

The role of stakeholder participation in European sustainable development policies and strategies

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Introduction

This ESDN Quarterly Report reflects on the importance of stakeholder participation and engagement with particular emphasis on the processes and policies that concern National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) in Europe, but also in light of the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The development and implementation of SD related policies take place in a **multi-actor, multi-level and multi-sectorial** context. Continuous **learning and adaption** of policies and political commitment to pursue long-term goals in an active and adaptive manner are necessary. **Stakeholder participation and engagement** is necessary not only in the design and implementation of SD strategies, policies and projects, but also into the general decision-making process.

This QR also reflects on the discussions and exchanges held at the [13th ESDN Workshop](#), entitled “**Strengthening environmental and sustainable development dialogue in Europe in the context of the 2030 SD Agenda**”, which took place in **Paris on 12-13 November 2015**. The 13th ESDN Workshop was organised as a **joint event with the [EEAC Annual Conference 2015](#)**, “Civil Society and climate change: On the road to Paris”. Both events were organised in cooperation with the French Ministry for Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy. The main aim of the 13th ESDN Workshop was to take stock of European experiences of environmental and sustainable development dialogues in different countries and reflect upon how to improve stakeholder dialogues, also in the context of the 2030 Agenda for SD. This theme is also reflected within this report.

This Quarterly Report has the following structure: **Chapter 1** provides a definition of stakeholder participation by referring to the main discussions in the academic world, and concentrates on describing rationales, characteristics, challenges, and potential benefits of participation in the context of sustainable development. **Chapter 2** describes the role and the usage of stakeholder participation in Europe in the context of environmental and sustainable development policies and strategies. For this reason, we include and reflect on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS), the Europe 2020 strategy, and reflect on its flagship initiatives. We also look into how stakeholder participation is dealt with in the newly adopted ‘Circular Economy Package’ by the European Commission. **Chapter 3** then provides an overview on how stakeholder participation is incorporated in SD policies and strategies at the national level in Europe: we first give a more general European picture taken from an analysis of the contributions on the country profiles section of the ESDN website, and then present in more detail the experiences of four European countries: France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland. **Chapter 4** summarises the main discussions and results of the 13th ESDN Workshop. Finally, **chapter 5** concludes by providing a reflection on the main themes elaborated in the report.

1 Defining stakeholder participation

Chapter 1 describes what is meant by stakeholder participation¹ in the context of sustainable development, the rationale behind it, and its main characteristics.

In brief, **‘stakeholder participation’ refers to the inclusion of various stakeholders that can affect, or are affected by, the results of policy-making and decision-making processes.** In general, a number of institutions and actors are invited to participate in such processes, for instance, civil society organisations/NGOs, business representatives, social partners (i.e. trade unions, chambers of commerce, etc.), sub-national authorities, academia and individual citizens.

The participation of different stakeholders in decision-making processes has been a central principle of sustainable development since the concept emerged. Middlemiss (2014) found that both theory and practice of sustainable development have historically emphasised participation as an important means to achieve its ends (see also Hardin 1968, WCED 1987, Ostrom 1990). The participation of citizens in policy-making and decision-making for sustainable development has been encouraged and promoted for a long time, based on the principle that people are more likely to commit to outcomes to which they have had a collective input (Middlemiss, 2014, p.930).

Morse and Bell (2010) describe two main arguments behind this rationale:

1. that stakeholders have a fundamental right to be included in deliberations that will have an impact upon their lives and;
2. that listening to the voice of stakeholders and including them within a process of change can help make that change better.

Moreover, the ambiguity of the SD concept and its goals, and the need to adapt to changing circumstances calls for a constant redefinition and reinterpretation of SD principles. Jordan (2008) argues that in the absence of a “centrally determined blueprint for sustainable development, its practical meaning will necessarily have to emerge out of an interactive process of **societal dialogue and reflection**. If this is the case, systems of governance will be needed to guide and steer these collective discussions towards a satisfactory level of consensus” (pp.18-19).

Sustainable development thus calls for decision-making that has an adaptive and participatory character to account for changes and uncertainty, harness different types of knowledge, and foster cooperation and shared objectives.

Participation has been a central component of various policy documents. Since the adoption of Agenda 21 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, this collaborative imperative has gained ground in environmental policy practice, and is now translated into frameworks for ‘stakeholder’ participation across multiple environmental areas and green policy instruments (Kuchler and Lövbrand, 2015, p.2). For instance, Agenda 21 put great emphasis on local community participation as a means of implementation by affirming that governments at the appropriate level should, among others, select combinations of land uses and production systems appropriate to land units through multiple goal optimization procedures, and

¹ In this quarterly report, we used and refer to ESDN Office’s work done in the preparation of: Zwirner, W., G. Berger and M. Sedlacko (2008) Participatory Mechanisms in the Development, Implementation and Review of National Sustainable Development Strategies. ESDN Quarterly Report September 2008.

strengthen delivery systems and local community participation (paragraph 14.40, UNCED, 1992). In 2012, the Rio+20 Outcome Document, 'The Future We Want', stresses its aim to 'enhance the participation and effective engagement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the relevant international forums and, in this regard, promote transparency and broad public participation and partnerships to implement sustainable development' (UN, 2012). Participatory arrangements of different stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, business, and academia in the policy-making process are thus a central steering tool for sustainable development governance.

1.1 Different rationales of participation

Participation follows different rationales. A very valuable way to see participation rationales is proposed by Wesselink et al. (2011). Based on Fiorino (1990), Blackstock and Richards (2007), and Stirling (2006; 2008), the understanding of participation rationales is usually defined through three main categories:

1. **Instrumental:** Effective participation makes decisions more legitimate and improves results. It aims to restore public credibility, diffuse conflicts, justify decisions, and limit future challenges to implementation by 'creating ownership'. Policy goals are not open for discussion; only the details are (to a lesser or greater extent). It hereby supports incumbent interests.
2. **Substantive:** Non-experts see problems, issues, and solutions that experts sometimes miss. It aims to increase the breadth and depth of information and thereby improve the quality of decisions; it ignores power issues (e.g. related to problem framing). Unlike in the instrumental rationale, policy goals can be changed in a substantive rationale.
3. **Normative:** Democratic ideals call for maximum participation. It aims to counter the power of incumbent interests and allows all who are affected by a decision to have influence.

Although Wesselink et al. (2015) argued that participatory processes were widely seen as useful in producing benefits in all three rationales, they also contend that a consideration of potential contradictions between the arguments of each rationale is necessary. The main question that needs to be addressed, they argue, is therefore: "**Why do participation?**". They offer the explanation that "[t]ogether with other factors such as social and political context, capacities, time, and finance, participation rationales guide the choices made in a participatory process" (ibid., p.2690).

In this context, Wesselink et al. (2011) complemented the rationales categorisation by adding a *fourth rationale* defined as '**legalistic rationale**'. Although this fourth rationale is practically similar to the 'instrumental rationale', where compliance with rules is seen as necessary to get things done, in the legalistic rationale, "none of the other instrumental drivers for participation remains so the organised process is likely to be a formality without any uptake of results" (Wesselink et al., 2011, p.2691). Following the legalistic rationale, **participation is considered only when and because it is required**. The case of EU legislation is a good example: when the EU requires that participation is undertaken, arrangements are made in order to respect this requirement. Therefore, **procedural pressure is the only reason that participation is organised** (ibid., p.2694). The following **Figure 1.1** summarises the four different rationales looking in particular at the (i) subjects (who), (ii) objects (what), and (iii) modalities (how) of participatory arrangements. In the fourth rationale, such categories look at the formal requirements but somehow are not limiting participation: one can argue that, as long as the formal requirements are met, participation could be opened to a diversity

of subjects, and consider different objects when they would not interfere with the requested procedures.

Fig.1.1: Participation rationales and design choices for participation

	Instrumental rationale	Substantive rationale	Normative rationale	Legalistic rationale
Who is included?	those who have blocking power and those who are needed for implementation	those who have additional knowledge	those who have a stake	those who are necessary by formal requirement
What is included?	policy makers' concerns; selected knowledge and views	policy makers' concerns; all knowledge and views	participants' concerns and views	concerns, knowledge and views explicitly and formally requested
How is it included?	only when it ensures smooth implementation	only when it adds value substantively	in all stages and issues	by following formally required procedures

Source: adapted from Wesselink et al., 2011; Stirling, 2006; Stirling, 2008

1.2 Key principles of stakeholder participation processes

Several **key principles** describe the characteristics and reasoning for stakeholder participation processes in more detail (see for instance: Arbter et al. 2007; Duraiappah et al., 2005; Egger and Majeres, 1992; Hemmati, 2002):

- **Inclusion:** citizens or representatives of societal groups (stakeholders) who are affected by the results of a decision or a process should be involved;
- **Equal Partnership:** it should be recognised that every citizens and/or stakeholder representative has equal rights to participate in the process regardless of their status;
- **Increasing knowledge:** stakeholders possess different kinds of 'knowledge' (e.g. expert, regional/local or context specific knowledge) that can increase the understanding of certain issues;
- **Transparency:** all participants should contribute to create a climate of mutual trust, open communication and fair dialogue;
- **Access to information:** all participants should have access to relevant information and documents in the participatory process;
- **Ownership:** Involving stakeholders and citizens in participatory processes can increase their 'ownership' of the outcomes of participation;
- **Sharing responsibility:** each stakeholder should be provided with clear responsibilities and all stakeholders should have equal responsibility for decisions made in the respective participatory process;
- **Empowerment:** it should be clear from the beginning of the participatory process how much influence the participants have and what will be done with the results;
- **Process design:** the process design of participatory processes should take into account the duration of the participation and the resources required by all participants (e.g. personnel, time, budget, etc.);
- **Integrating in existing decision procedures:** Participatory processes in a representative democracy should be linked with existing decision procedures in order to clarify their role and status in the entire decision-making process.

The process principles outlined above can have different application practices in the policy process, depending on: (i) participation applied in the different **policy hierarchy levels**, (ii) the **different**

forms of participation, (iii) the **degree of participation**, (iv) participation at the different political levels (**vertical participation**), (v) the **breadth of participation** and, (vi) the **participation at different stages of the policy cycle**. We will describe each of these six points in the following paragraphs:

(i) Policy hierarchy level

Participatory mechanisms can be applied at different levels of policy hierarchies. Firstly, on the highest level in the development and/or implementation of **policies, strategies, overall concepts**, etc. which outline general objectives and policy goals. Secondly, participation can take place in the development/implementation of **plans and programmes** that define objectives and targets in specific policy fields. And thirdly, participation can take place in **projects** that have a clearly defined scope and specific running time.

(ii) Different forms of participation

Depending on the scope and objective of participation, there are different forms of participation processes. One can distinguish between:

- **ad-hoc forms** that are organised once for a specific purpose like, e.g. internet consultations, web-based debates, workshops, public hearings, conferences, presentations, round tables and dialogues, etc.
- **institutionalised forms** like, e.g. dialogues, partnerships, councils, committees, advisory groups, etc.
- **'hybrid forms'** are, for instance, councils or committees (e.g. national SD councils) supported by ad-hoc participation (e.g. forums, workshops and conferences addressing specific topics of SD).

(iii) Degree of participation

One can also distinguish participation mechanisms regarding the **intensity** with which stakeholder are involved. There are multiple academic approaches to categorizing this 'degree of participation'. For instance, Bass *et al.* (1995) developed six degrees of participation that are shown in Fig.1.2 below:

Fig 1.2: A typology of participation in policy processes and planning

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Participants are listening only</i> - e.g. receiving information from a government PR campaign or open database. 2) <i>Participants are listening and giving information</i> - e.g. through public inquiries, media activities, "hotlines". 3) <i>Participants are consulted</i> - e.g. through working groups and meetings held to discuss policy. 4) <i>Participation in analysis and agenda-setting</i> - e.g. through multi-stakeholder groups, round tables and commissions. 5) <i>Participation in reaching consensus on strategy elements</i> - e.g. through national round tables, parliamentary/select committees, and conflict mediation. 6) <i>Participants involved in decision-making on the policy, strategy or its components.</i> |
|--|

Source: Bass *et al.* (1995)

Another typology by Green and Hunton-Clarke (2003) distinguishes between informative, consultative and decisional participation:

- **Informative participation** describes processes that involve information that is being passed from one body to another. On the one hand, this includes the distribution of information

from the central institution(s) to the stakeholders (e.g. websites, online reports, brochures etc.) in a one-way communication. On the other hand, it also includes processes with a two-way information exchange between the central institution(s) and the stakeholders (e.g. during information events, campaigns, etc.).

- **Consultative participation** refers to a higher-level of exchange between the central institution(s) and the stakeholders. At this level, the stakeholders are asked to contribute their views, knowledge and experiences at various stages of the policy process. Examples are consultation processes, round tables, dialogue forums, workshops, national SD councils, partnerships, etc. This form of participation not only comprises a stronger involvement of stakeholders, but also refers to issues like commitment in the process, resources applied, capacity-building, etc.
- **Decisional participation** describes mechanisms in which stakeholders participate in the decision-making process. This includes participation in actual political decision-making or in the preparation of political decisions. Examples are some national SD councils, sectoral policy dialogues, decisions on indicator sets, etc.

(iv) Vertical participation

Participation takes place at **different political levels**, i.e. on the supra-national (EU), national, regional and/or local level. Dalal-Clayton and Bass (2002) argue that in participatory processes at the supra-national and/or nation level, participation is often restricted to traditional stakeholder groups and ‘classic’ participatory mechanisms. In contrast, participation on the sub-national levels is often more interactive and innovative. Moreover, the motivation for stakeholder participation at the sub-national levels can be fostered by direct regional/local concerns and experiences. The links between top-down and bottom-up dynamics in participation and the fostering of decentralised mechanisms as well as vertical integration itself are some of the main challenges of designing participatory processes.

(v) Breadth of participation (or horizontal participation)

This refers to the number of stakeholders involved in a participatory mechanism, i.e. how diverse and cross-boundary (e.g. cross-sectoral, inter-disciplinary, etc.) the set of involved stakeholders is. Based on Dalal-Clayton and Bass (2002), one can distinguish between:

- **Full participation:** All major sectors of society are involved, including individual citizens. Moreover, representatives of at least two political levels take part in the participation. There should be no administrative or technical restrictions in place (e.g. access to information, need of special technical equipment, etc).
- **Restricted participation:** Only some sectors of society are involved; individual citizens are not involved in participation. In most cases, not more than two political levels are involved. Administrative or technical restrictions can be in place. The central institution(s) define general terms for participation, including selection criteria.
- **Strongly restricted participation:** Only a selected few sectors of society are involved; individual citizens are not involved in participation. Not more than two political levels are involved. Administrative or technical restrictions are in place. The central institution(s) define clear terms for participation, including strong selection criteria.

(vi) Participation at different stages of the policy cycle

This characteristic refers to the three common stages of the policy cycle, i.e. participation in the **design, implementation, and review** of policies, strategies, programmes etc. Design refers to the drafting process of policies, strategies and programmes; implementation refers to those participatory mechanisms that are in direct relation to the implementation of policy or strategy objectives and the outcomes of those initiatives; and review refers to evaluating and monitoring the progress in achieving the objectives as well as to the further development of i.e. a policy, a strategy, a programme.

1.3 Benefits and challenges of public participation

Participatory processes can produce a number of **benefits** for the different stakeholders involved. Generally, these processes bring together people with different interests, views and ideas, who might have otherwise not cooperated. As they express their various perspectives, needs and experiences, a common pool of knowledge about the different aspects of a policy, strategy, plan, programme or project is developed. The subsequent political decision process can then take this knowledge and the gathered ideas into account. The benefits of public participation processes differs regarding the involved stakeholders (Arbter et al, 2007):

- **Politicians** may acquire a *clearer picture of the needs* of different stakeholder groups and citizens. Participatory processes can render it easier to *accommodate conflicting interests* and promote the *culture of collaboration and dialogue*.
- **Public administrators** can benefit from stakeholder participation because issues have been discussed and worked out in *cooperation with stakeholders*. Therefore, administrators are less likely to be confronted with objections and subsequent complaints in the policy or strategy process. Moreover, participation may play an important part in *increasing stakeholders' trust in the administration*.
- **Business representatives** may benefit from bringing in their perspectives in the participatory process and, thereby, *influencing the development of policies and strategies*. Moreover, they are *informed about future developments earlier* and this may influence their business strategy and future activities.
- **Citizens or citizen representatives, incl. civil society organisations** have the chance to *present their ideas, views and thoughts* about a policy issue, strategy or project, and can influence the decision and policy processes. They also *gain up-to-date information and insights* into how decisions are reached.

Although there are many benefits of participatory processes, practical experiences show and research (Steurer, 2007) reveals that establishing meaningful and effective exchange mechanisms between different stakeholders remains a **challenge**. Below we list some limits and costs of participatory processes and how they could be addressed (Arbter et al, 2007; Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002; UNEP, 2002; Waylen et al. 2015²):

- **Creation of unrealistic expectations:** To avoid this, the purpose and form of participation should be openly communicated in advance and it should be made clear that compromises are necessary in a process where conflicting opinions and interests meet.

² Waylen, K.A., K.L. Blackstock, K.B. Marshall and J. Duglinson (2015) Participation–Prescription Tension in Natural Resource Management: The case of diffuse pollution in Scottish water management. *Env. Pol. Gov.* 25, pp.111–124

- **Topics are too technical:** This is a risk stemming from omissions in the planning of participation. Evidently, special care needs to be taken to ‘translate’ a given problem into plain language and to provide participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- **Costs of resources, time and money:** Transaction costs of developing and maintaining institutional mechanisms for public participation, conflict resolution, time spent in meetings, costs for catering, transport and accommodation, etc., need to be taken into account.
- **Stakeholder selection and legitimisation of stakeholder groups:** This is one of the most sensitive elements of a participatory process. An open, transparent and profound stakeholder selection is necessary for successful outcomes.
- **Takeover of the process by dominant participants:** Careful design of public participation should ensure that participation is balanced, that all sides of the debate are heard.
- **Report on the outcomes of participatory processes:** Transparent and open public participation should also include a report about how the results of the participatory process have been used and an explanation when results were not used. This will potentially increase efforts and costs, however, will contribute to the traceability of outcomes and trust of stakeholders involved;
- **Pre-existence of prescribed management goals or targets:** Pre-set targets are clearly incompatible with granting stakeholder control over objective-setting and decision-making.

1.4 A reference to major UN conferences

As discussed above before, participation has been a central component of various UN policy documents. This section expands on this notion and makes reference to the main UN conferences leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In **Agenda 21**, the Action Programme adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992, includes a major reference to **stakeholder participation in the context of SD** (UNCED, 1992, para 23.2):

“One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. Furthermore, in the more specific context of environment and development, the need for new forms of participation has emerged. This includes the need of individuals, groups and organizations to participate in environmental impact assessment procedures and to know about and participate in decisions, particularly those which potentially affect the communities in which they live and work. Individuals, groups and organizations should have access to information relevant to environment and development held by national authorities, including information on products and activities that have or are likely to have a significant impact on the environment, and information on environmental protection measures.”

During the decades following the adoption of Agenda 21, the principle of stakeholder participation has been implemented in many processes of international SD governance, especially the UN system (i.e. the work of the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Habitat and UNAIDS programmes). Generally, stakeholder participation is identified as an objective in its own right and a fundamental equity principle of SD (UN, 2002).

More recently, the **Rio+20 Outcome Document**, ‘The Future We Want’, stressed its aim to ‘enhance the participation and effective engagement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the

relevant international forums and, in this regard, promote transparency and broad public participation and partnerships to implement sustainable development' (paragraph 76) (UN,2012).

In the months following Rio+20, the formulation of the SDGs itself was characterized by a particular effort to engage with different stakeholders and enhance the process through extensive public consultations. In the recently adopted the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the current goals and targets are the result of *"over two years of intensive **public consultation** and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world, which paid particular attention to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable"*(paragraph 6) (UN, 2015).

In the chapter on **'means of implementation'**, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the general role of stakeholders in the implementation phase: *"We acknowledge the role of the diverse private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals, and that of civil society organizations and philanthropic organizations in the implementation of the new Agenda."* (paragraph 41). In addition, the 2030 Agenda Outcome Document refers to the necessary close cooperation between governments and public institutions and stakeholders in achieving the Agenda's objectives: *"Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, subregional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others."* (paragraph 45) (ibid.).

There is an emphasis on participation also in the different SDGs, as for instance SDG 6, *"Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all"* has the sub goal 6.b that reads *"support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management"*. Another example is SDG 16 to 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' also has clear references to participation: *"Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance"* (16.8) (ibid.).

Furthermore, the document stresses **multi-stakeholder partnerships** as a way to engage with and enhance cooperation between different stakeholders. For instance, this is described in SDG 17.16: *"Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries"*. The rationale for a call to involve different stakeholders is the **sharing of knowledge, the co-creation of new knowledge, and providing adequate finance**. Furthermore, partnerships between different stakeholder groups are also seen as an **effective tool of implementation** and this *"public, public-private and civil society partnerships"* (target 17.17) are encouraged.

Finally, the document also commits itself to **participation in the follow-up and review process**: *"The HLPF will support participation in follow-up and review processes by the major groups and other relevant stakeholders in line with Resolution 67/290. We call on these actors to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda"* (paragraph 89) (ibid.). Stakeholder participation is thus seen as positive at all stages of the policy process, from the formulation of objectives and policies, to implementation, and monitoring and reviewing.

1.5 The stakeholders' view on participation

Tackling the transformative challenges of sustainable development requires and will be only achievable with the **full engagement and participation of a great variety of stakeholders in a constructive partnership**. Various stakeholders are needed at all stages of the sustainability cycle in order to contribute to the identification of goals and targets, as co-producers of the policies and measures needed to achieve the objectives as well as actions needed to change unsustainable practices and behaviours, as co-participants in monitoring and review processes in the form of 'joint guardians' and 'watchdogs of progress' (Osborn, 2015).

In a nutshell, the relevance of stakeholder participation is to be found first of all in their different forms of **knowledge**, or even **concerns** that they could bring on the table. On the other hand, in order to make use of their knowledge, a **democratic process** taking care of involving stakeholders and their interests is vital. Furthermore, **transparency** in decision-making in the sense of **access** to information and making the participation in an **open dialogue** are preconditions for effective stakeholder involvement and SD implementation (Stakeholder Forum, 2015; Osborn, 2015).

As far as the implementation of SDGs at EU level and at the national level is concerned, the engagement of stakeholders is, therefore, essential. As mentioned, the **necessity for new knowledge** is one of the major reasons for stakeholder participation. New knowledge on climate change, energy, resource efficiency, circular economy and the linked questions of air pollution, health, vehicle emissions and transport as well as new thinking about sustainable cities, water and oceans is urgently required (Osborn, 2015). In this respect, various stakeholders are needed to **enable and encourage the SD debate**, and to **highlight areas where new efforts are indispensable**. Therefore, modalities for stakeholder engagement should be considered and implemented so that stakeholders can build up their capacity to engage productively at each stage of the sustainability cycle in a consistent and coherent way (Osborn, 2015).

In order to support stakeholder participation, and a transformational sustainable development agenda, the following stakeholders' needs are to be considered:

- **Raise awareness** in order to improve stakeholders' understanding and recognition of the value of the new agenda for SD. The more stakeholders are involved in the process, the more inclusive the whole implementation of the agenda will be, therefore, enhancing communication between all stakeholders from civil society, governments and the media to raise awareness of the process and its importance.
- **Increase engagement** implies to provide opportunities and modalities for everyone to contribute their views.
- **Empower stakeholders** to improve their ability to participate and influence, therefore, they need to be well-equipped to influence key processes and actors.
- **Coordinate advocacy** aims at increasing the visibility, inclusivity and impact of advocacy activities and policy responses.
- **Strengthen governance** that engages all stakeholders and provides transparency, guarantees access to information and justice as well as strengthens accountability (Stakeholder Forum, 2015).

2 Stakeholder participation in the context of European SD governance

Chapter 2 describes the role and the use of stakeholder participation on the EU level in the context of environmental and sustainable development policies and strategies. For this reason, we look into participatory provisions and mechanisms of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS), the Europe 2020 Strategy, its flagships, and the recently published ‘Circular Economy’ package of the European Commission.

2.1 EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS): participation at its core

Renewed and adopted in 2006, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) sets out objectives and concrete actions for **seven key priority challenges**, mostly for the period until 2010:

1. **Climate change and clean energy:** to limit climate change and its costs and negative effects to society and the environment;
2. **Sustainable transport:** to ensure that our transport systems meet society’s economic, social and environmental needs whilst minimising their undesirable impacts on the economy, society and the environment;
3. **Sustainable consumption & production:** to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns;
4. **Conservation and management of natural resources:** to improve management and avoid overexploitation of natural resources, recognising the value of ecosystem services;
5. **Public Health:** to promote good public health on equal conditions and improve protection against health threats;
6. **Social inclusion, demography and migration:** to create a socially inclusive society by taking into account solidarity between and within generations and to secure and increase the quality of life of citizens as a precondition for lasting individual well-being;
7. **Global poverty and sustainable development challenges:** to actively promote sustainable development worldwide and ensure that the European Union’s internal and external policies are consistent with global sustainable development and its international commitments.

Additionally, the renewed EU SDS includes **two cross-cutting policies** that aim to contribute to the knowledge society: 1) **Education and training**; and, 2) **Research and development**.

We summarised the main information regarding the EU SDS in the following **Fig.2.1**, which describes aim, objectives, governance cycle, the main documents for implementation at the national level, and the ministries responsible at the national level.

Fig.2.1: The EU SDS in brief

Strategy	Renewed in 2006 based on the first EU SDS (Gothenburg, 2001)
Aim	Achieve SD, quality of life and well-being in Europe in the long-term
Objectives	7 key challenges: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate change and clean energy 2. Sustainable transport 3. Sustainable consumption & production 4. Conservation and management of natural resources 5. Public Health 6. Social inclusion, demography and migration 7. Global poverty and sustainable development challenges 2 cross-cutting policies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. education and training; b. research and development
Governance cycle	Every two years
Main documents for implementation at the national level	National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)
Ministries responsible at the national level	Ministries of the Environment (in most cases)

Source: Pisano et al., 2011

In this context, **stakeholder participation** is addressed by several of the policy guiding principles in the renewed EU SDS (European Council, 2006, pp.4-5)³:

- **Open and democratic society:** Guarantee citizens' rights of access to information and ensure access to justice. Develop adequate consultation and participatory channels for all interested parties and associations;
- **Involvement of citizens:** Enhance the participation of citizens in decision-making. Promote their education and public awareness of sustainable development. Inform citizens about their impact on the environment and their options for making more sustainable choices;
- **Involvement of businesses and social partners:** Enhance the social dialogue, corporate social responsibility and private-public partnerships to foster cooperation and common responsibilities to achieve sustainable consumption and production;
- **Policy integration:** Promote integration of economic, social and environmental considerations so that they are coherent and mutually reinforce each other by making full use of instruments for better regulation, such as balanced impact assessment and stakeholder consultations.

Under the section 'Better policy-making', the EU SDS suggests the use of, among other tools, public and stakeholders participation (paragraph 11, *ibid.*). Moreover, the engagement of stakeholders in dialogues, events, consultations and meetings with the EU Commission and with Member States is often advised.

A particularly relevant recommendation is to be found in paragraph 43, where Member States are suggested to "consider strengthening or, where these do not yet exist, setting up **multi-stakeholder national advisory councils on sustainable development to stimulate informed debate, assist in the preparation of NSDSs and/or contribute to national and EU progress reviews**".

³ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?!=EN&f=ST%2010917%202006%20INIT>

An extremely significant indication, very much connected to the whole context of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recently approved by the UN General Assembly, is the provision included in paragraph 27. In this paragraph the EU Commission is asked to “elaborate a concrete and realistic vision of the EU on its way to sustainable development over the next 50 years”. When related to this new impetus and momentum built with the new SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for SD, such a paragraph somehow emphasizes the need of a holistic approach that looks at a future-looking sustainable development of Europe. The paragraph then continues by highlighting how such a vision “should be prepared in a participatory manner and should identify the main long term objectives and describe intermediate stages and steps towards their achievement”, therefore, stressing the need for a shared and participatory vision for a sustainable Europe by European citizens. Coherently and with regards to the local level, the EU SDS also suggests that “approaches like Local Agenda 21 and other processes with broad public participation must be further strengthened and promoted” (paragraph 29). In addition, paragraph 31 states:

“The EU welcomes civil society initiatives which aim at creating more ownership for sustainable development and will therefore intensify dialogue with relevant organisations and platforms that can offer valuable advice by drawing attention to the likely impact of current policies on future generations. In this context, the EU will also continue to promote full implementation of the Aarhus Convention Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.” (ibid.)

Finally, participatory tools and mechanisms can be found in the preparation, implementation and of NSDSs in most EU Member States. Generally, participation forms an integral part and constitutes an important principle of the SD strategy cycle⁴.

2.2 The Europe 2020 Strategy: limited participation

Adopted in 2010, the Europe 2020 Strategy ‘A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ outlines three “mutually reinforcing priorities” (EC, 2010, p.3)⁵ for the EU:

- Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation
- Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy
- Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

Although they are not exhaustive, **five EU headline targets** are to be achieved by 2020:

- I. 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed;
- II. 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D;
- III. the "20/20/20" climate and energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction *if the conditions are right*);
- IV. the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree;
- V. 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.

⁴ See also: Hametner, M. and R. Steurer (2007) Objectives and Indicators of Sustainable Development in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of European Coherence. ESDN Quarterly Report December 2007

⁵ European Commission (2010) EUROPE 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM(2010) 2020 final, 2010, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

The EU headline targets are then translated into national Europe 2020 targets that reflect the different national situations and circumstances. To reach these targets, seven Flagship Initiatives have already been put in place. The strategy is implemented and monitored as part of the European Semester. We summarised the main information regarding the Europe 2020 Strategy in the following **Fig.2.2**, which describes aim, objectives, governance cycle, the main documents for implementation at the national level, and the ministries responsible at the national level.

Fig.2.2: The Europe 2020 Strategy in brief

Strategy	Published March 2010; adopted June 2010
Aim	Achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth
Objectives	<p>5 headline targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment: 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed • R&D / innovation: 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D • Climate change / energy: the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right) • Education: the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree • Poverty / social exclusion: 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty <p>To reach these targets, 7 flagship initiatives are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Innovation Union</i> - <i>Youth on the move</i> - <i>A digital agenda for Europe</i> - <i>Resource efficient Europe</i> - <i>An industrial policy for the globalisation era</i> - <i>An agenda for new skills and jobs</i> - <i>European platform against poverty</i>
Governance cycle	Every year
Main documents for implementation at the national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability / convergence programmes • National reform programmes
Ministries responsible at the national level	Ministries of Economic Affairs and/or Ministries of Finance (in most cases)

Source: Pisano et al., 2011

Although **greater ownership⁶** is seen as a **necessity** of the Europe 2020 Strategy, **very little – and rather vaguely – is said about stakeholders engagement and participation**. In fact, paragraph titled 'Stakeholders and civil society' (in section 5.2 of the strategy) only encourages a closer association between the **Economic and Social Committee** and the **Committee of Regions** and just mentions that an "[e]xchange of good practices, benchmarking and networking - as promoted by several Member States - has proven another useful tool to forge ownership and dynamism around the need for reform" (European Commission, 2010, p.30). In section 6 of the Strategy document, the European Commission also proposes that the European Council "calls on all parties and stakeholders (e.g. national/regional parliaments, regional and/or local authorities, social partners and civil society, and last but not least the citizens of Europe) to help implement the strategy, working in partnership, by taking action in areas within their responsibility" (p.30).

In elaborating the governance architecture, the European Council is provided with full ownership and with the role of focal point of the new strategy; the Commission is to monitor progress towards the targets, facilitate policy exchange and make the necessary proposals to steer action and advance

⁶ see section 5.2 'Who does what?' in chapter 5 'Delivering results: stronger governance

the EU flagship initiatives; and, the European Parliament has the role of driving force to mobilise citizens and act as co-legislator on key initiatives. More importantly, this so-called “**partnership approach**” gets extended to “EU committees, to national parliaments and national, local and regional authorities, to social partners **and to stakeholders and civil society so that everyone is involved in delivering on the vision**” (p.6).

2.2.1 The role of flagship initiatives

The flagship initiatives presented in 2010 were work or action programmes for the key areas of the Europe 2020 Strategy with the intention to set out a number of specific actions at both EU and national levels in thematic areas. In 2014, four years after launching the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU Commission published a Communication⁷ to take stock of the strategy. In this document, the EU Commission stresses the key role of **awareness and ownership by all relevant actors** for the success of the strategy.

In terms of challenges and limitations, the EU Commission argues that “in many Member States, the involvement of the different stakeholders in the implementation of the strategy could still be improved. (...) At European level, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions have been particularly active through close monitoring of the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy and through mobilising action in the Member States, including at regional and local levels and reflecting the multi-level governance structure of the EU. The Commission has also reinforced its representations in the Member States to enhance the quality of its engagement with authorities and stakeholders in Member States.”

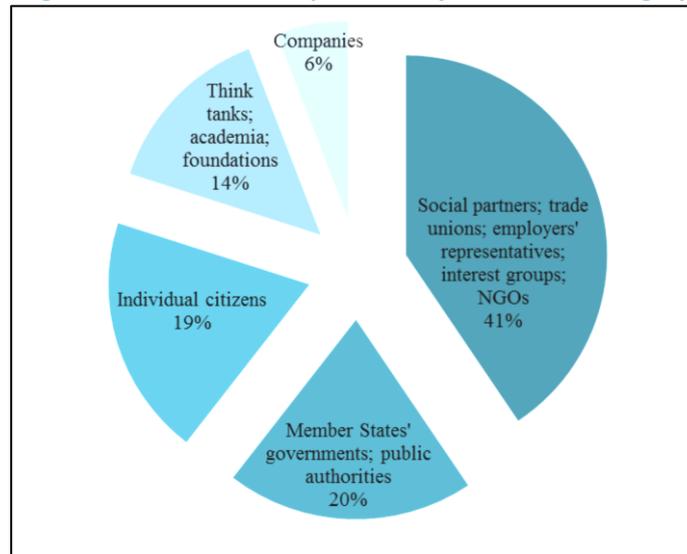
Based on the analysis in this Communication, the Commission launched a [public consultation](#) to gather the views of all stakeholders to help developing the strategy for the 2015-2020 period. The aim was to collect experience from stakeholders to draw the lessons from the first years of implementation of the strategy and to feed into the review. The consultation was open from 5 May to 31 October 2014 and was followed up with the publication of its results⁸. In total, 755 contributions were received from 29 countries. The participants reflect the broad range of stakeholders of the Europe 2020 Strategy: social partners, interest groups and non-governmental organisations form the most represented category (41%), followed by Member States' governments and public authorities, including local and regional authorities (20%), individual citizens (19%) and think tanks, academia and foundations (14%). Companies account for 6% of the respondents, a rather low score which is counterbalanced by the higher score of interest groups representing them.

Please see **Fig. 2.3** below for an overview on the stakeholders submitting contributions in this consultation phase.

⁷ EU Commission (2014) Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM(2014) 130 final/2

⁸ EU Commission (2015) Results of the public consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM(2015) 100 final

Fig.2.3: Distribution of respondents by stakeholder category



Source: European Commission

As the European Commission reports, the main outcomes from the public consultation have been summarised as follows:

- “Europe 2020 is seen as a relevant overarching framework to promote jobs and growth at EU and national level. Its objectives and priorities are meaningful in the light of current and future challenges;
- The five headline targets represent key catalysts for jobs and growth and help to keep the strategy focused;
- Most of the flagship initiatives have served their purpose, yet their visibility has remained weak;
- There is scope and a need to improve the delivery of the strategy through enhanced ownership and involvement on the ground.” (European Commission, 2015, p.1)⁹

An important point with regard to stakeholder participation raised by the public consultation results is that “reflections on the review of the Europe 2020 Strategy have generated strong interest and mobilised stakeholders involved in the implementation of the strategy” (p.5). Especially, the Committee of the Regions, through the work of its monitoring platform, and the European Economic and Social Committee, have been particularly active, and organised exchanges of views and discussions around the topics of the Europe 2020 strategy. Similarly, a range of events were organised in the Member States, with the support of the European Semester Officers from the European Commission, on the strategy as a whole or some of its features. Such events had the effect to: (i) enrich the dialogue with all the interested actors, (ii) build bridges between the various networks of stakeholders, (iii) and gathered experience and best practices from the ground to feed into the review of the strategy.

On the basis of the contributions received, the Commission identifies the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Europe 2020 strategy (see Fig.2.4). Among the weaknesses, one important mention is towards **‘Insufficient involvement of the relevant**

⁹ EU Commission (2015) Results of the public consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM(2015) 100 final

stakeholders', which somehow confirms our first impression after reading through the strategy main documents.

Fig.2.4 Summary of the main lessons learned through the consultation

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelming support for an EU-wide jobs and growth strategy • Consistency of the areas covered by Europe 2020 with the challenges to be tackled • Relevant and mutually reinforcing targets • Some already tangible progress: the EU is on course to meet or closely approach the targets on education, climate and energy 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of visibility of the flagship initiatives • Need to improve the delivery and implementation of the strategy • Insufficient involvement of the relevant stakeholders • Far from reaching the targets on employment, research and development and poverty reduction
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors willing to play an active role in the strategy • Close monitoring of the strategy through the European Semester • Alignment of Europe 2020 with the Commission's priorities (jobs, growth and investment) 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The crisis has amplified divergences across and within Member States • Political nature of the targets and lack of ambition of Member States

Source: EU Commission, 2015

Finally, the EU Commission will take the results of the public consultation into account in further reflections on how the Europe 2020 strategy should be taken forward, together with the contributions of the European Parliament, the Council, national Parliaments, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

2.2.2 The example of the Circular Economy package

On 2 December 2015, the new European Commission adopted a new, more ambitious **Circular Economy Package**, which includes revised legislative proposals on waste, with the intention to stimulate Europe's transition towards a circular economy with the effort to *boost global competitiveness, foster sustainable economic growth and generate new jobs*.

The Circular Economy Package consists of an [EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy](#) that establishes a concrete and ambitious programme of action, with measures covering the whole cycle: from production and consumption to waste management and the market for secondary raw materials. The [annex to the action plan](#) sets out the timeline when the actions will be completed. The European Commission says the proposed actions will contribute to **"closing the loop" of product lifecycles through greater recycling and re-use, and bring benefits for both the environment and the economy**.

The reflection on how the objective of circular economy can be reached in an efficient way compatible with the jobs and growth agenda of the new Commission took into account the input given from many sides, by the Council and in Parliament, but also during public consultations.

As part of the process to develop this new circular economy package, the Commission organized a [Stakeholder Conference](#) and launched a [public consultation](#) on the subject. On 25 June 2015 about **700 delegates** participated in the Stakeholder Conference on Circular Economy. A one-day event was dedicated to discussions, and the feedback received through 6 thematic split-up sessions

contributed to help shaping the new Circular Economy Package for which DG ENV and DG GROW are co-responsible. Fig. 2.5 below provides an overview of the key messages from the 6 thematic sessions at the conference.

Fig. 2.5: Key messages from the six split-up sessions

<p>Production Phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling framework (regulatory, finance) should accompany market drivers to foster more circular economy • There is no one-size-fits-all solution to product design – need to recognise differences across materials and products • Use better the existing framework (Ecodesign/GPP) to improve material efficiency through requirements on, e.g., reparability, durability and recyclability • Quality standards are needed for secondary raw materials to increase their use
<p>Markets for Secondary Raw Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value chain cooperation/agreements (incl. platforms), involving policy makers: matching demand and supply needs, providing online information about presence of recyclable materials in products (stocks and flows), and establishing transparent EPR schemes. • Regulatory obstacles exist and are often sector specific ("one size does not fit all") : e.g. unclear (end-of-) waste/product status, lack of harmonized material quality standards. • E-procedures by Member States needed to facilitate shipment of waste and materials and to improve traceability.
<p>Consumption phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing EU instruments (Ecodesign, EU Ecolabel, EU Energy Label...) should address durability and reparability more systematically • Repair should be facilitated via access to spare parts, repair services, repair information and manuals, promotion of local initiatives • Demand for mandatory information on lifespan of products (if done correctly) and for improved and longer guarantees to drive durability of products
<p>Materials and Chemicals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation and design for recyclability of materials and products: dismantability, "molecular recycling", progressive phase out of substances of concern (reparability!) under certain conditions • Alignment of products, chemicals and waste legislation: risk assessment and management tools embedded in REACH and other products legislation; compatibility between waste legislation and chemical legislation including REACH. • Promote traceability and information about substances of concern in virgin and recycled materials throughout value chain (database could be better than labelling).
<p>Research, Innovation and Investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost innovation by combining ambitious vision, minimum standards, and market incentives; e.g. ensure high value use of bio-waste and resources • Build trust between all stakeholders on basis of robust knowledge, co-designing solutions, convincing economics, and consistent policy • Use the potential of innovative green public procurement and adaptive regulatory frameworks for systemic innovation
<p>Waste complement to the legislative proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets needed for legal certainty and to drive investment. Targets should cover the whole hierarchy and more waste streams (food, industrial, commercial). Landfill restriction measures needed while avoiding the creation of local over capacities • Implementation/enforcement is key. Harmonised definitions/standards, improved statistics, traceability are needed. Separate collection is essential as well as supporting measures (public procurement, better design, awareness) • Economic instruments are helping (green taxes, incentives, PAYT). Clear rules needed for extended producer responsibility.

Source: [EU Commission, 2015](#)

The above mentioned **public consultation** was open from the 28 May until the 20 August 2015. [The contributions are now published](#) and some preliminary results have been drawn already¹⁰. Of the almost 1,500 answers received, 45% were from the private sector, while 25% were from individuals,

¹⁰ We refer here at the contribution by a representative of the Commission – DG Environment – in the context of the FP7 DYNAMIX project (please see: http://dynamix-project.eu/sites/default/files/Kretschmer_DYNAMIX%20Webinar.pdf)

10% from civil society, and 6% from public authorities. The questionnaire included a total of 24 questions (predefined answers and open answer possibilities with also the possibility to upload additional documents) and covered five sections related to: 1) production phase, 2) consumption phase, 3) markets for secondary raw materials, 4) sectoral measures, and 5) enabling factors for the Circular Economy. Important topics were covered and 88% of the answers demonstrated to be very well or fairly well informed about Circular Economy. From the results, five sectors were prioritised: electronics, food, packaging, construction, and demolition. Key secondary raw materials/waste streams were identified in bio-nutrients, plastics, critical raw materials, and construction aggregates. Furthermore, the main barriers were sought mainly in relation to a lack of quality standards, a lack of cooperation down the value chain, and a lack of data on material flows. Finally higher support was shown towards: **Ecodesign** (i.e. reparability, reuse); **EU standards for secondary raw materials**; **Green Public Procurement (GPP)**; **labelling** (i.e. info for consumers); **Waste prevention** (especially food waste); **VAT rebates on recycled materials, green products**; **financing innovation, skills and knowledge**; and **action on chemicals** (concerns on presence of toxins; interface between chemical – product – waste legislation).

3 National experiences and the role of stakeholders engagement and participation in SD policies and strategies

Chapter 3 provides an overview on how stakeholder participation is incorporated in SD policies and strategies by the national level in Europe. We first give a general picture and then we present the experiences of four European countries in more detail: France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland.

3.1 Participation processes in the context of National SD Strategies: the situation in Europe

Participation is and needs to be a **key element of SD strategy processes**. It has been addressed at various levels. For instance, Agenda 21 outlines that National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) “should be developed through the widest possible participation” (UNCED, 1992, para 8.7). Thus, public participation is included as an important element in UN and OECD guidance documents for preparing NSDS (UN, 2002; OECD, 2001).

As also shown in chapter two, participation is also addressed by several of the policy guiding principles in the renewed EU SDS of 2006 (European Council, 2006, pp.4-5)¹¹:

- **Open and democratic society:** Guarantee citizens’ rights of access to information and ensure access to justice. Develop adequate consultation and participatory channels for all interested parties and associations;
- **Involvement of citizens:** Enhance the participation of citizens in decision-making. Promote their education and public awareness of sustainable development. Inform citizens about their impact on the environment and their options for making more sustainable choices;
- **Involvement of businesses and social partners:** Enhance the social dialogue, corporate social responsibility and private-public partnerships to foster cooperation and common responsibilities to achieve sustainable consumption and production;
- **Policy integration:** Promote integration of economic, social and environmental considerations so that they are coherent and mutually reinforce each other by making full use of instruments for better regulation, such as balanced impact assessment and stakeholder consultations.

In most European countries, participatory tools and mechanisms can be found in the preparation, implementation and review of NSDSs. In this context, participation refers to the **inclusion of a wide range of societal actors**, including governments, businesses, trade unions, NGOs, academics and civil society, in the process of developing, reviewing and discussing NSDSs. It covers participatory and consultation processes, institutions and bodies involved, and different forms of cooperation between various actors and stakeholder groups.

¹¹ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2010917%202006%20INIT>

Implementation

In practice, the implementation of participation processes in the various countries is **very diverse** in terms of the involvement of stakeholders and responsible institutions drawn in in the process of developing and discussing NSDS. Approaches differ among countries, ranging from discussion, consultation and participatory processes (e.g. in the form of platforms). Also, responsible institutions involved in the participation practice vary between different countries from ministries to independent bodies, such as advisory councils or agencies. Even though the implementation of participation mechanisms is carried out differently by the countries, they all display **common functions by providing space for debate, consultation and information exchange**.

Similarities

When developing NSDSs, all countries share the common practice of bringing in contributions from across government ministries, diverse stakeholders from various sectors, and a wide range of interest groups. Furthermore, all countries intend to broaden the involvement of stakeholder groups and civil society to **strengthen the ownership of NSDSs**.

Mechanisms

The differences in terms of practice of involvement manifest themselves in the **various mechanisms and tools** to engage more societal stakeholders in policy-making processes. For instance, some countries have **established institution(s)** for the development of NSDSs which are dealing with SD issues and serve as main platform for public participation.

These institutions or boards serve as consultative bodies acting as reflection, advisory boards, and discussion and consultancy bodies regarding SD issues. They organize meetings, conferences, workshops, which aim to facilitate broad public discussion and access of information on SD topics. For instance, several countries have a **National Council on SD (NCSO)**, which is a multi-stakeholder mechanism to ensure participation of various stakeholders in policy-making (e.g. Finland, France, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland and Slovenia) (see chapter 3.2).

Other countries (e.g. Switzerland) make use of **platforms and consultation mechanisms** to involve stakeholders by submitting the draft strategy and take comments into consideration (see chapter 3.2). *Hungary* distributes emails with requests of participation to professionals, organizations, governmental and civil spheres who are then meeting up in a series of panel discussions. *Iceland's* strategy is reviewed by a cross-ministerial committee at a national environmental assembly which is then open to discussion for public administration, municipalities and NGOs. *Italy* is carrying out consultation rounds in meetings involving approximately 140 authorities and organizations. Similarly, *Spain* organizes public participation for the NSDS in form of the Conference on SD. Another example to mention is *Latvia*, which has established regional forums and a national forum, involving about 1000 participants, in order to discuss SD priorities.

Functions and aims

The main common targets of participation mechanisms shared by all countries are the creation of an **information exchange platform** for stakeholders comprising mutual cooperation, consultation, broad public discussion and access to information on SD topics. Yet, the facilitation of a forum for discussion, analysis and dialogue shall aim at **increasing the ownership** of NSDSs, further **stimulating broader discussion** on SD not only on a policy, but also society level. Every country pursues its aims in terms of participation on different foci. For instance, an interesting example is to be found in Finland (please refer to chapter 3.2).

3.2 Stakeholder participation in France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland

In this chapter, we present four examples of stakeholder participation of four countries in Europe: France, Finland, Germany, and Switzerland. The information provided for each country is based on input received from representatives of the respective participation mechanisms.

France: Environmental dialogues, la Conference environnementale and the National council for ecological transition

The context

The governance around environmental public policies came to a turning point in France in 2007 with the “**Grenelle de l'Environnement**”. The “Grenelle de l'environnement” was a wide participatory process, with representatives from the state, local authorities, federations of employers, trade unions and NGOs. Today, the governance for defining, implementing and monitoring environmental public policies provides for the participation of those stakeholders that gathered since 2013 in the **National Council for Ecological Transition (CNTE)**. The CNTE is composed of 50 members of various organizations, divided into 6 official bodies which have the right to vote, and which represent federations of employers, trade unions, members of Parliament (including members of European Parliament), local authorities, environmental NGOs, and other associations. There is also a body of 8 “associated members” with no right to vote, but which take part to all CNTE activities. Under the law, the CNTE is consulted on:

1. Bills concerning primarily environment or energy policies;
2. National strategies for sustainable development, biodiversity and development of corporate social and environmental responsibility.

Consultation of the CNTE leads to a vote that will be the opinion of the CNTE. This opinion does not legally bind the government's decision, but it is made public and thus plays a strong role in governmental decisions. Within the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable development and Energy, the Sustainable Development Delegation (SDD) provides the secretariat of the CNET and is responsible for coordinating the organization of the Environmental Conference, which we describe in more detail below.

A French feature for environmental dialogue: The Environmental Conference

Since 2012, when the French President of the Republic established it, the **Environmental Conference** (**'la Conférence Environnementale'**) is an annual event that aims to set governmental priorities for ecological transition, after consultation with stakeholders. The government commitments at the end of the Environmental Conference are gathered into a roadmap for ecological transition. CNTE's stakeholders are the privileged interlocutors of the government in the preparation and negotiation of the roadmap during the Environmental Conference, and also in the monitoring of its implementation. So far, three Environmental Conferences have been held in 2012, 2013 and 2014:

- The 2012 Environmental Conference dealt with 5 themes (Energy, Biodiversity, Environmental health risks, Funding and taxation, Governance) and led to 84 measures, which formed the governmental priorities for ecological transition. For instance, the new French law on energetic transition comes directly from the National Debate on Energetic Transition that was a measure taken through the Environmental Conference process.
- The 2013 Environmental Conference also dealt with 5 themes (Circular economy, Employment, Water policy, Marine biodiversity, Sustainable development education). The theme "Employment" was a proposition of the CNTE. In total, 50 new measures were decided in 2013.
- The 2014 Environmental Conference dealt with 3 themes (COP21, Transport, Environment and health). The theme "Transport" was proposed by the CNTE. A total of 75 new measures were decided in 2014.

The year 2015 is a turning point in Environmental Conference's cycle: the process of the three successive conferences was improved from one year to the next, and the year 2014 gave satisfaction on all points. Currently, the time is up to take stock of the French practice of the Environmental Conference in order to examine the follow-up to be given to this major annual event for ecological transition.

Finland: a multi-stakeholder model for Sustainable Development

The context

Finland has a long tradition in developing and implementing strategies and programmes for sustainable development. The key mechanism has been the **Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCS)** which was established in 1993, shortly after the first Rio Conference on SD. The Commission has continued to operate without interruption for 22 years now.

The Finnish Commission on Sustainable Development shows a **hybrid governance model**: it combines high-level leadership with broad-based participation. The 45 members of the Commission represent all spheres of the society. The Commission includes **ministers** and **high-level civil servants** from ministries working on sustainable development issues, **parliamentarians**, and a wide spectrum of **representatives from Finnish civil society**, business and industry, academia, trade unions, churches and scientific institutions. The **FNCS meets 2-4 times per year**. In addition, the Commission prepares **seminars and workshops** in order to boost dialogue between stakeholders

and produce innovative policies and solutions for the Finnish society: such seminars and workshop are held usually between 2 to 4 times per year.

All these years, the Finnish **Prime Minister** (or other ministers of the national government) has led the work of the Commission. Recently, with the change of the Government in spring 2015, the new Prime Minister, Juha Sipilä, has taken over. The challenge is now increasing with the 2030 Agenda for SD and the SDGs to be implemented, monitored and reviewed.

In 2013, the Finnish Innovation Fund, Sitra, established [an expert panel](#) alongside the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSO). Such an **expert panel** on sustainable development brings a scientific perspective to politics. The panel prepares, challenges and evaluates the Commission's work and political decision-making. The SD expert panel comprises professors of social, environmental, consumer, welfare policy and a senior vice president of finance and pension policy.

An inter-ministerial network secretariat prepares and supports the work of the FNCSO on a day-to-day basis and convenes about 8 times per year. The network secretariat now comprises about 20 members from 11 ministries as well as partners from Sitra, the Finnish funding agency for technology and innovation Tekes, the military headquarters and the defense administration, each taking the lead in preparing themes within their area of expertise.

New innovation for better ownership and participation: The Society's Commitment to SD

In order to generate action and engage larger segments of the society to sustainability work, the Finnish FNCSO invented a new multi-stakeholder operational tool for sustainable development called: ***“Finland We Want by 2050 – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development”***. This new approach is a new partnership model that aims at boosting ownership, action, innovative solutions and impact throughout the society: it brings together the public sector, companies, civil society actors, organizations and citizens in a unique way.

The vision of the Commitment is to have a ***“prosperous Finland within the carrying capacity of nature”***. This can be achieved by implementing the **eight shared objectives** that have been jointly defined: (1) Equal prospects for well-being; (2) A participatory society for citizens; (3) Sustainable work; (4) Sustainable local communities; (5) A carbon-neutral society; (6) An economy that is resource-wise; (7) Lifestyles that respect the carrying capacity of nature; (8) Decision-making that respects nature.

The idea is simple: an organisation makes a commitment, takes a concrete action, and measures the progress. After one year already up to 160 organisations from large companies to ministries, schools and individual citizens have made their operational commitments. When put together, the individual commitments lead to greater results. They will bring systemic change and create a community of pioneers.

Genuine ownership and commitment can only be created by bottom-up, participatory approach with continuous dialogue and trust. Finland hopes that this new model can inspire countries to develop practical and participatory models to implement the new ambitious Agenda2030.

Germany: the 2016 review of the German sustainable development strategy

The context

The German National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) was adopted in 2002. Through a total of three extensive reports in 2004, 2008 and 2012, this strategy has been continuously updated over three changes of government. This underlines the broad, constant political consensus in Germany regarding the importance of sustainability.

The coalition agreement of the current government stresses once more that **sustainable development is the fundamental objective and benchmark of the government** and provides a number of measures to strengthen the efforts on national, European and international level.

The next NSDS Progress Report is due in autumn 2016. The NSDS will be an essential framework for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD as it provides new momentum and challenge for the further development of the NSDS, requiring at the same time a careful review of all essential aspects of the current strategy.

The main elements of the current NSDS are: the institutional setting, the management rules, the 38 indicators and targets, the impact assessment for all legislative acts proposed by the government, regular reports assessing the progress e.g. the biannual indicator report and peer reviews (2009 and 2013).

The main challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda are the review of the national targets and indicators in light of the SDGs, the strengthening of horizontal and vertical integration of SD policy and the implementation of the new global partnership including the multi-stakeholder approach.

The institutions with an important role in stakeholder participation

The institutions in place - State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development, the Council for Sustainable Development and the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development – have an important role regarding stakeholder participation and the further development of the national strategy:

- The **State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development** comprises the State Secretaries of all ministries and is chaired by the Head of the Federal Chancellery. The Committee is in charge of the further development and monitoring of the national strategy. It meets about 4 times a year and discusses specific items (lately e.g. sustainable consumption, sustainable cities) with relevant experts from business, science, associations, the *Länder* or local communities.
- The **German Council for Sustainable Development** is composed of fifteen individuals from businesses, trade unions, churches, the media, and consumer and environmental associations. They are appointed for three years by the German Chancellor and represent the three dimensions of sustainability according to their professional and personal backgrounds. The Council works independently and has two major tasks: to advise the Federal Government on all matters relating to sustainable development and to promote the dialogue with stakeholders and civil society. (Examples: yearly conference with more than 1,000 participants, development of the German Sustainability Code with business, investors

and civil society, dialogue with 100 youngest local politicians; dialogue with mayors; started in 2012 the project of a yearly SD Action Day/Week).

- **Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development** comprises 17 MoPs of all parties represented in the *Bundestag*. It plays a role in developing goals, measures and instruments and defining them in concrete terms as well as to enter into dialogue with other parliaments, particularly in the European Union, and underpin the discussion within society on the subject of sustainable development. The Parliamentary Advisory Council has also been assigned to evaluate the sustainability impact assessment of the Federal Government.

The current stakeholder dialogue

Whereas in 2010/2011, when preparing the Progress Report 2012, the dialogue with stakeholders was mainly conducted by an internet consultation, the current stakeholder dialogue (2015/2016) focuses also on a **series of 5 stakeholder conferences**, which, among others, treat several crucial questions such as for instance: How can the new global targets on SD be implemented on national level and what needs to be done in Germany to further promote SD? How should the new global partnership be implemented in Germany? How could and should sustainable economic activities and sustainable consumption be promoted? What should be the main focus of sustainable cities and infrastructure? What are the inter-linkages of poverty related questions and SD in Germany? How to strengthen vertical integration in Germany?

The results and findings of the conferences as well as further statements and comments via Internet will be collected and evaluated for the further development of the NSDS. In 2016, the draft Progress Report 2016 will be published and consulted via Internet and discussed with stakeholder. The review should be finalized in autumn 2016.

Switzerland: stakeholder dialogue and forum for sustainable development

In Switzerland, sustainable development is rooted in the Swiss Constitution as basic principle. The main policy-focus areas for sustainable development are set out by the Federal Council (government) in its Sustainable Development Strategy. The strategy itself is part of the legislative planning of the Federal Council and it is being renewed every four years.

For the renewal of the strategy for the legislative period of 2016-2019, a **broad stakeholder dialogue** was carried out with **150 national representatives of civil society** (NGOs and associations), **science, cantons, communes and the federal administration itself**. During a series of workshops in nine thematic fields (e.g. consumption and production, natural resources, health, social cohesion etc.), suggestions for long-term visions, goals for 2030, and measures for the legislative period were developed. The definition of the goals was based on the provisional SDGs by the Open Working Group. The results of the participatory process are being published in a report and served as a basis for the renewal of the national Sustainable Development Strategy.

The outcome of the process shows clearly that **participation is an essential requirement for sustainable development** and an important instrument to mobilize stakeholders for partnerships. The goals of the process were reached and it will be continued for the implementation of the national strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, the process had

several difficulties due to the wide range of interests of the stakeholders and also because the participants had to express their interests without concrete previous propositions from the federal administration: this was considered difficult and nonsystematic.

The **ongoing process will be strongly based on the 2030 Agenda** and should have a focus on transversal topics and holistic discussions. Further, communication will be intensified, since the understanding of sustainable development can differ strongly between stakeholders. A clear communication of the added-value of sustainable development and a respective strategy is of crucial importance for including a representative spectrum of stakeholders, in particular economic players.

Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda will also be a major topic in the Sustainable Development Forum, which is the platform for implementing sustainable development processes and actions on the subnational level since 2001.

4 Results from the 13th ESDN Workshop

The [13th ESDN workshop](#) was entitled “**Strengthening environmental and sustainable development dialogue in Europe in the context of the 2030 SD Agenda**” and took place on 12 November 2015 in Paris. This workshop was part of a joint event with the 23rd EEAC Annual Conference and was hosted by the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy. In total, 84 participants from 20 countries took part in this joint event.

The key objectives of the workshop were to:

- a) Explore the role of stakeholders in environmental and sustainable development dialogues;
- b) Exchange national experiences with environmental and sustainable development dialogues and;
- c) Discuss ideas and recommendations for improving stakeholder participation and dialogues to achieve sustainable development objectives.

The objectives of the workshop were addressed in the following 4 sessions:

- Session 1: Role of stakeholders in environmental and SD dialogues**
- Session 2: National experiences with environmental and SD dialogues**
- Session 3: Advancing environmental and SD dialogues – big ideas and recommendations**
- Session 4: The Role of Environmental and SD Dialogues in Europe and beyond**

Session 1 explored the **importance of stakeholder involvement in the SDG implementation process**. Collaborative involvement of stakeholders in the design and delivery stage of policymaking for sustainable development was highlighted as a key success factor. Such **co-design and co-productive** processes can be the basis of effective policy mixes. Stakeholders, it was argued, play a central role both in implementation and monitoring and review processes. To enable stakeholders to engage in these processes **capacity building** will be of uttermost importance. The Session was with the proposal for a **European SD Forum** that will have the objective to provide a platform for stakeholders to engage with the European Commission in planning the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Europe in a formal and collaborative manner.

In Session 2 of the workshop, **national experiences** with environmental and sustainable development dialogues and other forms of engagement were explored. For this purpose, representatives of **France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland** shared their experiences. Common themes included the type and intensity of stakeholder engagement ranging from online consultations, to yearly conferences that act as forums for discussion between representatives of different stakeholder groups, to workshop series focussing on specific thematic issues. The time, intensity, selectivity and form of engagement with stakeholders are factors that have to be adapted to the particular national context.

In Session 3, participants were invited to explore ideas on the question ‘*What is needed to improve stakeholder participation and dialogues to achieve sustainable development objectives?*’ in an interactive working group setting. Key messages were recorded on large moderation cards, reported back to all participants, clustered and discussed (see below a synthesis of working group results by

the ESDN Office). Five main themes have been debated: **trust, diversity, ownership, knowledge co-creation and management, and awareness.**

1) **Trust:**

- a. Building and maintaining trust in the dialogue process and its implementation

2) **Diversity:**

- a. Diversity referring to: (i) inclusiveness, (ii) participation, (iii) respect, (iv) representatively

3) **Ownership:**

- a. Creating a bigger sense of ownership;
- b. Ownership comprises: (i) authority, (ii) responsibility, (iii) accountability; and
- c. Striving for commitment.

4) **Knowledge co-creation and management**

- a. A shared culture (i.e. education, coaching of decision-makers, semantics, co-responsibility, communication, transparency);
- b. Applying principles of 'Good Governance' (i.e. participatory, inclusive, open, transparent through lifecycle, sharing of responsibilities);
- c. Facing and openly discussing conflict;
- d. Managing knowledge/information; and
- e. Shared tools should be applied (e.g. funding, legislations, clusters, networks, voluntary commitments, indicators, benchmarking, methods/process, link to the decision)

5) **Awareness**

- a. Celebrities and the mass media (e.g. the Pope) should be increasingly involved to speak up for the cause;
- b. Education for SD is needed to increase awareness in developed and developing countries;
- c. Developing strong narratives in context of national and EU SD strategies, linked with sectoral policy processes; and
- d. Communicating cost/benefits of action/inaction for current and future generations.

The last session of the workshop focussed on the role of environmental and sustainable development dialogues in Europe and beyond. For this purpose, a high-level panel was asked to discuss the importance and added-value of stakeholder involvement. At the beginning of the panel discussion, each panellist was asked for a 5 minutes opening statement. This was followed by a discussion with the workshop participants. Several important issues were stressed: (a) the importance of **creating a feeling of ownership for the 2030 Agenda**; (b) the **need for local solutions** where local stakeholders have a say; and (c) the **central role of national SD strategies** that are in line with the global agenda.

The panel discussion also highlighted **four priorities** in relation to the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for SD and the SDGs. Firstly, there is a need to investigate how an **intergovernmental review processes** can be set up that facilitates the implementation of the SDGs. Secondly, the need to understand what can be done to improve **education for sustainable development**, e.g. through initiatives such as the online university for SD. Thirdly, the need to make efforts to **support processes of localizing SDGs**. Fourthly, the **pathways to transformation** were described as a necessary complement to stakeholder participation.

A view from the European level was then offered in which **SD was seen as part of the European identity**. Moreover, several **concrete tools at the EU level to promote SD** were mentioned, while it was also proposed that, in order to be successful in mobilizing of stakeholders, a **transparent process of consultation** is required. Most importantly, the need to address the multidimensional nature of SD was pointed out in a way that environmental, social and economic objectives necessary to the transition become one single agenda. Lastly, a reference was made to the new Commission Work Programme for 2016, which has one of its 23 priorities focussing on [sustainability](#), signalling a commitment to a longer timeframe, while linking up with the current governance structure.

Also stressed were the **concerns about the ‘participation trap’** – the fact that many stakeholders cannot take part because they **do not have sufficient resources to participate** in meetings. In addition, **physical meetings** (as opposed to online consultations) were emphasised as important for a constructive dialogue between stakeholders and policymakers.

Many others topics were raised in the debate with the workshop participants¹² that are worth mentioning such as, for instance: the need to accept **planetary boundaries**; the need to shift from focussing on individual profit to **collective well-being**; including **representatives of the interests of future generations**; addressing issues of **societal transformation**; the value of **sustainability as the narrative to link short and long-term problems**; and the urgency to use the current **window of opportunity** offered by the adoption of the **2030 Agenda for SD**.

¹² For a more complete view over the 13th ESDN Workshop, please see our report at: http://www.sd-network.eu/pdf/doc_workshops/2015%20paris/13th%20ESDN%20Workshop%20Report.pdf

5 Conclusions and reflections

The main intention of this ESDN Quarterly Report was to describe the role of stakeholder participation and engagement in the context of sustainable development, with particular attention to the relationships with SD strategies and policies in Europe.

In **chapter one**, we firstly provided a brief definition of stakeholder participation as **the inclusion of various stakeholders that can affect, or are affected by the results of policy-making and decision-making processes**. We then explored the concept and described its multifaceted characteristics through the analysis of different academic discussions and more policy-oriented sources. In this process, we tried to provide an answer to the question *‘why do participation?’*, and explained four **rationales** that are behind the usage of participation arrangements: instrumental, substantive, normative, and legalistic. We then described the key principles of stakeholder participation that should be included in SD policy processes and showed how participatory processes can produce a number of **benefits** for the different stakeholders involved, for instance, bringing together people with different interests, views and ideas, who might have not cooperated otherwise. At the same time, practical experiences and research revealed that some **challenges and questions** remain to be addressed. To investigate how stakeholder participation is treated in international policy-making, we analysed how this is addressed in UN conferences on sustainable development and related UN documents. Notably, Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992) articulated participation as “one of the **fundamental prerequisites** for the achievement of sustainable development”. In the recently adopted **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** participation is featured extensively in several parts i.e. means of implementation and, specifically, in some SDGs and targets. Finally, we also briefly explored the stakeholders’ view on participation.

In the **second chapter**, we described the role and the use of stakeholder participation at the EU level in the context of environmental and sustainable development policies and strategies. For this reason, we looked into participatory provisions and mechanisms of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS), the Europe 2020 Strategy, its flagships, and the recently published ‘Circular Economy’ package of the European Commission as a more practical policy example. We showed that **the EU Sustainable Development Strategy had participation at its core**, and addressed it through several of its policy guiding principles in the renewed EU SDS: (i) Open and democratic society; (ii) Involvement of citizens; (iii) Involvement of businesses and social partners; and (iv) Policy integration. In contrast, we could not report a similar emphasis on participation in the Europe 2020 Strategy. Although greater ownership is seen as a necessity of the Europe 2020 Strategy, references to stakeholder engagement and participation are scarce and rather vague. This was also confirmed by the main lessons learned through the public consultation on the Europe 2020 Strategy launched by the EU Commission in 2014 with the intention to gather the views of all stakeholders to develop the strategy for the 2015-2020 period: **‘Insufficient involvement of the relevant stakeholders’ of the Europe 2020 Strategy** was indeed mentioned among the weaknesses of the strategy. Participation was more prominent in the example of the development of the recently-adopted new circular economy package: after stopping the first draft of the package, the Commission organized [a Stakeholder Conference](#) and launched a [public consultation](#) on the subject, and made use of participation in a very instrumental way.

Chapter three provided an overview on how stakeholder participation is incorporated in SD policies and strategies in Europe at the national level. We first presented a general picture of participation in the 33 countries ESDN monitored, and then we presented the experiences of four European countries in more detail: France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland.

All of these countries have instrumental and institutionalised ways of using participation. In our in-depth investigation of such national experiences, we found that although different approaches are used, several commonalities can be reported. For instance, the use of stakeholder participation processes and their magnitude seems to have increased in the last years. This shows that dialogue with stakeholders is not only perceived as a requirement by policy-makers, but rather is appreciated especially as a tool to gather opinions, to get larger perspectives and to facilitate more ownership and commitment. All countries are organising face-to-face interactions with a large array of stakeholders in the forms of conferences, workshops, and seminars. In Switzerland, for instance, a **broad stakeholder dialogue** was carried out with **150 national representatives of civil society** (NGOs and associations), **science, cantons, communes and the federal administration** as part of the process of renewing the strategy for the legislative period of 2016-2019. During a series of workshops in nine thematic fields (e.g. consumption and production, natural resources, health, social cohesion etc.), suggestions for long-term visions, goals for 2030, and measures for the legislative period were developed. In France, since 2012, as established by the French President of the Republic, the **Environmental Conference ('la Conférence Environnementale')** is an annual event that aims to set governmental priorities for ecological transition, after consultation with stakeholders. The government commitments at the end of the Environmental Conference are gathered into a roadmap for ecological transition. In Germany, the German Council for SD usually organises yearly conferences with more than 1,000 participants. In the context of drafting the new Progress Report 2016, whereas in 2010/2011, during the preparation of the Progress Report 2012, the dialogue with stakeholders was mainly conducted by an internet consultation, the current stakeholder dialogue focuses also on a **series of 5 stakeholder conferences**. The results and findings of the conferences as well as additional online statements and comments will be collected and evaluated for the further development of the NSDS.

With regard to raising the level of ownership and commitment, the Finnish experience is particularly valuable: the Finnish NCSD invented a new multi-stakeholder tool for sustainable development called **"Finland We Want by 2050 – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development"**, with the aim of boosting ownership, action, innovative solutions and impact throughout the society by bringing together the public sector, companies, civil society actors, organizations and citizens.

Another important commonality we found is that, apart from Switzerland, all three other countries have created a formal mechanism that brings together stakeholders in the form of a council or commission. In France, this mechanism is called **National Council for Ecological Transition (CNTE)**, which is consulted on: (1) bills concerning primarily environment or energy policies; and, (2) national strategies for sustainable development, biodiversity and development of corporate social and environmental responsibility. Consultation of the French CNTE leads to a vote building up the *opinion* of the CNTE, which is not legally binding for the government, but is made public and, thus, plays a strong role in governmental decisions. The longest standing mechanism of the ones considered in this report can be found in Finland, where the **Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSO)**, established in 1993 shortly after the first Rio Conference on SD,

continues to operate without interruption for 22 years. Such a mechanism follows a **hybrid governance model** combining broad-based participation with high-level leadership (usually the Finnish Prime Minister). In Germany, three main institutions play a crucial role with regards to stakeholder participation and the further development of the national SD strategy. Among these institutions, the **German Council for Sustainable Development** works independently to advise the Federal Government on all matters relating to sustainable development and to promote the dialogue with stakeholders and civil society.

Chapter 4 summarised the main discussions and results from the 13th ESDN Workshop. In this context, the results of the group work were synthesised into five main themes for further debate: **trust, diversity, ownership, knowledge co-creation and management**, and **awareness**. A panel discussion and a final debate within the plenary raised many interesting points at the end of the workshop, especially putting in relation participation and the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for SD: (a) the importance of **creating a feeling of ownership for the 2030 Agenda**; (b) the **need for local solutions** where local stakeholders have a say; and (c) the **central role of national SD strategies** that are in line with the global agenda. Four priorities were highlighted in relation to the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for SD and the SDGs. Firstly, there is a need to investigate how an **intergovernmental review processes** can be set up to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs. Secondly, the need to understand what can be done to improve **education for sustainable development**, e.g. through initiatives such as the online university for SD. Thirdly, the need to make efforts to **support processes of localizing SDGs**. Fourthly, the **pathways to transformation** were described as a necessary complement to stakeholder participation.

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