

---

**PRELIMINARY REPORT**

# Managers' Attitudes on Sustainable Development Concept Application in Trading Companies – Evidence from Serbia

Maja Staletović<sup>1\*</sup> | Srećko Bačevac<sup>2</sup> | Mirjana Stevanović<sup>3</sup> | Ljubica Pantelić<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Business College of Applied Studies „Prof. PhD Radomir Bojković“ Kruševac

<sup>2</sup> Belgrade Banking Academy, Faculty for Banking, Insurance and Finance Belgrade, Belgrade

<sup>3</sup> The College of Academic Studies „Dositej“, Belgrade

<sup>4</sup> Deposit Insurance Agency, Belgrade

## ABSTRACT

Trading companies face various challenges brought about by the modern environment. For this reason, trading company managers try to adapt their business to various requirements of the environment. This is supported by the fact that recently there has been a global change in the structure of retail, with evidence in the following examples: new sales formats have appeared, there are new categories of retail companies, sales facilities are modernized, soft information is emphasized, flexibility and innovation in business are encouraged, the role of interest groups is valued, unpredictability is accepted as the norm of functioning, the offer of trade mark products is expanded, etc. However, as economic, environmental and social problems gain more and more importance, another very important topic that captures the attention of business managers is the sustainable development concept application. Doing business in accordance with the rules of sustainable development implies that trading companies base their work on ecological and moral principles of sustainable social communities. In accordance with the importance that the sustainable development concept has today, the aim of the paper is based on the analysis of attitudes of employees in management positions in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia regarding the application of economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development. The research results showed that the application of certain elements of sustainable development basic dimensions in their trading companies has been evaluated by the managers as good.

**Keywords:** *sustainable development, trading companies, management, changes, environment*

**JEL Classification:** M14, Q56

---

## INTRODUCTION

In modern economic conditions, sustainable development is a serious and very important topic. This concept aims to promote equitable and equal development while achieving economic betterment, social well-being and environmental quality. The goal is to satisfy the needs of present generations and not neglect the needs of future generations. Thus, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive attitude regarding the sustainable development concept application in all areas and at all levels. In the last few years, the sustainable development concept is increasingly used in the field of trade. Proof of this can be found in published sustainable development reports of many successful companies in that area. The above reports differ in the detail of providing data on

---

\* Corresponding author, e-mail: maja.staletovic@visokaposlovnaskola.edu.rs

sustainable activities. A more detailed presentation of data on sustainable activities is provided by trading companies that have leadership positions in the market, which is, to some extent, expected from them. These companies are significantly dedicated to the application of various elements of economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development. Regarding trading companies in the Republic of Serbia, this paper aims to analyze certain research results in order to view the application of sustainable development basic dimensions in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia. The paper is based on the following research hypothesis: Trading companies in the Republic of Serbia operate in accordance with the basic elements of the economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development. Accordingly, a theoretical presentation of the importance of sustainable development concept application in trading companies was given at the beginning of the paper. Thenceforth, in accordance with the goal and the set hypothesis, the research results were presented and the managers' attitudes regarding the sustainable development concept application in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia were analyzed. At the end, concluding remarks were given and the contribution of this research was pointed out.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The importance of sustainable development was recognized as early as 1972, when the Club of Rome pointed out the „dilemmas“ humanity faced at that time, primarily from the standpoint of accelerated exploitation of the most important natural resources (Štrbac et al., 2012). In such conditions, the sustainable development concept was primarily associated with the need to stop further creating unbalanced relations between the environment and society. The goal was based on creating a more harmonious relationship between accelerated economic growth and a significantly degraded environment. The sustainable development concept is conceived as a category that should propagate and encourage economic growth without environmental degradation and with respect for the needs of all social community members. Its task is reflected in creating the balance between economic, ecological and social spheres, which in turbulent economic conditions can bring great benefits. The main principle of sustainable development is based on ensuring intergenerational solidarity (Withisuphakorn, 2019). It can even be said that sustainable development is the backbone of modern society. It is actually a concept that is gaining importance day by day in various sectors of the economy.

The emergence of the sustainable development concept had a significant role in creating a change in global thinking, forcing companies to rethink the way they conduct their business (Hami et al., 2015). Many, especially companies that have a leadership position in the market, have become aware of the importance of the sustainability concept for their functioning. As trade and retail occupy a significant place in the economy of a country, likewise, the sustainable development concept has its place in retail (Sokolov Mladenović, 2017). However, with regard to the trade sector, the sustainable development concept application is relatively recent. The need for responsible behavior in trading companies is stimulated by the action of various dynamic environmental trends. Firstly, we are talking about the increasingly developed awareness of consumers about the importance of responsible behavior of trading companies, the emergence of information and communication technology that provides the opportunity to transmit information about companies' irresponsible activities among consumers at an enormous speed, the increasing interest of the media in socially responsible activities of companies, etc. In addition, trading companies, especially those engaged in manufacturing, have a certain contribution to environmental degradation, but also in creating or solving social community problems. Today, retail is facing major challenges due to the high mobility of consumers, the need for a strong orientation toward monitoring and analyzing consumer behavior, and the transition to online trade (Burić, 2020). All these factors encourage trading companies to operate in accordance with sustainable development goals and principles. In his work, Lazibat (2012) states the research

results according to which consumers notice the following irresponsible activities of trading companies:

- large trading companies can be a competition to smaller trading companies,
- trading companies can be harmful to the environment when they generate a large amount of waste,
- inadequate attitude towards employees,
- inadequate attitude towards consumers,
- non-compliance with legal regulations,
- inadequate promotional material.

Rahdari et al. (2020) emphasize that the retail industry has a significant responsibility to society because its business model is broadly embedded within society, both in terms of suppliers in its upstream supply chains and downstream with consumers. Stefaneska and Borusiak (2015) emphasize that retail companies have a special role in implementing the concept of sustainable development. Thanks to their position as intermediaries between manufacturing companies and consumers, trading companies are able to encourage responsible behavior of their interest groups, which can be of great importance for improving the quality of life of the entire social community. Theoretical-empirical research shows that trade has the ability to influence the production process and the consumption pattern but also to encourage producers to favor the needs of consumers who prioritize the sustainability concept (Sokolov Mladenović, Ćuzović, 2014). At the same time, the sustainable development concept with all its components in retail shows certain specificities, and based on them, companies strive to create and improve their long-term competitive advantage (Sokolov Mladenović, 2017). Thanks to their position as intermediaries between manufacturing companies and consumers, trading companies are able to monitor the responsible operations of their suppliers and also influence the development of consumer awareness of the importance of sustainable development. A trading company can initiate the process of developing awareness among end-users that they are not only consumers but that they can be an important link in the procurement chain that can, by adopting the habit of ecological behavior, return a significant amount of raw materials, now in the role of a supplier (Knego, 2012). The management of trading companies is responsible for ensuring the willingness to include a larger amount of organic products in their offer, eliminate the use of plastic bags, respect the principles of "fair" trade and consumption, offer organic products under the brand name, respect ecological principles when building sales facilities, use renewable energy sources, etc. Essentially, trading companies are also expected to encourage the creation of new, sustainable habits of their suppliers, consumers and other social community members.

Business operation according to sustainable development principles and goals is especially expected of large and successful trading companies. According to their financial capacity, they are even expected to have a strategic commitment to sustainable development concept implementation. The foregoing means that sustainable development concept application should be continuous and not occasional. In addition, it is important that sustainable development concept implementation is not unilateral. It is necessary to simultaneously and equally take care of the application and balance of economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development. This is also important because the mentioned areas are somewhat interconnected. Zhang and Jiang (2019) note that a company's economic development will affect environmental degradation, but in turn, environmental pollution will also affect the development of companies. In addition, many studies show that consumers do not prefer to buy from socially irresponsible companies and that employees choose fair and responsible employers. It often happens that consumers hold trading companies responsible for the actions of other participants in the supply chain (for example, for product quality). For that reason, it is important that trading companies also encourage their suppliers to behave in accordance with the rules required by the sustainable development concept application. When choosing a supplier, a trading company can ignore those

who do not respect environmental protection criteria when manufacturing products, who exploit child labor, and who use impermissible technologies and materials in production that are harmful to human health and the environment (Knego, 2012). Given that an increasing number of stakeholders are showing interest in the responsible business of trading companies, the most successful retail chains regularly publish their sustainability reports, from which it can be seen which sustainable development components or dimensions represent an integral element of their business operation and creation of a long-term and sustainable competitive advantage (Sokolov Mladenović, 2017). Reports on sustainable development provide an overview of realized and planned sustainable activities, as well as the challenges faced by companies during the implementation of their sustainable activities. Regular disclosure of data on sustainable activities through sustainable development reports shows a strategic inclination to apply the sustainable development concept.

Recently, trading companies have been adopting various practices based on sustainable development concept application: eliminating the use of plastic bags, reducing CO2 emissions, developing internal codes of good conduct, improving employment practices (e.g., employment of persons with disabilities), etc. (Lavorata, 2014). Comprehensive and continuous application of sustainable development basic dimensions can have a positive impact on the business performance of a company and thus on its ability to more easily face all the challenges that hinder sustainable functioning. The benefits that trading companies can have from sustainable development concept application are numerous. Firstly, in dynamic economic conditions, sustainable development concept application represents a path that can help a trading company to better position itself on the market compared to its competitors. In addition, a sustainable business contributes to higher productivity, lower business costs, improved sales quality and increased sales revenue, improved consumer and employee satisfaction, and thus creates a base of loyal consumers and an image of a desirable employer, safe product quality and reliability, availability of necessary resources, etc. Lee (2021) points out that due to the positive effects, social responsibility becomes an important strategic issue for businesses. For this reason, many successful companies view sustainable development not only as a moral issue, but also as their social obligation and, accordingly, become advocates of "solid" sustainable development.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Achieving economic, ecological and social sustainability is one of the most pressing goals societies are facing today (Brenner, Hartl, 2021). In the dynamic and turbulent environment in which retail companies operate, sustainable practices are posited as an opportunity for their progress and survival (Marin-Garcia, 2021). In line with the importance of sustainable business, this paper's methodology is based on both theoretical and empirical research. Firstly, using the analytical and descriptive method, and based on available sources that deal with the issue of sustainable development and sustainable development concept application in trading companies, the importance of sustainable development concept in modern, very turbulent business conditions was pointed out, followed by the encouraging factors of sustainable development concept application in the trade sector, as well as the importance of sustainable operations of trading companies. In the empirical part of the research, the authors provide the results of a descriptive statistical analysis of respondents' attitudes regarding the application of various elements of economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development. In conditions when environmental pollution issues are becoming more serious and social sphere demands are increasingly high, sustainable development with its basic components becomes one of the unavoidable topics in business decision-making. Managers of trading companies are becoming more aware of the importance of sustainable development concepts for the realization of business goals and results. Accordingly, the investigated research sample (Staletović, 2022) consisted of employees in managerial positions in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia. Therefore, the research was conducted on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, between October 2021, and

March 2022, with a sample of 103 participants. The research included trading companies of various sizes. The data collected through the questionnaire, which, apart from general questions about gender, the position of the participants, headquarters of trading companies, type of the sales facility, etc., also contained questions about key elements of the economic, ecological and social dimension of sustainable development, where the participants evaluated the application of the aspects of sustainable development basic dimensions using a five-point Likert scale. The collected data were analyzed using the statistical program SPSS version 23.

## RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The trading sector plays a major role in the operations of the Serbian economy. It is also one of its most vital parts. However, characteristics of the modern environment had a significant impact on the functioning of trading companies in the Republic of Serbia. Today, when explaining the sustainable development concept, attention is focused on three aspects, i.e. economic, ecological and social sustainability (Sokolov Mladenović, 2017). In order to have a high-quality sustainable development concept application, it is necessary for trading companies to simultaneously devote themselves to the application of mentioned sustainable development dimensions. Accordingly, the management of trading companies is expected to create economic value, but also to take care of environmental protection and to take into account social community demands. The question arises whether such a situation also exists with the management of trading companies in the Republic of Serbia. The research conducted by Lovre and Brankov (2016), related to the sustainability of the retail sector until 2013, showed that the trading sector in the Republic of Serbia was on the path to doing sustainable business. Besides, Lukić (2012) also points out that the application of the sustainable development concept in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia is at a lower level compared to some countries with a more developed market economy, which especially applies to domestic retail companies. For example, Lukić (2016) states that energy costs in Serbian trade are higher than in countries with a developed market economy. The reasons for this are very low energy management efficiency, insufficient use of modern energy-efficient technology and equipment, unsatisfactory improvement of energy efficiency in existing and slowed construction of new energy-efficient office buildings and retail facilities, as well as a slight use of renewable energy sources (Lukić, 2016).

The results of the conducted research (Staletović, 2022), obtained using the method of a direct survey of employees in managerial positions in trading companies in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, showed that managers believe that their trading companies are committed to implementing economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development, which confirms the hypothesis set in this research. Descriptive analysis results regarding the basic dimensions of sustainable development are presented below, for each dimension separately (Table 2, 3, 4).

Primarily, it should be noted that the average value of the years of work of managers in their current position is around 9 years, which indicates that these are managers who are well acquainted with the operations of their companies and, accordingly, with the application of sustainable development concept thereof (Staletović, 2022). Consequently, they were able to assess with a greater degree of reliability the application of sustainable development basic dimensions in their companies.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for years of work of the manager in the current position

	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
How many years have you been working in your current position?	1.00	35.00	9.01	7.20

Source: Staletović (2022)

Silvestre and Tirca (2019) point out that one gets the impression that the change toward a more sustainable world is frustratingly slow and that organizations need to promote investment in the implementation of innovative approaches aimed at solving current and urgent sustainable challenges. Sustainable development refers to the need to simultaneously alleviate poverty/improve standards of living and maintain or enhance vital natural capital necessary for future well-being (Polasky et al., 2019). The economic dimension of sustainable development is based on the efficient use of available resources and productivity growth, which would represent an important source of competitive advantage, but all the while taking into account that negative environmental issues are minimized (Ostojić, 2020). Adequate application of the economic dimension of sustainable development implies that trading companies take into account rational use of available, especially scarce resources, encourage investments in less harmful technologies, improve employment, invest in sustainable training of their employees, in sustainable brands, etc. Essentially, by implementing the economic dimension of sustainable development, trading companies should encourage investments in new types of development that would encourage the implementation of sustainable economic activities. The descriptive analysis presented in Table 2 shows the assessment of the application of certain elements of sustainable development's economic dimension. For example, the data show that within the economic dimension of sustainable development, managers have best assessed that the increase of energy efficiency can be productive for the company and that extending direct sales to online sales and monitoring market demands in terms of quality, price and quantity can all have an impact on trading company's revenues from sale.

On the other hand, it has been poorly assessed that the introduction of organic products in a trading company would contribute to the growth of sales revenue, that social responsibility performance affects the company's financial performance, and that the introduction of ecological innovations can have a positive impact on the increase in sales revenue. However, regardless, the analysis shows that the application of sustainable development economic dimension elements in these companies is still assessed as good, which means that the managers of trading companies assess the application of certain sustainable development economic dimension elements as good or very good (the agreement ranged from 1 to 5, and the arithmetic mean is mostly between 3 and 4).

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for basic elements of sustainable development economic dimension

<b>Economic dimension of sustainable development</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>AM</b>	<b>SD</b>
To what extent are the resources available to your trading company used rationally, i.e., in accordance with the rules required by sustainable development concept application	2.00	5.00	3.58	0.90
To what extent do you think a more efficient use of resources would affect the economic performance of your trading company	1.00	5.00	3.61	0.88
To what extent does social responsibility performance affect the financial performance of your trading company	1.00	5.00	3.14	1.00
To what extent is the awareness about the importance of sustainable cost management for achieving sustainable efficiency developed in your trading company	2.00	5.00	3.37	1.00
To what extent is your trading company committed to continuous investment in new jobs	1.00	5.00	3.46	1.13
To what extent would various professional trainings of your employees on sustainable development importance contribute to the growth of your income from the sale of goods	1.00	5.00	3.50	0.98
To what extent do you believe that encouraging your suppliers to behave in accordance with the sustainable development concept would positively affect the economic performance of your trading company	2.00	5.00	3.41	0.81
To what extent would the introduction of adequately marked, high-quality and at the same time affordable private labels in the offer of your trading company contribute to the growth of your sales revenue?	1.00	5.00	3.62	0.93
To what extent is your trading company committed to creating sustainable value for consumers	2.00	5.00	3.62	0.99
To what extent would the use and introduction of organic products in your trading company contribute to the growth of your sales revenue	1.00	5.00	2.94	1.07
To what extent does the need to keep up with market demand for quality, price, and quantity of merchandise affect your sales revenue?	1.00	5.00	3.65	1.03
To what extent can the introduction of eco-innovations in the business practices of your trading company contribute to the growth of your sales revenue	1.00	5.00	3.27	1.00
To what extent can expanding direct sales to online sales affect your sales revenue	1.00	5.00	3.74	1.20
To what extent do you believe the costs of solving environmental issues affect the selling price of your goods	1.00	5.00	3.28	1.02
To what extent can the increase in energy efficiency improve the profitability of your trading company	2.00	5.00	3.98	1.01

*AM* – Arithmetic mean

*SD* – Standard deviation

Source: Staletović (2022)

Bojat and Rebić (2019) point out that sustainable development should provide long-term economic benefits and reduce the negative effects of business activities on the environment. Our planet's ecosystem is very sensitive, as even small disturbances, such as global temperature changes in larger temporal and spatial scales cause unpredictable effects (Nadoveza, Pešić, 2020). Due to strong pressure from society and stakeholders to reduce negative impacts on the

environment, companies are forced to focus on nature conservation and ecology (Stojanović, 2021). Damnjanović et al. (2020) state that large corporations in developed countries must consider the ecological component of sustainable development during every significant project due to extremely precise environmental legislation that very harshly sanctions non-ecological technological processes, used materials and environmentally harmful products. The data presented in Table 3 show that the application of certain ecological dimension elements of sustainable development is assessed as good or very good (the arithmetic mean is also between 3 and 4). The exception is one element, i.e. the worst assessment is present regarding the knowledge of the terms "Green sales facilities", "Green product range", "Green price", "Green transport", "Green technology". On the other hand, it is best assessed that the increase in the trading company's participation in environmental actions would have an impact on improving the image of the company. In addition, there is a good assessment, for example, regarding the extent to which trading companies have reduced the use of plastic bags, etc.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics for basic elements of sustainable development ecological dimension

<b>Ecological dimension of sustainable development</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>AM</b>	<b>SD</b>
To what extent do you take into account the requirements of the ecological dimension of sustainable development when making business decisions	1.00	5.00	3.21	1.11
To what extent would increasing the participation of your trading company in environmental actions organized at the local or wider social community level contribute to strengthening the image and reputation of your company	1.00	5.00	3.61	0.95
To what extent are employees in your company informed about the importance of environmental protection	1.00	5.00	3.41	0.99
To what extent are your sales facilities, processes and technologies following environmental sustainability requirements	2.00	5.00	3.27	0.82
To what extent does your trading company respect ecological principles of sustainability when using means of transport	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.04
To what extent would investing in functional and economical equipment which is compliant with ecological standards for storing and displaying goods contribute to the progress of your company	1.00	5.00	3.56	0.86
To what extent would the application and promotion of recycled material in order to preserve nature be productive for your trading company	1.00	5.00	3.52	1.00
To what extent is your trading company committed to designing a more sustainable way of using water throughout the supply chain	1.00	5.00	3.21	1.06
To what extent could adequate solutions for more responsible waste management be developed in your trading company	1.00	5.00	3.47	0.90
To what extent has the use of plastic bags been reduced in your trading company	1.00	5.00	3.58	1.17
To what extent does your trading company pay attention to energy efficiency	1.00	5.00	3.49	1.16
To what extent would the introduction of eco-label into your trading company's business practices indicate compliance with high environmental protection standards	1.00	5.00	3.35	1.12

<b>Ecological dimension of sustainable development</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>AM</b>	<b>SD</b>
To what extent are your suppliers familiar with the importance and need to respect environmental requirements in their business	1.00	5.00	3.02	0.97
To what extent could your trading company work on developing an environmental protection policy with the aim of monitoring, measuring, reducing and preventing the release of pollutants into the environment?	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.16
To what extent are you familiar with the terms "Green sales facilities", "Green product range", "Green price", "Green transport", "Green technology"	1.00	5.00	2.87	1.16

AM – Arithmetic mean; SD – Standard deviation

Source: Staletović (2022)

In addition to the economic and environmental aspects, trading companies must not neglect the importance of the social dimension of sustainable development. Pavlović and Denčić-Mihajlov (2020) state that the concept of a sustainable business causes companies to direct their resources more than ever toward solving important social issues. In accordance with the requirements of this sustainable development dimension, trading companies should be as fair as possible in respecting the needs of all social community members. In order to achieve this, it is necessary for them to include in their operations all basic elements incorporated in the social dimension of sustainable development. The research results shown in Table 4 indicate that the best assessed is that trading companies can increase responsible behavior towards their employees in terms of ensuring occupational safety and fairer awarding of employees, as well as that there is an opportunity to work on promoting gender equality. On the other hand, the worst assessment is regarding the degree to which a company is dedicated to providing support to the social community through various activities. However, in this case, likewise, the application of mentioned elements within the social dimension of sustainable development is assessed as good.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for basic elements of sustainable development social dimension

<b>Social dimension of sustainable development</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>AM</b>	<b>SD</b>
To what extent could your trading company increase responsible behavior towards its employees in terms of ensuring occupational safety, security and health	1.00	5.00	3.88	1.08
To what extent could your trading company work to respect and promote gender equality?	1.00	5.00	3.72	1.10
To what extent is your business committed to employing people with disabilities	1.00	5.00	2.85	1.17
To what extent is your trading company committed to the professional development and training of its staff	1.00	5.00	3.21	1.12
To what extent could your trading company take care of the system of fair awarding of its employees	1.00	5.00	4.05	1.00
To what extent are the activities organized in your trading company aimed at informing employees about the importance of responsible behavior towards customers	1.00	5.00	3.29	1.14
To what extent could your trading company be more committed to complying with high standards of quality and safety of goods for human health	1.00	5.00	3.61	1.09
To what extent does your trading company support the implementation of projects aimed at involving customers in socially responsible actions	1.00	5.00	4.03	0.99
To what extent does your trading company take care of the safety and security of the storage space	2.00	5.00	4.02	0.97

<b>Social dimension of sustainable development</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>AM</b>	<b>SD</b>
To what extent is your trading company ensuring that the goods it sells are accessible to the average consumer	1.00	5.00	2.95	0.98
To what extent is your trading company familiar with the terms "Fair trade" and "Fairtrade goods"	1.00	5.00	3.26	1.31
To what extent does your trading company support its suppliers with the aim of creating a sustainable supply chain	1.00	5.00	3.19	1.13
To what extent does your trading company work to raise citizens' awareness of a healthier lifestyle	1.00	5.00	3.19	0.98
To what extent do you think that the implementation of charitable projects by your trading company would have a positive effect on the trust of consumers and society	1.00	5.00	3.72	1.01
To what extent is your trading company committed to providing support to the local community through various socially responsible activities	1.00	5.00	2.10	1.20

*AM – Arithmetic mean*

*SD – Standard deviation*

*Source: Staletović (2022)*

Dynamic economy, together with social equality and sustainable use of resources, create the foundations of sustainable development (Jusufranić et al., 2019). With changing social norms and consumer attitudes, the need for businesses to consider and incorporate sustainability into their core strategies has never been more important (Vadakkepatt, 2021). Essentially, the analysis of the presented data shows that the application of economic, ecological and social dimensions elements of sustainable development in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia is assessed as good. It should be kept in mind that the future economy and our future in general largely depend on what we will do and how (Mihajlović et al., 2020). Accordingly, company managers have the task of making other employees aware of the importance of the sustainable development concept, its essence and the need to establish a balance between economic, ecological and social components of development (Staletović et al., 2021). Only through such joint effort that quality implementation of sustainable development can be achieved.

## **CONCLUSION**

The need for sustainable development concept application in trading companies especially gains importance with the emergence of a dynamic environment. In such conditions, simultaneous and equal application of economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development is emphasized. It can be said that the managers of trading companies operating in the territory of the Republic of Serbia have become aware of the importance of sustainable development concept application in their business. The analysis of obtained results related to the attitudes of managers regarding the application of basic dimensions of sustainable development showed that trading companies respect certain elements of economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development. However, it can also be concluded that some further improvements are still necessary in this regard.

The contribution of research results can be viewed from a theoretical and empirical standpoint. The significance of the theoretical part of the research is reflected in the fact that the importance of sustainable development concept application in trading companies has been pointed out. The significance can also be seen in the fact that the factors that encouraged sustainable development concept application in trading companies were highlighted, as well as the benefits that trading companies can have from such application. The contribution of the empirical part of the research is reflected in providing a more detailed insight into the situation regarding the application of various elements of economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development in

trading companies in the Republic of Serbia. The research limitation is mirrored primarily in the inadequate number of papers dealing with the sustainable development issues in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia, making it harder to compare findings with similar scientific studies. The reason for this is precisely the existence of a small number of scientific studies that deal with applying fundamental dimensions of sustainable development in the trading sector of the Republic of Serbia. The limitation can also be reflected in the size of the sample due to insufficient interest of the participants in managerial positions for filling out the questionnaire (due to lack of time, lack of trust in the way in which data is used, then still current Covid-19 virus protection measures, etc.) Given that this is a very modern concept, which gains more and more significance, the recommendation for further research is to monitor the condition of application of fundamental dimensions of sustainable development in the trading sector in the future and, if possible, on a larger sample.

## LITERATURE

- Bojat, M. Rebić, M.** (2019). Key macroeconomic indicators of sustainable development in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Economic ideas*, 35, 75-93.
- Brenner, B., Hartl, B.** (2021). The perceived relationship between digitalization and ecological, economic, and social sustainability. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 315, 128128
- Burilović, L.** (2020). Digital transformation of retail business. *Business excellence*, 14(2), 197-221.
- Damnjanović, R., Bešlin-Feruh, M., Rajković, A.** (2020). Marketing of sustainable development and environmental management. *Sustainable Development*, 2(2), 31-40.
- Hami, N., Muhamad, M. R., Ebrahim, Z.** (2015). The impact of sustainable manufacturing practices and innovation performance on economic sustainability. *Procedia Cirp*, 26, 190-195.
- Jusufranić I., Nestorović O., Biočanin R.** (2019). Ecological aspects in the function of sustainable development. *Science and technology*, 7(12), 113-120.
- Knego, N.** (2012). Quality as a function of sustainable retail development. *Collection of works: Trade perspectives 2012: Trade in the Context of Sustainable Development*, ISBN 978-953-6025-62-6, 19-36.
- Lee, S.H.** (2021). Effects of Retailers' Corporate Social Responsibility on Retailer Equity and Consumer Usage Intention. *Sustainability*, 13(6), 3080; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063080>
- Lavorata, L.** (2014). Influence of retailers' commitment to sustainable development on store image, consumer loyalty and consumer boycotts: Proposal for a model using the theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 21(6), 1021-1027.
- Lazibat, T., Sutić, I., Baković, T.** (2012). Possibilities of applying the ISO 26000 standard in the distribution trade of the Republic of Croatia, Trade Perspectives 2012, *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference Zagreb*, ISBN 978-953-6025-62-6, 102-116.
- Lovre, K., Brankov, T.** (2016). Multiple Sustainability Dimensions of Retail Sector in Serbia until 2013, *Industrija*, 44(1), 133-149.
- Lukić, R.** (2012). Sustainable development of retail in Serbia. *Revista de Management Comparat Internațional*, 13(4), 574-586.
- Lukić, R.** (2016). The impact of energy efficiency on performance in service sector. *Economic and Environmental Studies*, 16(2 (38)), 169-190.
- Marin-Garcia, A., Gil-Saura, I., Ruiz-Molina, M. E., Berenguer-Contrí, G.** (2021). Sustainability, store equity, and satisfaction: The moderating effect of gender in retailing. *Sustainability*, 13(2), 1010.
- Mihajlović, M., Nikolić, S., Tasić, S.** (2020). Sustainability of the economic model of contemporary economy. *Održivi razvoj*, 2(2), 7-13.
- Nadoveza, B., Pešić, H.** (2020). Sustainable development: Production force of modern society. *Održivi razvoj*, 2(1), 31-40.

- Ostojić, I.** (2020). Institutional component of sustainable development of Serbia. Challenges of sustainable development in Serbia and the European Union. Edition Zbornici. *Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade*, ISBN 978-86-7093-237-1, 100-117.
- Pavlović M., Denčić-Mihajlov, K.** (2020). Sustainable Development Reporting and Sustainable Financing: Challenges for SMEs. *Economic challenges*, 9(18), 49-61.
- Polasky, S., Kling, C. L., Levin, S. A., Carpenter, S. R., Daily, G. C., Ehrlich, P. R., ... Lubchenco, J.** (2019). Role of economics in analyzing the environment and sustainable development. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(12), 5233-5238.
- Rahdari A., Sheehy B., Khan H., Braendle U, Rexhepi G., Sepasi S.** (2020). Exploring global retailers' corporate social responsibility performance. *Heliyon* 4 (2020) e04644.
- Silvestre, B. S., Tirca, D. M.** (2019). Innovations for sustainable development: Moving toward a sustainable future. *Journal of cleaner production*, 208, 325-332.
- Sokolov Mladenović, S.** (2017). Sustainability and sustainable development in retail - international and domestic experiences. *Economics*, 1(1), 47-55.
- Sokolov Mladenović, S., Ćuzović, S.** (2014). Trade management in mastering the secrets of sustainable development. *Economic topics*, 52(3), 361-378.
- Stefaneska, M., Borusiak, B.** (2015). Sustainable development in the retail sector-a local perspective. 11th International Conference of ASECU September, 10-11, 370-381.
- Staletović, M.** (2022). Application of the concept of sustainable development in trading companies in the Republic of Serbia in order to improve business performance. *Doctoral dissertation*.
- Staletović, M., Kojić, N., Milačić, S., Dajić, M.** (2021). Importance of sustainable human resources management on the example of trade companies in Kruševac. *Oditor*, 7(2), 107-119.
- Stojanović, A.** (2021). Modeling the factors of corporate social responsibility in the conditions of a dynamic business environment. *Doctoral dissertation*.
- Štrbac, N., Vuković M, Voza D, Sokić, M.** (2012). Sustainable development and environmental protection. *Recycling and Sustainable Development*, 5(1), 18-29.
- Vadakkepatt, G. G., Winterich, K. P., Mittal, V., Zinn, W., Beitelspacher, L., Aloysius, J.,... Reilman, J.** (2021). Sustainable retailing. *Journal of Retailing*, 97(1), 62-80.
- Wthisuphakorn, P., Batra, I., Parameswar, N., Dhir, S.** (2019). Sustainable development in practice: Case study of L'Oréal. *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research*, 13(Special), 35-47.
- Zhang, H., Jiang, N.** (2019). Discussion on Environmental Protection and Company Economic Development. *In IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 242(5), 1-6.

Article history:	Received: 20.12.2022.
	Revised: 5.2.2023.
	Accepted: 16.3.2023.