europe’s Rudolf Steiner. More recently we can observe significant impact of US based Ken Wilber’s integral approach, Don Beck’s Spiral Dynamics, Ervin Laszlo’s holistic consciousness, Trans4m’s Integral Worlds approach … The key feature across most approaches is the propagation of a new evolutionary level of human consciousness, enabling humanity to transcend fragmented, isolated perspectives into an integrative one, including all those levels that came before. Except for the last two above mentioned, they have not been particularly concerned with the economic aspects of society, as we are at this conference and in this paper, and as a rule they adopt a universalist integral approach, whereby what they propose supposedly applies to all societies.

In a unique approach to fuse and upgrade these two movements of sustainability and integrality, we are proposing for consideration a new conceptual framework with a transdisciplinary, transcultural, transpersonal and transformational character – an approach that can inform us in our endeavours towards SDGs, with co-creating Integral Green Economies and Societies as we have already started in Slovenia, within the innovation ecosystem of the European Union.
2. *Integral Worlds* – a holistic approach to addressing imbalances

*Integral Worlds* is a holistic approach to understanding and consciously evolving human systems, which serves to address imbalances – within an individual, organisation, community and or society, but also within specific fields, such as economics, enterprise, human development at large etc. (Schieffer and Lessem, 2014). By “integral” Alexander Schieffer and Ronnie Lessem from the Trans4m Center for Integral Development in Geneva mean the dynamic, integrated inclusion of all dimensions (including natural ones) of a human system, be it on an individual, organisational, communal or societal level. There are four core dimensions that all such systems share and that need to be considered equally if the entire integrated system is to flourish. Mapping these four dimensions in a circular way they distinguish between the “southern” realm of nature and community; the “eastern” realm of culture and spirituality or consciousness; the “northern” realm of science, systems and technology; and the “western” realm of finance and enterprise or economics and politics. (Figure 4)

**Figure 4: Integral Worlds – the Basic Elements**

![Diagram of Integral Worlds]

All of these realms are held together by what Lessem and Schieffer termed a “moral core”, a unique expression of the innermost value base that a society considers as essential to its being. The inner moral core serves to interconnect the four outer worlds and is associated with the ability to originate and synthesize. Sustainable development of a social system has to build on the strengths and capacities of each world, each part of the system. (Figure 5)

We are overcoming “Worlds out of balance” through co-evolving dynamic balance. We can say that every social system needs to find, in order to be and stay sustainable, a dynamic balance between its four mutually reinforcing and interdependent ‘worlds’ (from nature and community, to finance and enterprise) and its ‘center’ – the moral core.
The generic *Integral Worlds* approach has been derived and is presented in the volume *Integral Development* by Lessem and Schieffer (2014), and summarised in Figure 6.
The *Integral Worlds* framework incorporates an inbuilt transformational rhythm, which not only makes the entire approach dynamic but also serves as a rhythm to enable you to actively engage in building an integral organisation, community, society, …. This rhythm is called the GENE (an acronym for Grounding, Emerging, Navigating, Effecting), representing a fourfold spiralling force, activating the entire model. The fourfold GENE rhythm functions within the four levels of each realm, as well as in between the four realms. While, according to Lessem and Schieffer, we see the GENE as an iterative, ever-unfolding rhythmical force, we nevertheless start the transformational process in the south, thereby beginning with a conscious grounding in a given context and issue, before we then engage in its transformation. (Figure 7)
3. Brief Overview of Integral Economics

Economy is regarded as just one of the integral parts of society - one that needs to be fully “re-embedded” into society. Based on the recognition that the mainstream economic paradigm is largely to be blamed for the present imbalances in relation to sustainable development goals of humanity and planet, we will be particularly interested in the application of the generic *Integral Worlds* approach in this area.
According to *Integral Economics* (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010), a society needs to begin its process of integral economic development by securing “southern” nature-based economic self-sufficiency, before it focuses on the other, “eastern”, “northern” and “western”, economic functions. Thereafter it needs to respectively include the building up of a culture-based developmental economy (ensuring that the economy is aligned with the cultural evolution of the society), a knowledge-based social economy (aligning its socio-economic structures with technology-driven knowledge systems) and a life-based living economy (reconnecting finance and economic performance measurement to natural and human well-being).

The transformative GENE process for an Integral Economy begins with Grounding (G) in a particular nature and community, to surface key economic developmental needs and potentials. We then progress towards Emergence (E), tapping into the cultural creativity of a particular economy and society, inviting and generating insights to respond to economic challenges and aspirations, by also tapping into the cultural potential for the economic renewal of a society.

In activating its own cultural capacities, a society does, on the one hand, affirm its own cultural uniqueness, but it also, on the other hand, invites other cultural perspectives from outside, to broaden its own co-evolution. The insights gained from the cultural space are then further expressed and developed in a process of Navigating (N) new economic knowledge and concepts, in the “northern” realm of science, systems and technology that is particular to that society. It is here that a society shapes, in explicit terms, its own socio-economic perspective, in touch with its natural and communal grounds, and resourced by its cultural capacities. Such new economic theory is then ultimately Effected (2nd E) and practically realised via a new form of enterprise and/or economic policy.

Lessem and Schieffer were surprised about the wealth of innovative economic thinking and practise that can be found in the world; the biggest surprise of all was the wealth of economic
thinking to be found at the centre, which led to the articulation of - what they call - a moral economic core. Such a moral economic core is related to the innermost value base to be found in each society and is either related to religion and/or secular, humanist articulation of such a value base.

We will illustrate the theoretical explanation with seminal models, globally recognised practice cases of Integral Economy, successful in free market conditions:

**South:** The role model Lessem and Schieffer surfaced in the “southern” realm is the “social business” and self-sufficiency movement, embodied by Grameen in Bangladesh (the founder: the Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus). Another distinguished practice case is the Sekem community enterprise in Egypt, founded by Ibrahim Abouleish, the winner of the Right Livelihood Award (Alternative Nobel Prize).

**East:** The role model surfaced in the “eastern” realm is the developmental enterprise, embodied by Canon in Japan, pursuing its Japanese path of “kyosei”, or co-evolution, as well as Sarvodaya (“The Awakening of All”) in Sri Lanka, one of the world’s largest development initiatives.

**North:** The role model surfaced in the “northern” realm is the cooperative enterprise, pre-eminently embodied in the Mondragon Cooperatives in Spain, the world’s largest workers’ cooperative and a leader in the social-economic cooperative movement. It is particularly relevant for the development of a social economy in Slovenia and Europe.

**West:** The role model surfaced by Lessem and Schieffer in the “western” realm is the “sustainable enterprise”, embodied in Interface in the USA, a corporate leader within the sustainability movement. Considering the enormous influence of the unsustainable banking system on development of our societies the case of a leading sustainable bank Triodos from Netherlands is highly relevant for our discussion, too. In our case the “west” builds on the rest - south, east and north - rather than standing in splendid isolation.

Integral explanation of a globally renowned practice case – the Mondragon Cooperative, aligned with the GENE rhythm, is summarised in the Figure 9: the four integral dimensions, as well as the centring moral core.
The wealth of economic thinking and practise we can find in the world along the four economic realms and the moral economic core is schematically depicted in the world map of Integral Economy in Figure 10 (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).
4. *Integral Green Slovenia: the Book and the Model*

In a unique process of co-creation, the Citizens’ Initiative for an Integral Green Slovenia, together with Trans4m, applied and evolved this new framework within the innovation ecosystem of the European Union, on the level of individual sustainable enterprises and local communities, but also on national level, and depicted this multidimensional and multi-layered process in the Gower and Routledge volume *Integral Green Slovenia: Towards a Social, Knowledge- and Value-Based Economy and Society at the Heart of Europe*, edited by Darja Piciga, Alexander Schieffer and Ronnie Lessem (2016). This second book in the Integral Green Society and Economy series tells the unique story of a society pursuing a newly holistic and green approach to economics. The story is framed by real-life stories of integral communities and organisations on a path of social innovation for sustainability. These good practices (about 20 of them) and corresponding conceptual framework are in the book presented by 43 Slovenian authors in collaboration with the series editors, Lessem and Schieffer.

**Figure 11: Integral Green Slovenia: the Book**

In elaborating four integral economic paths of the Integral Green Slovenia model, we also identified the key EU and Slovenian policies, programmes and measures promoting each path.
In the “southern” Community-based self-sufficient economy the particular contribution of organic agriculture, with emphasis on small organic farms, to an integral green development is highlighted and illustrated with practice cases. The self-sufficiency focus shifts from food to energy, in particular to wood-based energy self-sufficiency: wood as one of Slovenia’s most important strategic resources, with Slovenia having a unique and historical approach to close-to-nature forestry.

The Slovenian cases and approaches to Culture-based developmental economy (East) encompass the Heart of Slovenia as a case of culture-based regional development; the heart-centred approach to the Earth, nature and the human essence based on art as complementary to science (e.g., geomancy and geoculture by Marko Pogačnik) and sustainability management in protected areas in the case of the mountainous region Solčavsko.

North: Domel, one of the country’s most prominent high-tech manufacturers, represents a Slovenian prototype of a social knowledge-based economic approach in the integral green economy model. A case of Green Social Entrepreneurship is depicted in the book, together with the policy framework for and an overview of development of cooperatives, social entrepreneurship and creative industries.

and finally West: A number of pioneering Slovenian enterprises, who all combine a strong sense for environmental and social responsibility with green technology and sustainable production processes are in the volume Integral Green Slovenia represented by Institute Metron, one of the country’s leading institutions in electric vehicle development, and the remarkable case of Pipistrel, a world leader in ultra-light aircraft design and construction - a
demonstration of how to combine highest technological standards with an uncompromising commitment to the environment.

The integral economy framework with its GENE concept is in the book well documented in the case of high-tech company Domel. From an integral economic perspective, as illustrated in the Figure 13, Domel has built its vision on the values of socially responsible and innovative entrepreneurship: creativity and ambition, responsibility and economy, respect and cooperation, caring for customers and employees, and loyalty (Moral Economic Core). Domel has integrated a strong connection to the local community and a passion for social responsibility into its business model as competitive advantages. In Domel these values come alive by being demonstrated in everyday business operations. Such values are expressed in a strong connection and integration with the surrounding community, caring for its weakest members, and in respect for the natural heritage: Domel is a global player with local Grounding. Domel’s employees and CEO are aware of the cultural heritage that has shaped them (such as the iron foundry tradition in their town Železniki and cooperative heritage of the company and the region), and they have developed an awareness of the necessity for continuous development: enterprise evolution is Emerging from a rich cultural heritage. This awareness is reflected in the development of new knowledge, particularly in the field of technology and education and in conjunction with academic institutions (science and technology to Navigate their development). Innovations also contribute to greater energy efficiency of Domel’s products, which is characteristic of a green and circular economy, and are backed up with an Effective business model (finance and enterprise). Effective crisis management and an enhanced market position are regarded as cooperative impact, too. Employee ownership – the battle for the company lasted from 1992 to 2010 - borne fruit in the form of a high degree of loyalty, innovation and employee commitment.

Figure 13: The Integral Green Model of Domel
Combined efforts result in a reduced burden on material resources and enhanced energy efficiency (highlights of green economy). Consumers acknowledge the high quality of the solutions Domel provides and this can be seen in the fact that the company has become a developmental supplier to some of the largest global corporations in the fields of power tools and garden equipment, the automotive industry and heating, ventilation, air-conditioning and cooling. An awareness of the need for development and advancement is the driving force at the company and is inseparably tied to efforts to maintain quality jobs that facilitate a sustainable developmental path for the company, its employees and the citizens of Železniki.

Co-ownership and co-management by employees are the key elements of the (knowledge-based) social economy, which not only is recognised in the European Union as a successful model for escaping the crisis but also has a long tradition in Slovenia. And today, through enterprises like Domel, we are “discovering” them once again.

5. European Smart Integration

The case of Domel and several other cases from Integral Green Slovenia can be regarded as excellent practices of sustainable development and are at the same time supported by the EU policies for sustainable development.

In building the Slovenian integral green development model we have complemented the traditional conceptualisation of sustainable development, according to the Integral Worlds approach: sustainable development is described with four dimensions (environment, economy, society and culture), and emphasis on values of social responsibility is added. Measures to implement a SD policy have to target goals in all four dimensions and to follow values of social responsibility.

We don’t build a new development model from scratch; quite the opposite, our argument is that a number of existing EU, national and regional policies and guidelines, measures and instruments across several policy domains are already supporting sustainable development goals and the integral green model of development2: green and circular economy, social economy and socially responsible entrepreneurship, ethical banking, sustainable development of towns and rural areas with organic food and energy self-supply, revitalisation of cultural heritage ….

On the other hand, one can observe that sustainable development is often impeded by certain other policies, that is, macroeconomic and fiscal policies. Our assumption is that by placing values of social responsibility and sustainability in the centre of an economic model and, at the same time, strongly relying on all four dimensions of sustainable development, we could outweigh the unsustainable policy impulses.

A new concept of “smart integration of European Union policies for sustainable development” has been proposed that is emphasizing and promoting synergies and cross-sector approach. Various EU policies are reflected in the good practices presented throughout the book Integral

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2 We can certainly agree with Hans Bruyninckx, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency, introducing the last report on the state and the outlook of the European environment with the words: “The European Union has provided global environmental leadership for some 40 years.” (https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer-2015/synthesis/report/0b-foreword).
Green Slovenia, which witnesses that smart integration already works. As analysis of practice cases has revealed, smart integration of EU policies for sustainable development is already happening and occurs in various ways, for example:

1. Through the complex structure of EU programmes, projects in different areas and on various levels are supported. Business organisations, local communities and other entities can apply for funds at a number of tenders each year. Furthermore, funding possibilities are offered in different international programmes. Financial means to support the integral green practices came from national and regional programmes of the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Cohesion Fund and the Rural Development Programme; on the EU level from the LIFE programme (LIFE is the EU’s funding instrument for the environment and climate action); Intelligent Energy Europe; R&D and innovation programmes (Horizon 2020); programmes to support cross-border cooperation and macro-regional priorities; and several other financial and programming mechanisms. Some kind of support from EU and international programmes has been mentioned in almost all practice cases.

2. Following EU guidelines, like the ones for a green economy, in an innovative way—for example the EU directive with regard to eco-design requirements for vacuum cleaners in the case of Domel - not only can ensure survival of companies but can even help them to become world leaders in market niches.

3. Possibilities for networking and cooperation within the EU and also with third countries are innumerable, as illustrated in the book.

The Integral Green Slovenia model represents a societal innovation for sustainable development, consisting of several social innovations. Since we are building on existing EU policies for sustainable development, with a view of smartly integrating them, our work has significant implications for further policy building and implementation towards SDGs as well as for participatory governance and political agendas.

6. Building the Future of Europe as an Integral Green Society and Economy

To conclude, we turn to current challenges of the European Union - where the debate about The White Paper on the future of Europe³ is taking place - and look at them from the perspective of the 2030 Agenda, informed by the wealth of integral conceptual framework and practice cases. Being aware of multiple crises in Europe and neighbouring regions, while the EU, at the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, is even facing a threat of disintegration, we are proposing to step on the path of holistic, integral societal and economic renewal. Such a renewal has to be today based on the paradigm of sustainable development and therefore needs to fully embrace the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. After all the European Union was the most active political entity in negotiations for Agenda 2030 and has ambition to play a leading role in its implementation domestically - with several well elaborated policies already in place - and on a global scale.⁴

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The conceptual framework of the Integral Worlds Approach can inform endeavours towards SDGs in a Renaissance mode\(^5\), as we tried with the Appeal for an Integral Green Europe\(^6\):

- By placing *fundamental values*, underlying the European cultural heritage, in the centre and as the starting point of visionary thinking as well as practical policies and measures – to inspire, help to integrate different spheres, and to enable a strong connection of all stakeholders to the innermost value core of the European society.

- By rooting sustainable development in *nature and community* and including *culture* of the particular society as a crucial, but often neglected, component of a holistic approach to development. The integral paradigm of sustainable development therefore encompasses four, mutually balanced dimensions - economy, environment, society, culture - and is strongly based on the moral core. An Integral Green Europe is authentically building on European culture(s) as well as recognising contributions of neighbouring and other cultures.

- By revisiting the *economic paradigm* that is to a large extent responsible for current environmental degradation, social and economic crises. The future of Europe’s economy has to be rebuilt on the wealth of integral impulses from all spheres and sectors of society, promote various economic approaches and paths that are successful in free market conditions and resilient to crises (e.g., green economy, social entrepreneurship), and take into account the whole of the environmental and social impact of business operations.

- By connecting and upgrading a number of successful European *integral green practices*, explaining them with the help of Integral Economics and Integral Development; among them Integral Green Slovenia as a pilot country.

- By *smart integration* and effective implementation of EU policies based on sustainable development principles, such as the green, low-carbon and circular economy as described earlier.

- By helping Europe to become aware that “Integral Age” and “Societal Renaissance” are *emerging in other cultures*, too, and to support such integral impulses for societal and economic renewal in developing countries.

And the final point: Co-creation of an Integral Green Europe could help the European community to reassume - now in partnership with, and drawing upon, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and America - the joint role of Navigating societal and economic renewal globally.

**Key References:**


\(^5\) Among various initiatives and attempts to resurrect the grandeur of Europe are also those from which we can find inspiration in the great era of European Renaissance, e.g.: EURAB in 2009 ([https://ec.europa.eu/research/erab/pdf/erab-first-annual-report-06102009_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/erab/pdf/erab-first-annual-report-06102009_en.pdf)) and more recently the 2016 Appeal of 9 May ([http://www.m9m.eu/l201/](http://www.m9m.eu/l201/)). We couldn’t find, however, initiatives that would incorporate an integral perspective or position themselves in the paradigm of sustainable development.

\(^6\) This appeal resulted from the 3rd International Conference *Integral Green Economy for a Better World – IGE2017*, held on 31 January 2017 in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and organised by Citizens’ Initiative for an Integral Green Slovenia and TRANS4M Centre for Integral Development, in cooperation with 28 national and international organisations and institutions.
