

Article

Ensuring Sustainable Development in Light of Pandemic “New Normal” Influence

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Abstract: The study aims to estimate the possibilities of sustainable development, ensuring and achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in light of challenges caused by the pandemic’s “new normal”. In this regard, the study employs bibliometric and empirical approaches. Based on the bibliometric analysis results, it is found that the main focus of sustainable development studies during the pandemic is on economic issues (particularly, innovations and strategic decision-making) while also addressing humanitarian problems such as ensuring health and well-being. To find the practical problems in ensuring sustainable development during the pandemic period, we used the case of Ukraine with appropriate empirical analysis at two levels. Therefore, we estimated the achievements of SDGs compared to planned indicators for 2020 (as the last report data available for this study). As a result, the low level of achievements is proven; particularly, only 20% of planned indicators are fulfilled with planned values. Moreover, the sociological research is conducted to reveal the subjective perceptions of the pandemic’s influence on the possibilities of achieving SDGs. The survey was conducted during the second pandemic wave in December 2020–January 2021, involving 416 respondents. The obtained results confirmed the ambiguous influence of the pandemic. On the one hand, the positive changes are typical for healthcare services and distance learning. However, the negative influence of the pandemic’s “new normal” on SDGs is confirmed by respondents through their concerns about the effects of the pandemic on the development of investments and agricultural technologies as well as the progress in goals, such as “Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure” and “Sustainable Cities and Communities”.

Keywords: new normal; pandemic; sustainable development; sustainable development goals



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1. Introduction

The “new normal” concept has been widely used in scientific terminology for some time, particularly, since the middle of the 19th century. Despite this, the terminology has grown significantly worldwide due to the financial–economic crisis. Moreover, the “new normal” concept was introduced by Mohamed A. El-Erian during the financial crisis of 2009 [1]. A new wave of the new normal research that became the greatest global humanity challenge in the last decades was the consequence of the pandemic and economic shock, especially in the first weeks and months of the coronavirus crisis.

Leading international organizations and researchers highlighted the new economic normality’s numerous controversial appearances and consequences.

Among the negative consequences that decelerated the achievements in humanity’s sustainable development in the coming decades are inequality risks intensification, unemployment, and even hunger. These threats were defined by the International Labor Organization [2]. The World Bank estimated that the risks of reducing the dynamics of foreign direct investments along with the related consequences for economic growth became substantial [3]. Similarly, the World Health Organization noted the wide-reaching risks to

the habitants' well-being and health. In addition, in the 2023 report, the Director-General of the WHO pointed out that health risks related to the coronavirus are still substantial, and COVID-19 had significant implications for health-related targets under the sustainable development goals [4].

The economic shock period and sudden stop period substantially impacted the economic aspects of sustainable development. The business prospects' unpredictability was analyzed in light of factors, such as the uncertainty in the state administration actions during that period [5,6], the support from vulnerable governments to manage the COVID-19 crisis [7,8], and the provision of agile models of interaction in different domains [9,10], including employment, education, and other communications. The new wave of actuality has brought forth questions about the deficit in digital skills for employment [11,12], the employee risk management of different groups depending on the pandemic influence [13–15], employees' disengagement [16], and the stress caused by the new labor conditions [17], including technostress created by the momentary hyper digitalization of many processes [18–20].

In general, since 2019, a great number of publications have been dedicated to the pandemic and new economic normality. For example, a search for the keyword "COVID-19 pandemic" in the Google Scholar search engine yielded 2,140,000 search results, while the "New Normal" keyword produced 8,060,000 items (results for 19 June 2023). Moreover, these search results were generated from English language requests. Indeed, such a scientific interest reflects the quest for answers to an immense challenge regarding humanity during the last decades.

The related answers were quickly found across various domains and reflected in the rapid growth of innovation and positive changes in economic behavior. Indeed, the main driver behind such changes diverged from the social responsibility ideas and achievement of sustainable development goals. Especially, the search for business answers regarding changes during the new normal period was influenced by the need for business and revenue recovery. However, such economic motives contributed to the development of innovative methods, communications, and digital skills improvement for people at all levels, and these are the most vivid and positive pandemic effects. The Deloitte company stated that the pandemic accelerated economic and social progress tremendously so that the expected economic digital development for the next decades was achieved within several weeks [21]. The future of successful companies is mainly connected with economic digitalization, and this tendency was researched in another report by Deloitte named "Post Apocalypse New Normality" [22]. The practical results of digitalization have become tangible in business models and at the macroeconomic level as evidenced by the construction of stable knowledge management systems [23–25], e-commerce [26,27], the development of digital technology in education [28,29], medicine [30], tourism [31,32], and the labor market, in general [33].

Quickly adapting to changes in customers' economic behavior and mastering digital skills helped in the fast expansion of innovative technologies based on artificial intelligence in business processes [34–36], increased remote work opportunities [37,38], and the usage of other products and services based on IT solutions [39,40].

Such consequences were perceived as a truly innovative response to the pandemic's new normal difficulties and as a step towards achieving sustainable development goals [41–44]. As a result, the development of information technology has become an important direction that assists the effective integration of "green" initiatives at different levels and positive ecological improvements [45–47].

Therefore, the "new normal" pandemic transformed living conditions substantially as well as business activities. Inexperience in such an extensive challenge showed the real weaknesses in management systems at all levels, leading to critical consequences, including loss of lives. On the other hand, the fast progress during the pandemic obviously assisted in strengthening sustainability at the global level thanks to the discovered solutions regarding the crisis exit. The analysts of Deloitte support this fact in their reports [21,22], as

well as other authors focused their attention on technologically driven positive decisions derived from the pandemic. In fact, this provocation that slowed economic and human development in the first wave of the pandemic became one of the most powerful triggers in stabilizing the balance and seeking new growth opportunities in a new history of humanity.

Considering that such opportunities are defined as an agenda of human development in the form of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) [48], our article intends to estimate the possibilities of sustainable development, ensuring and achieving the SDGs in light of challenges caused by the pandemic's "new normal".

To achieve this aim, we employ bibliometric analysis and our own sociological survey conducted during the second wave of the pandemic. Being one of the most challenging periods, this time allows us to investigate the subjective attitudes toward SDGs, considering the personal experience (both positive and negative) gained during the first stage of pandemic threats. Recognizing possible obstacles to achieving the SDGs enables us to understand the possible ways to investigate behavioral changes lately in sustainable development, ensuring influenced by the pandemic. Defined patterns in human behavior are useful for other research on the influence of similar large-scale risks in the socio-economic sphere.

The scientific novelty is based on the following: (1) proposed the scientific-methodical approach for bibliometric analysis of economic changes caused by the pandemic, in relation to the study of sustainable development that allows systemizing actual ways in problem analysis and opportunities during the "new normal" period and also creates the conditions for solving the related practical tasks; (2) discovered the subjective markers related to the main goals of sustainable development during one of the most critical stages of the pandemic, which is important for studying crisis perception and related opportunities in behavioral research.

The remaining parts of the study are structured as follows: Section 2 highlights the methodological approaches used to define the actual directions of scientific research of sustainable development in times of the pandemic new normal, as well as to perform data collection and data analysis. The results of the paper are presented in Section 3. Finally, the researchers summarize the main findings, describe the limitations of this research, and make some recommendations for further studies.

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve the set goal, we defined two research tasks (RTs):

RT1: Defined the modern context of the "new normal" concept in the interconnected scientific studies, including sustainable development, during the pandemic.

RT2: Measured the progress in the achievement of sustainable development goals (for example, the case of Ukraine) and researched the behavioral determinants and subjective perception of opportunities in delivering sustainable development, considering the "new normal" conditions based on the sociological survey.

In order to conduct RT1, we utilized the VOSviewer software v.1.6.10. The research information base consists of scientific publications in English from periodical editions indexed by the Scopus database. The search requests included works published from January 2020 to February 2021. The endpoint of the timeframe for bibliometric analysis is chosen as appropriate for the period of our sociological survey. Moreover, the one-year period from the start of the pandemic covered the first wave of the disease, which was the most crucial, and fostered the search for responses to pandemic shocks intensively. In our opinion, the publications from the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic reflect the most obvious changes in scientific research directions—threats, challenges, and behavior reactions at all levels of societal relationships—with a slow transition from shock to measures aimed at sustainable development recovery.

During the analysis, two search requests were made, where the first one did not include "COVID/COVID-19", and the second did have this keyword. Such search parameters were defined to test how close the scientific studies of the "New Normal" and "Sustainable

Development” are connected exactly with the pandemic. The search request parameters are detailed in the “Results” section.

To conduct RT2, we applied two methods of analysis, and, as a result, two specific goals are outlined—RT2.1 and RT2.2, respectively:

- (1) Statistical assessment—to study the progress in achieving the tasks defined by Ukraine for each of the 17 goals (RT2.1). The research information base consists of the latest report regarding the achievement of SDGs [49], which is currently available. At the time of the report, the announced indexes could not be substantially influenced by the pandemic and by activity during the “new normal” conditions. Therefore, using these analysis results, conclusions can be drawn regarding the attitude toward sustainable development in Ukraine and the responsibility in fulfilling the taken obligations;
- (2) Sociological survey—to define the subjective perception of pandemic influence on the possibilities in the achievement of SDGs (RT2.2).

The methodological basis of the survey is non-probability sampling using electronic means of communication, i.e., google-forms service. A pilot study was performed before the main survey in order to validate the formulation of the question and get feedback on the content and structure of the questionnaire. For this purpose, the pilot interview was conducted at the National University of Water and Environmental Engineering (NUWEE) at the beginning of winter 2020. The university specializes mainly in educational and scientific activities, especially, within the field of sustainability development. Therefore, the crucial stage in conducting our study was the recruitment of experts from among the scientific-pedagogical employees to develop and refine the questionnaire questions.

The main survey was conducted during the second wave of the pandemic in December 2020–January 2021 in the Rivne region. The sample size is 416 respondents. The questionnaire was shared through the network of the NUWEE contacts formed in partnership with the external stakeholders involved in the research and educational activity of the university. Particularly, the authors achieved this number of responses using the network of the professional recruitment agency “Imperia-HR” whose activity covers the labor market of the region with possibilities to gain the responses both from economically active and currently inactive representatives of the population. Moreover, using the professional experience of “Imperia-HR” in their market investigations, the important features of the respondents’ sample were formed. Particularly, we used the following characteristics in further analysis of the responses:

- gender;
- age (up to 22 years.; 23–30 years; 31–40 years; 41 and older);
- economic activity (economically active and inactive relatively).

Regarding the age division, which is relatively not frequently used, the justification for this approach is provided in [15], in accordance with the current patterns in the economic activity of the Ukrainian population.

As a result, the structure of the respondents was as follows: female (55.77%), male (44.23%), economically active (69.71%), and inactive (25.48%); with the distribution by age: up to 22 years (16.83%), 23–30 years (42.31%), 31–40 years (26.44%), and 41 and older (14.42%).

According to the State Statistics Service, the size of the general population (the entire adult population of the region) was 900.1 thousand people on 1 January 2021. To calculate the representativeness of a sample, we used the Cochran formula [50], with a confidence level of 95%. The actual value of the margin of error (confidence interval) is 4.80%. Therefore, the obtained results are representative and can be used for further analysis.

For the selection of answer options, the Likert scale was used, in particular, its most common type—a 5-level scale, where answers were scaled from 1 point (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 points (“Strongly Agree”).

The survey questions were created based on experts’ recommendations gained in the pilot interview according to the 17 SDGs (Table 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire questions according to SDGs.

	SDGs	The Serial Number of Questions in the Questionnaire	The Questions about the Pandemic Influence
1	No Poverty	Q1	The new conditions of economic activity helped in achieving the goal of “reducing poverty” and improving overall living standards (for the economy, in general).
2	Zero Hunger	Q2	The pandemic’s consequences have drawn attention to the development of investment and agriculture technologies that contribute to productivity growth within this sector and the affordability of foodstuffs.
3	Good Health and Well-being	Q3	The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to strengthening the attention to health care, medical field development, and the opportunity to care for health, thanks to timely diagnosis and other disease prevention (except COVID-19).
4	Quality Education	Q4.1	The education quality has significantly improved due to the improvements in distance learning.
		Q4.2	There was a growth in the affordability of educational services because of distance learning development.
5	Gender Equality	Q5	The level of gender discrimination decreased—the pandemic scaled the shortage of qualified employees, and the distance work opportunities reduced the negative attitude of employers toward women.
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	Q6	The severity of the water shortage problem has decreased, and new economic ways have emerged due to the changes in the work schedules of many enterprises; the pandemic positively influenced the hygienic conditions regarding water usage at all levels.
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	Q7.1	Energy consumption substantially increased during the pandemic.
		Q7.2	The pandemic impulses the production of renewable energy and technology development in this industry.
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	Q8	Increased decent work opportunities during the pandemic period.
9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	Q9	The pandemic induced innovations and infrastructure development.
10	Reduced Inequality	Q10	The pandemic reduced income inequality, in particular, due to the expansion of remote work.
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	Q11	The pandemic positively influenced the opportunities for sustainability developments in cities (the safe and affordable houses provision, public transport investments, and the creation of green public territories).
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	Q12	The pandemic contributed to the development of rational consumption models.
13	Climate Action	Q13	The pandemic’s limits positively influenced climate change slowdown.
14	Life Below Water	Q14	Increased the citizens’ and product producers’ responsibility for rational manufacturing and protecting marine and coastal ecosystems from pollution.
15	Life on Land	Q15	Increased opportunities for preserving and recovering terrestrial ecosystem, such as woods, wetlands, and others.
16	Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	Q16.1	Strengthened the attention and activity efforts to ensure the supremacy of the law and adherence to people’s rights.
		Q16.2	Changes occurred in the cohesion of Ukrainian society, influencing the affirmation of justice values.
17	Partnerships to achieve the Goal	Q17	The development of tools for distance communication with the government and between society, in general, increased the opportunities for partnership and cooperation.

For specific SDGs (4, 7, and 16), two questions were created due to the possible ambiguous influence of the pandemic: quality and affordability of education could be estimated differently (SDG4) by respondents as well as the impact on the energy consumption—both in general and regarding the development of the renewable energy (SDG7). Considering SDG16, human rights adherence and justice hold special value and are in need within the Ukrainian society, which explains the related interest to this question in the questionnaire.

3. Results

To conduct RT1, the keywords such as “sustainability”, “sustainable development”, “economic growth”, and “economic development” that reflected the “new normal” factors were used:

- the search request (1)—without the specifications about the pandemic and
- the search request (2)—with the keyword “COVID”/“COVID-19”.

The description of search conditions by two different variants and generalized results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The output data and generalized results of the bibliometric analysis regarding the new normal and sustainable development connections.

Search Conditions	Search Request 1	Search Request 2
Keywords, logical conjunction	“New normal” AND “crisis” AND (“sustainability” OR “sustainable” AND “development”) AND (“economic” AND “growth” OR “economic” AND “development”)	“New normal” AND “crisis” AND (“COVID-19” OR “COVID”) AND (“sustainability” OR “sustainable” AND “development”) AND (“economic” AND “growth” OR “economic” AND “development”)
Publication type	Articles in scientific journals	
Publication language	English	
Publications quantity	956	513
Clusters number	4	4

Source: Developed by the authors with the help of VOSviewer v.1.6.10.

Thus, there are 956 results when articles’ titles and keywords meet the combination of “new normal” which does not necessarily include the mentions of coronavirus. The same search with the added keyword “COVID/COVID-19” yields only 513 results. Considering the stringent search criteria used, the obtained data provide a clear conception of the attention and research focus on the new normal in the most authoritative world sources—only periodical publications indexed by the Scopus database.

Despite the fact that publications on the topic of coronavirus and its economic consequences began in 2020, most results match exactly this search request: particularly, 513 of the 956 publications (with the keywords combination of “new normal” and “sustainable development”, including “economic development” and simply “development”) are connected with “COVID” and “New normal”. Considering this, further analysis will be conducted on this aggregate of received results—search request 2, which is described in Table 2.

The search results allowed for defining four research clusters (Figure 1)—relatively marked with red, green, yellow, and blue colors.

As shown in the illustration, the biggest cluster (“red”) is represented by studies, where the “new normal” dominates in the connections with the COVID-19 topic—the connections with other objects, including other clusters, were mostly created due to the “COVID-19” conjunction particularly. In the same cluster, research focused on the new normal in connection with the industrial problems that became the most sensitive to the changes—“tourism”, “transportation”, and “travel”. This shows an increase in the scientific

searches in the direction of answers formulation to the coronavirus crisis—through studies with the following topics: “sustainability”, “risks” (perception and estimation), “local planning”, and “strategic approach”. The “sustainable development”, dominated by the usage frequency in the “yellow” cluster, was been investigated within the connection of the concepts, such as education, high education, and online education. Other connections either involve “COVID-19” or closely relate to studies grouped within the “green” cluster, represented by “economics” and “economic development”, “health”, including mental health, “social distance”, “management”, “climate change”, humanitarian problems in different manifestations (“human”), and “employment”. Comparatively, new and innovative responses to pandemic threats to sustainable development are concentrated in the “blue” cluster—which includes search results in innovations and artificial intelligence development with more economic and industrial meaning, despite the social issues focused in yellow and green clusters.

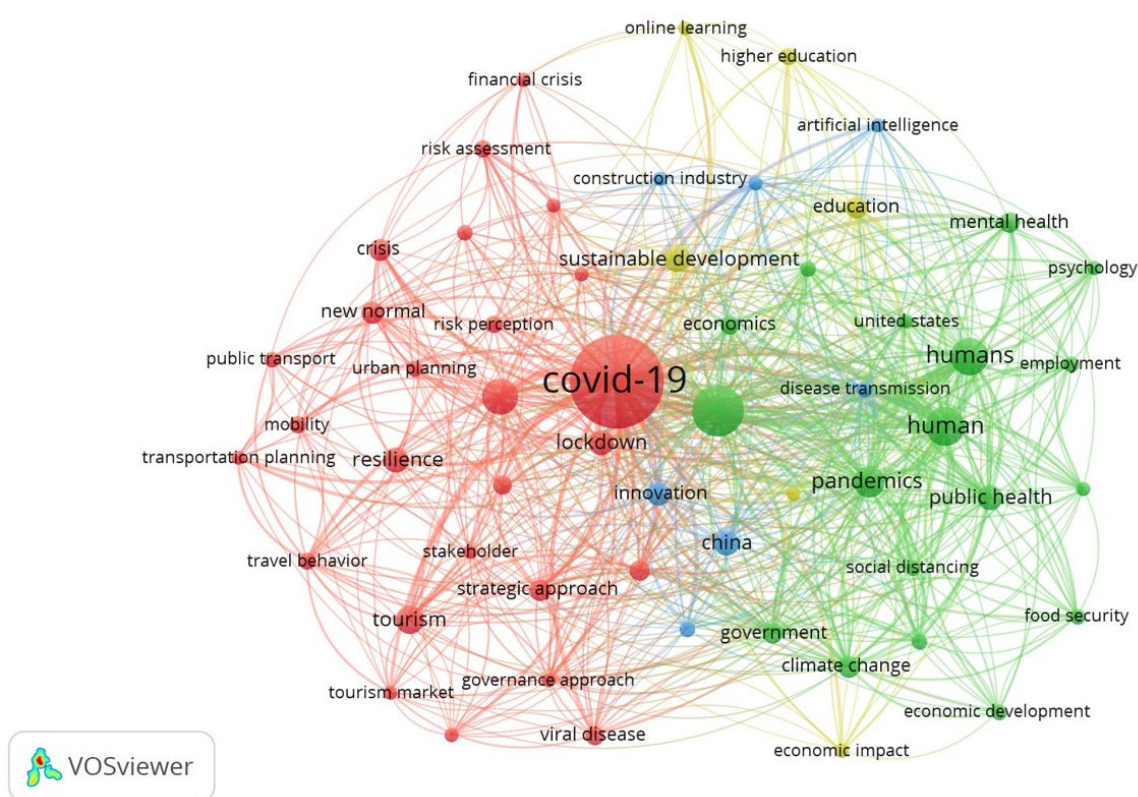


Figure 1. The graphical representation of the interconnection between research on the “new normal” and sustainable development. Source: Developed by the authors with the help of VOSviewer v.1.6.10.

The geographic division of studies in the chosen direction (Table 3) also illustrates the concentration of scientific interests.

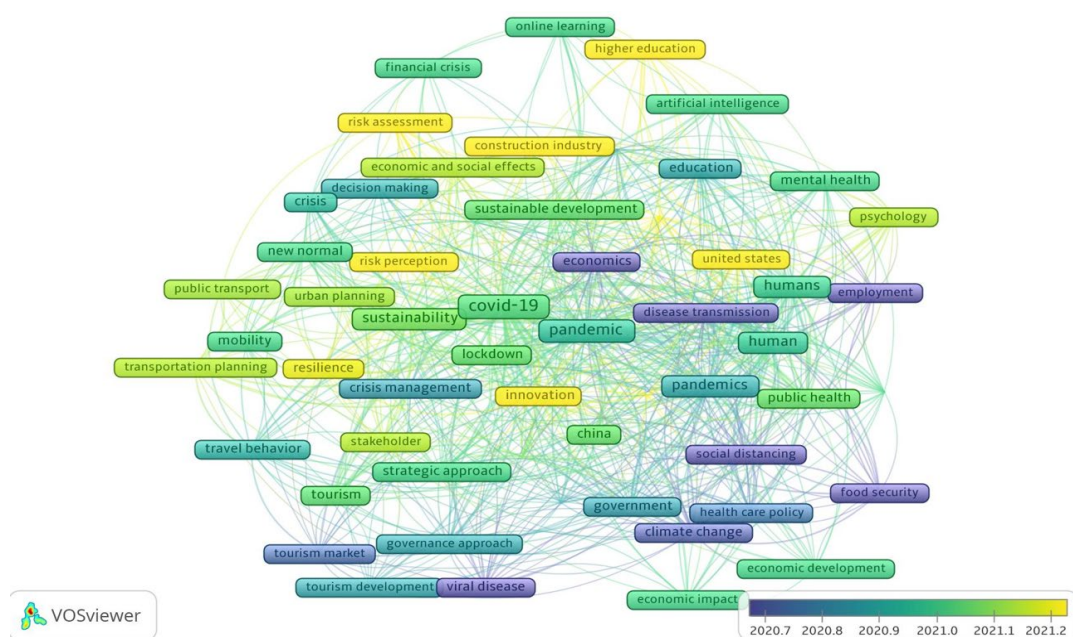
As presented in the table, most citations of scientific publications are the works published by scientists from developed and developing countries; however, both groups experienced more intense impacts during the initial waves of coronavirus and were among the first to search the ways to adapt to the “new normal” of the pandemic—i.e., the USA, the United Kingdom, India, and China. Although Australia had fewer cases compared to those countries, its high level of social development explains its position in the top 5.

Table 3. Top 10 countries sorted by the number of publications' citations on the “new normal” and sustainable development.

№ 3/II	Country	Citations	Documents
1	United States	800	75
2	United Kingdom	683	76
3	India	530	52
4	Australia	203	37
5	China	193	46
6	South Africa	155	26
7	Japan	128	13
8	Italy	124	38
9	Sweden	117	15
10	South Korea	94	14

Source: Developed by the authors with the help of VOSviewer v.1.6.10.

Comparing the division of scientific publications by the publication time (Figure 2), the chronological changes in scientists' interest in the “new normal” topic become evident.

**Figure 2.** The division of the “new normal” studies and sustainable development by the publication time. Source: Developed by the authors with the help of VOSviewer v.1.6.10.

As shown in Figure 2, publications began in 2020, with an increase in the number of articles related to various keywords in June 2020. These keywords illustrate the scientists' reaction to the economic shock that provoked the pandemic. The most typical publications during that period relate to the economy in general, tourism, employment, food security, and climate change.

Gradually, the focus shifted toward studies that made the maximum use of keywords, such as “new normal”, sustainable development, sustainability, strategic approach, and economic development. This change illustrates the realization and perception of the new reality of economic relationships and the quest for answers to new challenges. The most appropriate studies in 2021 were about the particular ways to such answers—innovations

and actions in risky conditions. With the industrial expansion, the highest frequency of new studies pertained to the building industry and higher education. Such a division within the industry illustrates the concentration of interest in its recovery. This industry not only suffered seriously from the inability to transition to remote work (building), but it also, in many ways, defines the effectiveness of related industries. Considering higher education, scientists' interest was connected to innovation production using opportunities in artificial intelligence: Both keywords were in the same cluster at the publication time. Furthermore, the realization of innovations in the higher education industry and their transfer to other industries, as shown in Figure 1, has close relationships with the "artificial intelligence" keyword.

Therefore, based on the presented results, we can conclude that scientists, like many practicing entrepreneurs, adapted to the new conditions quite quickly and started proposing solutions to the new challenges. The shock period and the uncertainty regarding the development prospects were relatively short. Considering the time from the application to the publication release, it is obvious that the scientific decisions were generated and described in a short timeframe. At the same time, the high frequency of sustainable development studies with a vivid interest in innovative tools, stakeholders' interaction, and management questions (including the strategic) provides an understanding of the ways to exit from the crisis and utilize those new opportunities that were not widely used before the lockdown. The support of such opportunities and the creation of conditions for further AI technology development, as well as their usage in economics and simultaneous compliance with sustainable development, should be a priority at all management levels—from the government to businesses. This is the only way in which scientific achievements will be beneficial for business and society.

Estimating the opportunities to achieve SDGs during the second wave of the pandemic (RT2), when the inevitable changes were obvious, along with the need to adapt to the new normality, we conducted research using Ukraine as an example.

Within the realization of RT2.1, it was defined that sustainable development goals specified for Ukraine for the year 2020, along with related assessment criteria and target indicators, were mostly not completed. Such a general dynamic was confirmed in the summary section of the related report on Ukraine. The reasons for the low progress in this field, as stated by the head of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine and the UN and UNICEF representatives, are mostly connected with the pandemic [49] (pp. 3–5). Simultaneously, we conducted a more detailed analysis of goal achievements, considering the tasks declared within each of the goals and targeted indicators for their performance (Table 4). As a result, it can be concluded that Ukraine's poor results in this regard cannot be solely explained by the pandemic impacts.

Based on the measurements given in Table 4, it is evident that only 20% of tasks within 17 sustainable development goals were achieved by 2020. Notably, in some goals, the performance indicators were not set or such data were missing from the report—in general, such tasks are 41%. In our opinion, this shows a lack of readiness to take action toward related goals; as in the formulation of the task itself, the vivid declarations were made without the specified indicators for verification. Moreover, certain tasks in which the situation is critical (especially within the goal "Decent Work and Economic Growth", particularly "Reduced Inequality") are not easily connected with the pandemic. For example, with related regulations and attention to this area, the promotion of remote work could be a tool for inequality reduction, giving access to workplaces with decent work conditions irrespective of age, sex, and living area—in the industries where such a type of employment is possible. In addition, considering the inequality reduction, it was obvious at the tasks formulation stage that such goals were, in fact, not expected to be achieved—as performance indicators for tasks 6 and 8 within this goal were not defined.

Table 4. The monitoring results of Ukraine’s performance in achieving the sustainable development goals up to 2020.

#	Goal Name	Tasks Number			% Task Performance of the Goal
		Achieved	Not Achieved	Not Defined *	
1	No Poverty	2	3	-	40%
2	Zero Hunger	4	6	2	33%
3	Good Health and Well-being	5	8	3	31%
4	Quality Education	6	3	4	46%
5	Gender Equality	4	3	12	21%
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	5	2	4	45%
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	1	5	1	14%
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	1	7	8	6%
9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	3	6	5	21%
10	Reduced Inequality	-	2	6	0%
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	2	2	6	20%
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	1	3	2	17%
13	Climate Action	-	-	1	0%
14	Life Below Water	2	2	-	50%
15	Life on Land	-	12	1	0%
16	Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	2	3	21	8%
17	Partnerships to Achieve the Goal	-	3	1	0%
Total		20%	39%	41%	

Note: * The achievement goal indicators were not defined, or there were no numeric data regarding their performance; grey fill—the critical situation with the task performance (less than 10%, the number of unfinished tasks exceeded several times); dark grey fill—tasks were not completed at all. Source: Developed by the authors based on [49].

Other goals with a significant number of undefined goal indicators are Gender Equality, Climate Action, Peace, and Justice Strong Institutions. This indicates that such goals receive less attention and fewer resources for achieving SDG success. Goals such as Affordable and Clean Energy, Life on Land, and Partnerships to achieve the Goal have a substantial level of unfinished tasks compared to completed ones. This highlights the maintenance of the environmental and consumer problems, indicating the irresponsible approach towards the rational energy resources consumption and non-fulfilment of the plans regarding the local flora and fauna protection.

In general, 39% of the indicators were not achieved by 2020 out of the total number of indicators. Therefore, with regard to 41% of tasks with undefined goal indicators, this indicates a lack of government responsibility related to sustainable development and failure to implement its main goals.

At the same time, there have been positive achievements in terms of the defined tasks. Moreover, within the “Good Health and Well-being” goal, the indicator of patients diagnosed with active tuberculosis for the first time in their lives per 100,000 of the population (the target aim for 2020—51.7) decreased substantially. During the pre-coronavirus period, the indicator had decreased from 55.9 to 49.2. However, in 2020, due to the reinforced anti-pandemic activities, the indicator reached 34.3, which shows a positive trend in reducing the number of new tuberculosis cases. Another positive consequence of the COVID-19 restrictions is the increase in the percentage of the population that reported using the Internet in the last 12 months. The target goal for the year 2020 was set at 59%, but due to the global pandemic, this share exceeded 75%. This shows a positive trend in the demand for Internet services. At the same time, the availability of Internet access in rural middle education institutions also increased to 98.8%, with the target goal set for the year 2020—85%.

We conducted sociological monitoring to find out the personal attitudes of the population toward achieving the SDGs opportunities influenced by the new normality (within RT2.2).

The survey results, based on the main question of the questionnaire characterizing the subjective attitudes toward the ability to provide sustainable development, accounting for the influence of the “new normal”, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The estimates of the pandemic’s “new normal” influence on the abilities of sustainable development goals achievement; the average score is defined on a scale from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”).

Serial Number of the Questionnaire Question	Mean Value	Female	Male	Age, Years				Economic Activity	
				Up to 22	23–30	31–40	41 and Older	Active	Inactive
Q1	1.94	1.83	2.09	2.39	1.83	1.33	1.64	1.63	2.49
Q2	2.63	2.56	2.72	3.15	2.49	1.93	2.27	2.40	3.17
Q3	3.22	3.15	3.30	3.50	3.20	3.17	2.80	3.05	3.67
Q4.1	2.30	2.23	2.39	2.81	1.69	1.93	2.09	2.11	2.87
Q4.2	3.24	3.28	3.18	3.56	3.06	2.93	3.02	3.12	3.60
Q5	2.85	2.88	2.82	3.22	2.31	2.83	2.62	2.75	3.27
Q6	2.59	2.58	2.61	2.85	2.09	2.50	2.55	2.54	2.90
Q7.1	3.62	3.68	3.53	3.92	3.23	3.77	3.29	3.63	3.90
Q7.2	2.91	2.91	2.92	3.20	2.49	2.83	2.76	2.88	3.30
Q8	2.56	2.46	2.70	2.94	2.09	2.47	2.31	2.48	3.00
Q9	2.73	2.60	2.88	2.94	2.60	2.30	2.69	2.59	3.11
Q10	2.74	2.80	2.65	3.17	2.17	2.57	2.49	2.65	3.14
Q11	2.36	2.28	2.47	2.67	2.17	2.03	2.16	2.21	2.78
Q12	2.68	2.56	2.83	2.92	2.49	2.37	2.58	2.64	2.90
Q13	2.98	2.99	2.96	3.16	2.66	2.93	2.91	2.99	3.27
Q14	2.80	2.80	2.80	3.13	2.66	2.50	2.55	2.70	3.21
Q15	2.76	2.65	2.91	3.16	2.46	2.43	2.51	2.64	3.22
Q16.1	2.67	2.63	2.73	3.24	2.31	2.27	2.22	2.49	3.21
Q16.2	2.71	2.77	2.64	3.13	2.26	2.43	2.49	2.59	3.13
Q17	2.99	3.07	2.88	3.28	2.71	2.97	2.69	2.94	3.27

Note:  The self-esteem is quite close to the average level (2.98–2.99);  the self-esteem is more than the average (3.0), at the equator of the neutral attitude (there was no influence), but with the existence of the positive influence;  maximum critical scores (up to 2.1 inclusively).

As can be seen, a majority of responses have critical scores, indicating that respondents predominantly perceive the pandemic’s influence as negative toward sustainability development achievement. In some cases, like responses to Q7.1, the above-average estimates reflect the negative tendencies in the households which are not compensated by the new technologies in this area (Q7.2) and can be analyzed alongside the comparatively negative estimates of the pandemic’s influence on the Sustainable Cities and Communities development (Q11). However, some scores show the positive influence of the pandemic—this relates to the increase in the affordability of education and to the fact that people started taking care of their health, although out of necessity. The positive changes that respondents have experienced in the medical services and their ability to support their health are important for fostering a positive influence on the achievement of sustainable development goals; as the health level, especially among the working population, is part of specific goals and essentially influences the achievement of other goals—through the employment and economic results.

The scores of 31- to 40-year-old respondents are more critical, particularly to the pandemic’s influence on investments and agriculture technologies and the sustainable development achievements of cities. Such a negative trend is observed in scores related to the following sustainable development goals: “Innovation and Infrastructure” and “Sustainable Cities and Communities”.

The same negative perspective is observed among respondents of all age groups regarding the reduction in the quality of education services due to students' transition to remote learning during the quarantine conditions.

Some scores are different regarding gender discrimination. Economically active youth consider that the pandemic's influence is neutral or even has a positive influence. On the other hand, other respondents see a negative impact on gender equality due to the pandemic conditions. These results adhere to the official data that we previously analyzed regarding the achievement of sustainable development goals in Ukraine (RT 2.1) with respect to the "Gender Equality" goal. More optimistic scores given by students result from differences in the generation experience, as students could not have faced gender inequality problems yet.

With regard to the influence on the rational consumerization of water resources, the scores are either negative or neutral, as well as the influence on the working conditions and workplace inequality, innovations, and infrastructure development. The majority of respondents consider pandemic restrictions as an advantageous factor regarding renewable energy production; however, this belongs to the youth evaluation. The majority estimate the influence as an obstacle in the development of such production. Within the "Responsible Consumption and Production" sustainable development goal, the influence on the consumption models, both in economics, in general, and within the households, is mostly considered negative by respondents. Only the youth aged up to 22 years had not experienced such an influence. This division of scores mainly reflects the critical evaluation of the implementation of sustainable development goals, as analyzed in the RT 2.1 task.

Regarding the goals of "Climate Action", "Life Below Water", and "Life on Land", the respondents believe that the pandemic is not related to either strengthening or weakening the attention given to the problems related to climate change, rational household, the protection of the ocean, coastal, and land ecosystems.

Among other obvious dissimilarities towards the respondents' scores, the following ones are highlighted. The opinion of 23-year-old respondents is more optimistic compared to other age groups regarding Ukrainian social cohesion and the formation of the justice value systems. In the context of "Partnerships to achieve the Goal", economically active citizens observe the negative influence of COVID-19 on the conditions of international cooperation, while the youth hold the opposite opinion.

In conclusion, youth were mostly the neutral part of respondents. Their estimations were more likely to be neutral or more positive. The respondents at the age of 23 were mainly economically inactive citizens. The opinion of the economically active, in particular, those employed, reflects a more negative perception of the pandemic's influence. They tend to connect the deterioration of social, economic, and ecological problems with the pandemic's influence.

The same division in scores between active and inactive citizens was observed regarding the pandemic influence on human rights adherence. The youth consider the positive influence that can be explained by their activity in opinion defense through omnichannel communication, including social media. Other respondents consider that there are serious problems with human rights adherence due to the impact of pandemic restrictions.

The opportunities for partnership at the local level, in the estimation of the inactive interviewees, increased thanks to the pandemic's influence; although, on average, this influence is defined as negative by other respondents. Such a consequence can also relate to the high level of communication activity within this group, which consists of mainly youth.

4. Discussion

The bibliometric analysis results confirm the close relationships between "new normal" studies and sustainable development. These concepts share a common orientation of research in analyzing innovation development opportunities and improving strategic management approaches at different levels, particularly risk management and crisis adaptation. These studies are conducted simultaneously with the opportunities to address health

support, well-being, and solving other humanitarian problems. In general, the connection of these studies through the keywords “new normal”, “COVID-19”, and “sustainable development” reflects the fundamental population tasks regarding sustainable development under the influence of the pandemic.

The comprehension problems in scientific research are ahead of the effectiveness of the applied efforts in this area. Moreover, based on the analysis we conducted using Ukraine as an example, we can state that the achievement of sustainability development goals by the defined indicators is under threat. Only 20% of the planned tasks have been completed. The uncertainty of target indicators by their share raises doubts about the readiness of task realization within the chosen goals.

The prospects of achieving SDGs under the conditions of such a serious threat also evoked many doubts among respondents who participated in the questionnaire. Their estimations are mostly critical, reflecting the real economic and social shock experienced during the first waves of the pandemic, and this has been a main focus in the studies conducted by other researchers [5,51–55]. Therefore, we can consider such measurements as empirically confirmed reactions to the massive risks, during which global goals often yield to personal needs. Under such conditions, we can agree with the conclusions of other researchers regarding the fact that behavioral reactions are prevalently determined by stress in conditions of future uncertainty [17–20]. The most pessimistic estimations in our study are those who perceive the influence of the pandemic as particularly negative on the development of investments and agricultural technologies that assist in reaching the “Zero hunger” goal, as well as the progress in goals “Industry, innovation and infrastructure” and “Sustainable cities and communities”. However, despite the principally pessimistic or neutral scores, the positive perception of changes in health care services and distance learning was discovered. The latter can be explained by understanding the overall development of digital skills that are rapidly emerging in employment relations [15,33,54]. However, the negative influence of the pandemic’s “new normal” on SDGs is confirmed by respondents in their concerns about the impact of the pandemic.

In general, the analysis we conducted allows us to conclude that under the conditions of deep critical changes, the most optimistic individuals in the perception of the new conditions and threats are those with less experience in social participation processes. This was evident in our interviews represented by the youth (aged up to 22) and economically inactive people. In addition, some aspects of the sustainable development opportunities (education affordability, health support, and partnership development) are perceived to some extent positively even under the conditions of large-scale upheavals; therefore, the pandemic challenges have acted as catalysts for positive social transformations regarding certain sustainable development goals.

5. Conclusions

The pandemic’s “new normal” induced such fast changes in economic relations that would typically take decades under normal conditions. Alongside the negative consequences, substantial advantages emerged—including, the formation of new habits in employment, business management, the development of innovative ways of interaction, and, as a result, the improved affordability of many products and services. The regular search for answers to the new challenges for sustainable development provision accompanies positive economic changes.

The positive patterns that we defined in the scientific studies (by the bibliometric analysis results) are not always supported by the optimistic subjective estimations of prospects for achieving SDGs under the critical conditions, in this case, caused by the pandemic. In particular, according to the results of our sociological survey, the changes during the “new normal” period were mainly viewed negatively from the respondents’ perspective. The exceptions are the positive consequences such as the increasing education affordability, the development of medical services and healthcare, and partially, other consequences (communication development, etc.) that reflect the positive transformations

in the behavior of specific groups of respondents, mostly—youth. We can attribute such results to the youth's greater inclination to communicate, thanks to well-developed digital skills. Preservation and the expansion of such behavioral attitudes to other groups of people can have a generally positive influence on sustainable development. Moreover, positive scores have been achieved in the goals that define the health and education of people as they could not be achieved without a change in their behavior. Their activity increased in pursuing personal growth and the usage of opportunities to support an acceptable level of health. Such changes indicate the formation of a positive background for providing further sustainable development, not only within SDGs 3 and 4 but also across all others, because health and people education, without no doubt, create the foundation for the achievement of other sustainable development goals.

Our research, which combined bibliometric, statistical, and sociological approaches to investigate the pandemic's impact on sustainable development, faced several limitations, especially in organizing sociological surveys. In future research, the authors aim to broaden the pool of estimates. However, in this regard, the main outcome of our study is not solely the dataset itself. We propose the authors' methodology to investigate the possibilities of achieving the SDGs in terms of extreme changes in the economy, influenced by external factors similar to the pandemic's sudden stops and shocks in various sectors. The probability of encountering similar large-scale unexpected challenges is high due to periodical manifestations of global risks. Therefore, we find it important to develop our approach to monitor the scientific interest regarding the impactful changes alongside the analysis of practical measures for achieving sustainability based on objective indicators of success and subjective perception of changes and their impact. We believe that our study is helpful in developing the existing literature on the sustainability field. This area of sustainability research requires further investigations, especially in the investigation of behavioral changes and readiness to contribute to sustainable development in uncertain situations. In this regard, the practical implication of our work introduces a new approach to studying the impact of the "new normal" in light of behavioral aspirations and the perception of possibilities for sustainable development. It creates a basis for understanding the public perception of crises and the associated opportunities.

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