



## Article

# A New Methodology to Assess Territorial Competence for Sustainable Local Development: The READI<sup>®</sup> (Resources-Actors-Dynamics) Matrix<sup>†</sup>

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† The READI matrix methodology is pending registration with its acronym in Spanish (REcursos, Actores, DInámicas).



**Citation:** Calvo-Palomares, R.; Aguado-Hernández, J.A.; Sigalat-Signes, E.; Roig-Merino, B. A New Methodology to Assess Territorial Competence for Sustainable Local Development: The READI<sup>®</sup> (Resources-Actors-Dynamics) Matrix. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6022. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116022>

Academic Editor: Gema Cárdenas

Received: 22 March 2021

Accepted: 19 May 2021

Published: 27 May 2021

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**Abstract:** The ability of a territory to manage certain sustainable development processes increasingly depends on its capacity to apply previous diagnostic processes to its current situation. For this reason, methodologies that facilitate the detection of needs and/or potentialities of the territory are key to meeting its anticipated sustainable development goals. We present the most notable results of the research methodology carried out in the province of Valencia (Spain) that has enabled the construction of a matrix of indicators that allow these previous diagnostic processes to be put into practice at a local level, based on the participation of the territory's socioeconomic actors.

**Keywords:** methodology; local development; matrix; resources; actors; dynamics

## 1. Introduction

To achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs), different territories require a sufficient level of competence to be able to undertake development processes that are sustainable, responsible, appropriate, and adapted to their particular needs and characteristics. This calls for a prior process of analysis, for which it is essential to have the methodologies—and therefore the instruments, tools and applications—to detect them.

The main purpose of this paper is to present the READI matrix, a tool for this prior process of evaluation (including self-assessment) of the degree of competence of territories to tackle local development processes (throughout the text, we shall refer to “territory” as a space of action for local development, and according to [1], p. 1261, “local” will refer to localities and sub-regions, including municipalities and intermunicipal associations). The project consists of the methodological design, construction and subsequent validation of the matrix, developed during 2018–2020, driven by the University of Valencia territorial development research group—Grupo de Investigación en Desarrollo Territorial de la Universitat de València, GRIDET—in collaboration with Divalterra, a public company of the Diputació de València (Spain), a provincial authority with competencies in local development. The matrix is based on the evaluation of each territory's prospects—setting out from the premise of the different reality of each territory—based on the availability, ownership, use and/or exploitation of elements with the potential to generate development processes within it, thus designing a self-diagnostic tool to gauge the degree of competence of any territory for local development.

This matrix is designated READI, from the initials of the key elements on which it is based: “Resources, Actors and Dynamics.” The project proposal allows us to empirically prove that territories are competent to the extent that they take advantage of the available resources (natural, but not only, underutilised or, on the contrary, intensively or irrationally used) and through the actors present (social and economic), generating dynamics among them (interactions between socioeconomic and natural systems) as essential elements for local development.

The measurement of these elements is carried out gradually, obtaining a final score indicative of the current situation in each territory, revealing its strengths and weaknesses and providing public managers with an adapted vision of the reality of the territory, which can serve as a basis for any subsequent intervention (action) on them that might be proposed in order to develop a more sustainable and efficient economy (competent for a sustainable territorial development). Herein lies the innovation of the present work, as there is no similar instrument in the scientific literature that makes a competency-based assessment for development possible.

The matrix was drawn up with the participation of researchers and professional experts of acknowledged national and international prestige on the subject, based on a plural methodological design, with the articulation in its different stages of qualitative and quantitative social research techniques that combine conversational and direct participation devices, thus seeking the construction of a collective discourse on the factors necessary for local development, and also the variables and indicators to measure them.

The process includes the creation, validation and testing of the READI matrix, the evaluation of the entire project as a whole and its end product—the software application. The main contributions of this article are based on this final stage.

The READI matrix is essentially a participatory territorial project (formed with the participation of the actors—before, during and after) with an integral vision (proposed for the whole territory—and for any territory—being able to establish comparisons) and with an integrated (understanding the territory as a whole on which we intervene) and integrative vision (taking into account all the actors of the territory, as dynamizing elements of the available resources).

## 2. The Role of Facilitating Methodologies in Sustainable Territorial Development

In the context of crisis uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, socio-territorial phenomena are extremely dynamic in both time and space. Therefore, in order to adjust policies to the needs of citizens, their understanding requires constant monitoring [2]. In this regard, the empowerment of Public Administrations (hereinafter referred to as PAs) becomes important to reduce confusion and noise [3] and to underpin knowledge and certainty in order to leave nothing to chance, shaping and constructing a map of the environment in which action is taken [4,5]. Likewise, it can be seen that methodologies based on social research play a more or less explicit role in all the phases through which a public problem may pass [6,7].

Theses on the programs, services and functions of the agencies and technical staff that implement socioeconomic development policies follow the same lines [8–11]. For decades, the Spanish state and autonomous community regulations on territorial development have been moving in the same direction [12,13], alongside international organizations such as OECD [14], the Leipzig Charter [15], the European Union [16] and its Territorial Agenda [17], professional associations [18] and scholars in the field [8,19–24].

In general, the absence of a culture and methodology of research in public policies to develop good observation and systematized information systems is significant. This results in the loss of the important data necessary to respond to the fundamental questions facing PAs to define the most appropriate policies for each objective [8,25].

Within this framework, the Spanish local development model, and the Valencian model in particular, is characterized by the lack of specific, updated and continuous technical–scientific information generation instruments for making decisions and using

the knowledge generated in its actions. This situation continues today, more than 30 years after its inception. All of this leads to the absence of adequate strategic planning, which hinders the implementation of a comprehensive vision adjusted to the priorities or basic needs of the population [13,26,27].

It is true that there have been different diagnostic methodologies for sustainable development for decades [7,28,29], such as the methodology for sustainable micro-regional development [30] or the Environmental Sustainability Index [31]. The latter, in turn, combines the OECD Pressure-State-Response scheme [32] with Yale University's Environmental Sustainability Index [33].

All of these methodologies must function without forgetting the participatory processes for the diagnosis of problems and the drafting of the sustainability agenda. These practices are framed within the remit of Local Agenda 21 [34–36], based on UN Agenda 21 [37], along with other initiatives such as URBACT, URBAN and EDUSI [2]. In the case of the SDGs, there are also different diagnoses [38,39]. However, they are focused on the state level or are based on population and housing census microdata [38] and not so much on the triangulation of techniques or participatory methodologies [38].

For this reason, in the field of sustainable territorial development, other facilitating methodologies and devices are needed that are integrated by familiar and practical indicators. These tools must assess and analyse the information in a rigorous and objective manner through the construction of indexes for data structuring—such as those proposed by the READI matrix. Only in this way can existing trends be apprehended and opportunities for government and private intervention be identified to feed back into the development of the policy-making process. Consequently, to adjust the programmes to the priorities or basic needs of the population, providing adequate resources for the most efficient lines of action [3,26,27,40–45].

In this sense, according to de Armas, Tamayo and Santos [46], it is necessary to have indicators that translate the territorial reality, serve as guides and which promote the territory's progress. In this line, the fact of having objective and adjusted indicators that make it possible to evaluate the degree of competence of the development achieved at a given time is certainly the previous step and *sine qua non* condition for the delimitation of the possible goals to achieve this.

In the sphere of public policies, and especially in the European context, there has always been a drive to measure and compare the levels of development and social, economic and environmental progress of different countries and regions. To this end, indicators and statistical methods have been used in official European Union documents to account for the efficiency of programmes and investments made in the territories ever since the creation of what was designated the European Spatial Development Perspective [47].

For the above reasons, many attempts have been made in the scientific literature to standardise indicators for diagnosing, monitoring and comparing development on different territorial scales and with different approaches depending on the scientific disciplines used. Thus, in a review of the scientific output, there are models that base their analysis on the development of matrices based on the attractiveness of a region and its competitiveness [21]. These models are based on the sustainable development of socioeconomic systems and the identification of management tools and indicators that are effective in the regional scope [23,29,48–51] or those focused on case studies [11,52]. Those models based on the economic analysis of sustainable development [53] and regional competitiveness based on the grouping of indicators through multicriteria comparisons, such as the analyses carried out by Florea and Florea from the regional economics perspective [54]—in 268 European regions—or those applied to case studies by authors such as Boggia & Cortina [55]. Likewise, the integrated multicriteria strategic planning approaches that in engineering and sustainable development are based on different methodological evaluation tools in order to support adaptive and inclusive decision-making processes that lead public authorities to opt for the most profitable in terms of environmental, social and economic sustainability [7].

Along the same lines, it is worth considering that the models for estimating social and economic indicators of sustainable development focused on methodological approaches for an integrated assessment of the socioeconomic parameters of sustainable development at the international level in the current UN information base [56], or those that, through the analysis of economic issues and taking into account institutional considerations, suggest mechanisms for implementing policies—markedly economic—based on a matrix to form priority development territories, such as those applied by Osipov et al. [57]. Other models, in a more entrepreneurial approach, develop matrices that underpin the issue of territorial development to business sustainability in contexts such as COVID-19, based on a whole series of indicators and multidimensional business components for strategic decision making for companies, ultimately hinging around and always seeking a sustainable path in the improvement of business in the territory [58].

Likewise, the methodological tools of other works take into account and highlight the importance of human resources and social capital for the territory's competitive development [59]. Moreover, some models involve the determination of partial and comprehensive indices of socio-ecological-economic development by comparing the existing reference the development values of the social, ecological and economic fields of activity [60,61], among many other works—and scientific disciplines—that propose measurement and classification methodologies and archetypes to understand and evaluate the capacities of the different territories from different territorial scales and viewpoints.

In this sense, the novelty of the initiative presented here is that there are no tools in the literature on the subject such as the one proposed, beyond the attempt to measure some territorial issues from different disciplines such as those mentioned above or strategies focused on cases by different scientific works [20,61–63] and others that are often merely conjectural opinions. Likewise, when data are available, they are partial or applicable to higher aggregate scales—regional, national or international—and, therefore, inappropriate for measuring development at the local level [43]. In line with authors such as Morel, Poulain & Ezvan [44], with the proposed matrix we intend to participate in a collective approach around a specific “common good” which is none other than the territory, along with its geographic, environmental, social, cultural and economic components.

The absence of local development measurement models is a fact. Although methodological tools and guides are being used in the effort to achieve strategic planning for participatory territorial governance, many other areas for development management are neglected, such as the use of the specific and potential resources of the territory [44,64], the consideration of institutional capacity building [45], the existence of different types of social networks that strengthen social capital [59,65,66] and their possible implications and interdependencies as essential factors for territorial development [13,66].

In this sense, sustainable territorial development calls for methodologies that allow and facilitate the analysis, diagnosis and study of the reality of their situation. So what happens when we do not have these types of specific tools? This is the case of the development model implemented in Spain since the 1980s, a model that has not provided the dynamics to generate the specific instruments needed to fully meet its objectives. In consequence, not having these types of tools (and thus lacking the information they generate) is an obstacle to the growth of a territory, hindering the actions to be undertaken, taking advantage neither of the available resources, nor the potential of the actors present, nor of course the dynamics that could be articulated among them. This means that the territories fail to take advantage of many of their potentialities, due to lack of knowledge, lack of competence and/or inoperativeness, thus limiting their socioeconomic possibilities. These are dynamics based on custom, very commonplace in this area, which do not facilitate dynamic, sustainable or responsible processes for development of the territory.

### 3. Methodology

#### *Methodological Genesis of the READI Matrix*

The project that serves as the applied basis of this work is, as presented in the introduction, designated “Design of a matrix for the evaluation (including self-assessment) of the competence of territories to face local development processes”. The project was developed over 24 months (from April 2018 to March 2020), driven by the Valencia University Territorial Development Research Group—GRIDET—in collaboration with Divalterra, a public company of the Diputació de València (Spain), and which has been characterised by essentially being a participative and participatory territorial project with the stakeholders specialised in local socioeconomic development present in the territory. Continuous and direct contact, as will be shown, has obliged us to “continuously visit the territory”.

The methodological approach to convert the body of knowledge possessed by expert personnel into theoretical and practical information was configured from a structural dimension that includes contributions from working group techniques and the Delphi method.

Specifically, the working group technique consisted of a meeting of people according to specific abilities, knowledge and skills (professionals or experts) who, under the leadership of a coordinator, set up the framework of interactions necessary to gather quality information on the current reality and future prospects of the territorial development model [67,68].

Likewise, through the Delphi method, the experts’ opinions and arguments are contrasted and combined in a participatory manner, creating a common inter-subjective language based on the aggregation of the knowledge of the specialists, to select the variables and indicators of interest, identify the causal relationships between factors and define and validate the construct of analysis and data gathering. All this was done by means of different feedback techniques, but without the anonymity of the members demanded in certain Delphi techniques [69–71] as anonymity is incompatible with participatory analysis.

In response to the question “Who took part?”, professionals and expert researchers of recognised prestige in the local, national and international scope were involved. As for the professionals, more than a hundred local employment and development agents (better known in Spain as AEDL (The Spanish acronym AEDL will be used in this paper to refer to the Local Development and Employment Agent.)) participated in the matrix design process. This way, we achieved a considerable representation of the province of Valencia.

Specifically, the distribution of technical staff in local development (Table 1) is 207 people in the province of Valencia, which covers a population rate of 97.13%. (The population coverage rate compares the population of the municipalities that have an AEDL service with the total population of each territory (province or community) in each period). Although there are currently fewer technicians than a decade ago, there is greater coverage of the territory due to the promotion in recent years of the Territorial Pacts and the AEDLs from the intermunicipal associations of municipalities.

**Table 1.** Number of AEDLs in Valencia province and Valencian Community (2011–2018).

Year	N° of AEDLs		N° of Municipalities		Population Coverage Rate	
	Valencia (Province)	Valencian Community	Valencia (Province)	Valencian Community	Valencian Community	Valencian Community
2011	266	656	266	542	84,5%	89,4%
2018	207	489	266	542	97,1%	94,2%

Source: Authors’ adaptation (and information provided by Labora (<http://www.labora.gva.es/>) and Divalterra (<https://www.divaladl.es/es/>) in 2018. Accessed on 20 April 2018).

The AEDLs who participated in the groups (93) represent 45% of the total number in the province, not counting the people interviewed or the experts in the nominal groups.

This size implies a maximum sampling error of 7.5% on the total AEDLs, for an expected parameter frequency of 50% (50/50) with a significance level of 95% ( $z = 1.96$ ).

In addition, national and international researchers and experts participated in two Delphi groups formed for this purpose. (We highlight the participation in these expert groups of Francisco Alburquerque (international expert), Antonio Cáceres (international expert), Pablo Costamagna (international expert), Javier Esparcia (Full Professor at the Universitat de València), Ximo Farinós (Full Professor at the Universitat de València), Juan A. Márquez (Full Professor at the University of Huelva), Antonio Martínez (Associate Professor at the University of Alicante), Ricardo Méndez (Researcher at CSIC), M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Pitarch (Associate Professor at Universitat de València), Joan Romero (Full Professor at Universitat de València), Joan R. Sanchis (Full Professor at Universitat de València) and Vicente Zapata (Associate Professor at the University of La Laguna)). This has afforded us a triangulation of perspectives of great importance for the project, combining a local vision—micro or proximal—with a national–international outlook—macro or broader—of the development of the territory.

The aforementioned actors were involved mainly through three main proposed actions:

- Generation actions. Holding meetings and group dynamics. The main aim was to gather contributions that would be useful as raw material for the project.
- Validation actions. Through the review of documents and results prepared that included the contributions made to date.
- Follow-up actions. Proposals so that stakeholders could be informed of the status and progress of the project at all times.

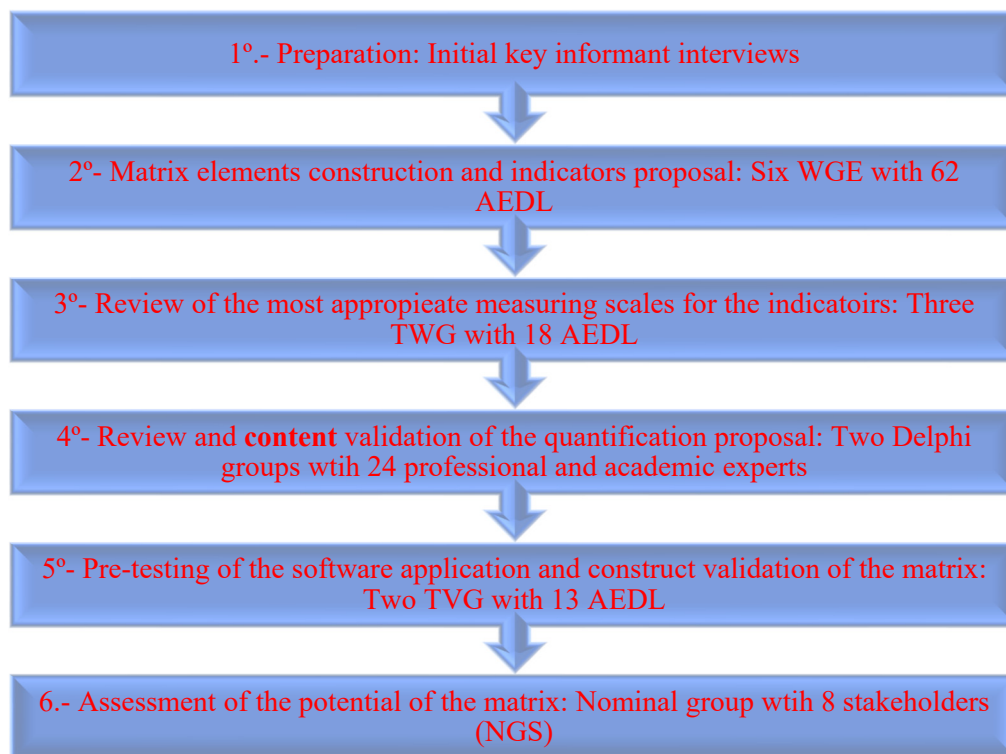
These three lines of work were operationalised in a process encompassing the creation, validation, testing and final evaluation of the entire project as a whole and its end product—the READI matrix software application—according to the following distribution of participants (see Figure 1):

- Six working groups of experts (WGE) in which 62 AEDL participated, to determine the key factors for the development of any territory (factors that responded to three main groups: resources necessary for development, actors involved in this process and dynamics that are articulated in a territory for its achievement).
- Three technical working groups (TWG) with 18 AEDL taking part, to review the most appropriate scales for measuring these indicators.
- Two Delphi groups for content validation of the matrix quantification proposal with 24 national and international experts from both academic and professional fields.
- Two technical validation groups (TVG) with 13 AEDL for pre-testing of the software application and construct validation of the matrix.
- Finally, a nominal group with 8 stakeholders (NGS) for the assessment of the potential of the matrix (advantages and drawbacks).

These actions served for the construction of the collective discourse that led to the determination of the matrix and its contents.

In addition to the READI matrix dimensions, indicators and scores, the main contributions of this article are based on the NGS. The 8 key participants in the NGS (Table 2) were selected in an interested manner to represent groups of actors directly involved in development of the territory, who were invited to take part once the project as a whole and its end product—the READI matrix software application—were prepared. They were asked to determine:

1. Individually, the advantages and disadvantages of the matrix in their view (as far as possible, they should identify three of each).
2. As a group, to try to order them based on the importance they attached to each of these benefits and drawbacks.



**Figure 1.** Research sequence of the READI matrix creation process. Source: Own creation.

**Table 2.** Nominal group with stakeholders (NGS) participant profile.

Code	Participant Profile	Operational Area
NGS-1	Union leader	Regional trade union organisation
NGS-2	Public Administrations manager. European Projects Department Head	Provincial area PAs
NGS-3	Political leader. Mayor and Councillor for Economic Promotion	Local area PAs
NGS-4	AEDL agent	Local area PAs
NGS-5	AEDL agent	Local area PAs
NGS-6	AEDL agent	Local area PAs
NGS-7	University Lecturer. Local Development Researcher profile	National PAs
NGS-8	Public Adm. Regional Employment and Training Service agent	Regional area PAs

Source: Own creation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Main Outcome: The READI Matrix

The main result of the project is undoubtedly the proposal of elements and the valuations assigned to each of them that make up the matrix and the software application that supports it. As a final result of the combination of these indicators, the matrix was constructed, a complex index with a total of 500 points, with three main dimensions or sub-indices: resources (200 points), actors (150 points) and dynamics (150 points). The final distribution of dimensions, variables and indicators is as shown in the following figure (Table 3):

**Table 3.** READI matrix final proposal.

<b>MATRIX Summary—Resources, Actors and Dynamics</b>	<b>Scores</b>
<b>RESOURCES</b>	
<b>ECONOMIC</b>	
Own funding sources	15
External funding sources (public)	10
External funding sources (public-private)	10
External funding sources (private)	10
Interest in and seeking participation in European projects	5
<b>PRODUCTIVE</b>	
Quantity of employment generated	15
Quality of employment generated	20
Productive fabric	10
Productive sectors (quantity)	5
Size of companies	5
<b>HUMAN</b>	
Average education level of the population	10
Labour migration balance (local employment system)	10
<b>SPATIAL</b>	
Natural resources	10
Tourism resources	10
Cultural resources	10
Production resources	15
Geographical location	10
Infrastructures	10
	<b>200</b>
<b>ACTORS</b>	
Specific resources for development	25
Presence of socioeconomic actors	25
Presence of variety of socioeconomic actors	25
Detection, study and analysis process	20
Contact process and collaboration proposals	30
Results obtained	25
	<b>150</b>
<b>DYNAMICS</b>	
Forums and meeting points	30
Types of forum and meeting points	20
Territorial leadership	25
Socio-institutional networks at local level	25
Methodologies and strategic plans	25
Joint vision of territorial development	25
	<b>150</b>
<b>TOTAL MAXIMUM SCORE</b>	<b>500</b>

Source: Own creation.

Regarding the previous table, a descriptive study design was followed for the construction of concepts, dimensions and indicators and the verification of multidimensional scales through factor analysis and construct validity. The quantitative analysis combined with the qualitative input from experts concluded that the matrix is a valid and reliable instrument for the programmed task.

In regard to the validity of the score matrix, it was divided into the analysis of content validity on the one hand, and construct validity on the other. To analyse the former—the content validity of the matrix—expert judgement was used through quantitative and qualitative data, as use of the expert voice is the process most widely applied to determine this type of validity [72]. To assess the reliability of the matrix of scores, the internal consistency of the dimensions was analysed by calculating Cronbach's alpha and the discrimination capacity of the dimensions was determined by calculating the homogeneity



index (All calculations made to measure the reliability and validity of the READI matrix were performed with SPSS v. 26 software.).

The statistical tests were conclusive, obtaining positive results on the validity of the matrix, both in terms of its content and its construct. As for its reliability, the internal consistency of the matrix obtained through the Cronbach's alpha calculation was very high, standing at 0.80, exceeding the value considered adequate in the scientific literature on the subject (0.70). Although the development of the methodological design followed for the analysis of validity and reliability of a matrix is not the subject of this paper, the authors give a detailed account of the entire methodological process and encourage you to consult it in a recent publication [73].

#### 4.2. Assessment of the Potential of the Matrix as Perceived by Stakeholders

Once the working group with stakeholder representatives was formed, Table 4 shows the main contributions according to the importance given to each of them in the work process carried out. It reflects both the overall vision (the result of the consensus reached in the group dynamics) and the individual vision of each participant (through the scores given to each of the contributions made (The individual scores were calculated taking into account the first 3 individual contributions, assigning 3 points to the first, 2 to the second and 1 to the third. Therefore, a score of 25% for the first advantage means that that contribution has obtained 6 points out of 24 of the maximum possible score (8 participants assigning 3 points to the same contribution.)).

**Table 4.** Result of group consensus and weighting of individual contributions.

	Advantages	%	Drawbacks	%
1	Responds to a need (gap) in the local development model.	25.0	Requires a high level of commitment from the territories (stakeholders). Actual usefulness will depend on the existence of this commitment.	35.42
2	Will allow comparability between territories.	18.75	Territories may not be sincere.	31.25
	Obtains a final score.	18.75		
3	Allows interpretation of results (both joint-global, by blocks, by elements).	14.58	Final score may respond to hidden, occasional or changing interests. Stakeholders may feel pressured to try to look good.	16.67
4	Stakeholder participation (added value).	6.25	May be boring for technicians if they perceive it as another diagnostic.	8.33
5	Determines the territorial scope of analysis: macro, meso, micro (provincial, county, local, etc.)	4.17	Requires the articulation of real participation processes and not all territories are competent to do so.	6.25
	Determines both aspects that are working and those that require intervention.	4.17		
	Allows the design of territorial intervention policies, based on the needs detected.	4.17		
	Allows the integration of perspectives—views—of the stakeholders present in the territory.	4.17		
6			Requires consensus, capacity and willingness to do so.	2.08

Source: Own creation.

From the information provided, two aspects are worth mentioning. On the one hand, the correlation between the individual vision and the vision determined as a group, both for advantages and disadvantages. On the other, the fact that the various representatives of the different interest groups participating in the dynamics made contributions related to three main moments of the research: firstly, linked to the origin of the matrix, the reasons

that made it possible and the design carried out (past scenario); secondly, linked to the result obtained so far, the software application (present scenario); and, thirdly, linked to the implementation of the tool on the territory and its potential (future scenario).

In terms of advantages, we can identify three major contributions:

1. That the READI matrix responds to a need (gap) in the local development model, as indicated by one participant “... *We had been asking for it for many years ...*”. This is one of the pending issues of the model;
2. That it has been agreed with the territory, highlighting the perception that it is the result of a participatory and participative process among the specialised stakeholders of the territory (“... *we are grateful that you have taken us into account from the outset ...*”) and allows integration of the stakeholders’ perspectives (“... *may be of great interest for any public policy articulation process ...*”); and,
3. Advantages focused on the applied and/or applicable potential of the same, allowing for comparability between territories by obtaining a final score at the desired level of analysis (globally, by blocks or by individual elements). In the words of one of the participants, “... *it is a very interesting aspect with many applications, (and) although comparisons are odious, it is very interesting to be able to know how each territory is doing ...*” providing “... *a snapshot of reality ...*”. This can also be defined for a specific territorial area, local, regional, provincial, etc., (“... *the territory can be defined and adjusted ...*”), based on what is working or needs improvement (“... *what works and what doesn't ...*”), from an interventionist perspective, leaving the theoretical—diagnostic—plane aside and allowing us to move on to action (“... *detecting needs is not something new that allows intervention, it is another level ...*”).

However, as the stakeholders point out, it should also be noted that the matrix does not solve all the problems and that it brings some disadvantages. Among them, we highlight as the main drawback that it requires a high commitment from the territories and their stakeholders, to the extent that its real usefulness will depend on the existence of this commitment (in the words of one participant, “... *if there is no predisposition, there is little to be done ...*”). Likewise, that there is an important risk in the application of the matrix, namely that the territories may not be sincere (“... *They may lie just to look good in the photo ...*”). Along with this, the fact that the final score may also be affected, as it may respond to hidden, ad hoc or changing interests (“... *and what if all that glitters is not gold? ...*”). Actors may be under pressure to try to look good (“... *How do we check whether a politician is influencing the agent? ...*”). The agent-technicians may find it boring if they perceive it as just another diagnosis (“... *we're fed up with prospecting and diagnostics that end up forgotten in a drawer ... what we want is for action to be taken ...*”). What is required is the articulation of real processes of participation, and not all territories are competent to do so, and for lack of a consensus, capacity and will to do so (“... *negotiating is not always easy, not all territories and not all stakeholders are willing to do so ...*”).

In addition to the qualitative view presented, and the importance it has had throughout the process, we would like to emphasise the high degree of consensus observed among the stakeholders. Thus, if we consider the quantification of the individual contributions, more than 60% of the responses are accumulated both in the first three advantages and disadvantages, reaching almost 80% in the first four.

## 5. Discussion: Comparing the READI Matrix with the Results of Other Studies

Table 5 summarises the comparison of the READI matrix with other similar studies and projects identified throughout this work. Obviously, all of them have in common the drafting of territorial diagnoses for the implementation of different territorial and sustainability policies. However, in most of the initiatives, their scope of application is state, supra-state or regional. There is, therefore, a lack of methodological proposals applied to the local level, which is where territorial development actions, such as the tool presented in this paper, are ultimately implemented.

Table 5. Comparison of the READI matrix with other projects and studies.

Reference of the Reviewed Studies and Projects	READI Matrix	[74]	[47]	[7,23,28,29,38,39,48–51,53,56,60,61]	[30]	[31,32,55]	[34–36]	[21]	[11,20,52,62,63]	[54]	[57,58]	[59]	
Aim	Description	Assessment of territorial competence for local development	Territorial development and cohesion trends in Europe	Efficiency of EU programmes and investments	Diagnosis for sustainable development	Sustainable micro-regional development	Environmental Sustainability Index	Diagnosis for Local Agenda 21	Attractiveness and competitiveness of a region	Case studies	Multicriteria comparison of regions competitiveness	Economic and business sustainability	Human resources and social capital
	Territorial diagnosis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Improvement in policy implementation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scope	National and supranational		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		
	Regional	✓			✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
	Local	✓						✓		✓			
Methodology	Compiling statistical data/census	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
	Triangulation of Social Research Techniques	✓	✓					✓					
	Participation of actors	✓						✓					
Factors	Resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Actors	✓											✓
	Dynamics	✓											
	Sustainability	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					
Approach	Integral, Integrated, Integrative	✓											

Source: Own creation.

Moreover, most of the projects follow an approach based on the compilation of quantitative statistical or census data, while the READI methodology is based on the articulation of quantitative and qualitative social research techniques and on the participation of the main actors of territorial development in its construction, validation and testing. However, above all, these socioeconomic agents are essential for the assessment of resources, actors and dynamics, and not only of economic resources, as is the case in many of the projects reviewed.

In short, it can be stated that the novelty of the READI matrix lies in the fact that there is no similar instrument in the scientific literature that makes possible an evaluation (even self-evaluation) of the degree of competence of territories to undertake local development processes from an integral, integrated and integrative perspective; in other words, sustainable.

## 6. Conclusions: The READI Matrix and SDGs

Given that development is not a possibility but a need of the territory and its population, the main conclusion shows that in order to achieve the SDGs, we need tools/methodologies/instruments that allow us to know whether we are competent and that indirectly facilitate the articulation of development policies appropriate to each territory.

As stated, the aim of the READI matrix is to enable (self-)assessment by the Public Administrations and socioeconomic agents that implement these policies—municipalities, associations of municipalities, districts or provinces, among others—of the degree of competence for the development of the different territories, based on the percentage weight of the same factors and variables in each demarcation, thus allowing for comparability between geographical areas. Methodology that facilitates interactions between the different systems (economic, physical, natural, social, human, etc.) involved.

Specifically, this instrument enables government entities and public managers responsible for decision making to detect possible existing shortcomings, identify opportunities for intervention and adjust programmes to the priorities or basic needs of the population, providing the most efficient lines with adequate resources, favouring the approach of proposals or improvement actions to face future actions and, ultimately, the realisation of a strategic plan for the sustainable development of a given territory. It is a tool for the improvement of territorial governance that enables responsible and rational management through indicators.

To this end, a computer application has been designed to bring all this work together in a graphic and visual way, allowing any territory to be evaluated (even self-assessed) and determine its degree of competence to face future development processes. The situation generated by COVID-19 has affected the planned work schedule and the software will be available at the end of 2021.

This index composed of indicators facilitates empirical knowledge, with all the guarantees of validity and reliability required by any scientific process, of the situation of the resources, actors and dynamics of a territory. To do so, it provides elaborated and structured information, sufficient in quantity and quality, while adaptable to the needs and different types and sizes of municipalities and levels of development, as well as an integrated territorial vision of their situation with respect to the goals of sustainable local development (SDGs). On this basis, the application of this tool, based on a participatory social research methodology, can bring significant advantages for public authorities and socioeconomic actors in relation to the SDGs, directly or indirectly, especially in periods of crisis such as the current one. The roadmap to be followed should be the European Green Deal proclaimed by the European Union (EU) [75], with a new development strategy that transforms EU territories into modern, resource-efficient and competitive economies, sustainable and environmentally friendly, and which make sustainable growth possible, with new opportunities for people and are fair and inclusive for all. In this regard, we consider that the READI matrix has an impact on three SDGs in particular: (a) Decent work and economic growth (*SDG 8*), since the integrated vision of territorial development, such

as that provided by the matrix, will promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; (b) Sustainable cities and communities (*SDG 11*), as the elaborated and structured information provided by the battery of indicators of the matrix, adaptable to the needs and the different municipalities and cities, can favour the approach of proposals or improvement actions to face future actions, facilitating the management of more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements, as well as business and employment opportunities; and (c) Alliance to achieve the objectives (*SDG 17*), as it highlights the essential relationship between local administrations, civil society and companies and strengthens ties through relationships of trust and transparency, and can help these different agents to emerge stronger from the crisis and find new opportunities in the future.

To close the article, it should be noted that the READI matrix measures territorial competence in local development, which is the result of the combination of three perspectives: social, economic and environmental. In this sense, the matrix is based on the resources, actors and dynamics present in the territory, as a triple axis of measurement of its competence to tackle sustainable development processes.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, R.C.-P.; methodology, all authors; software, J.A.A.-H.; validation, R.C.-P., J.A.A.-H. and E.S.-S.; formal analysis, J.A.A.-H. and E.S.-S.; investigation, all authors.; data curation, J.A.A.-H.; writing—original draft preparation, E.S.-S.; writing—review and editing, all authors.; visualization, B.R.-M.; supervision, R.C.-P.; project administration, R.C.-P.; funding acquisition, R.C.-P. and B.R.-M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the collaboration agreement between the Universitat de València and the public company Divalterra of the Diputació de València entitled “Preparation and validation of a matrix for the detection of competent territories for local development”, project OTR2018-18556INVES.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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