

# **“Vienna +10: National Sustainable Development Strategies in Europe”**

**Taking stock, new developments and future challenges**

*ESDN Office Team*

**ESDN Conference 2013 – Discussion Paper**



**European Sustainable Development Network**

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# Introduction

## ESDN Conference 2013: objectives and sessions

This conference discussion paper provides background information for the **ESDN Conference 2013**, including the interactive group work sessions. The ESDN Conference 2013 is entitled “**Vienna +10: National Sustainable Development Strategies in Europe – Taking stock, new developments and future challenges**”. Ten years after the first ESDN Conference in Vienna, in 2003, which provided important inputs on SD strategies in Europe, we revisit national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs) as they are one of the core themes of the ESDN. The objective of the ESDN Conference 2013 is to take stock of NSDSs processes and objectives in Europe, investigate past achievements, explore new developments, and identify future challenges.

The conference will comprise of five sessions:

- Session 1: The past 10 years of NSDSs in Europe and new developments
- Session 2: Past achievements of NSDSs in Europe
- Session 3: The future of NSDSs in Europe and beyond
- Session 4: Future needs and new impulses for NSDSs
- Session 5: The future of the ESDN

## Structure of the Discussion Paper

The conference discussion paper has the following structure: in chapter one, we provide a general overview of NSDSs, their purpose and key characteristics, the development process of NSDSs from 1992 to the present day, and offer some general background on the European perspective on NSDSs. The second chapter includes a comparative stock-taking of NSDSs processes in 26 European countries, mainly based on up-to-date information provided in the country profiles on the ESDN homepage.

A full documentation of the keynotes, discussions and group work at the conference will be published as ESDN Conference Proceedings shortly after the event.

# 1. National Sustainable Development Strategies

In this chapter of the Discussion Paper, we provide a brief overview of the purpose of National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs), define their key characteristics, sketch the development of NSDSs from 1992 to 2013, and outline the European perspective for NSDSs.

## 1.1. What NSDSs represent

### Purpose of NSDSs

The **purpose of NSDSs** can be described as aiming “to mobilize and focus a society’s efforts to achieve sustainable development” (Carew-Reid et al. 1994). They should provide a forum for societal articulation of a vision of a sustainable future, as well as a framework for processes of negotiation, mediation and consensus, and capacity building (ibid.) in order to achieve sustainable development objectives. According to Agenda 21, the Action Plan that resulted from the Rio 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, NSDSs “should be developed through the widest possible participation” and “build upon and harmonize the various sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country” as well as be “based on a thorough assessment of the current situation and initiatives”.

As Meadowcroft put it, National Sustainable Development Strategies represent:

*“one tool that governments can use to **enhance strategic decision making for sustainable development**. Because sustainable development **implies intergenerational time frames**, and a **complex balancing** of social objectives, the **longer term and more comprehensive approach to planning** embodied in national strategy processes is important. Strategies provide an opportunity to take stock and **fix priorities**. They provide an occasion to focus debate, build consensus, examine trade-offs and make choices”* (Meadowcroft, 2007, p. 157, emphases added).

NSDSs are thought of as serving to **achieve better policy coordination and integration in several dimensions**: horizontally (across policy sectors), vertically (across political-administrative levels as well as territorially), temporally (across time) and across societal sectors (public, private, academia, civil society). NSDSs have also become increasingly understood as **vehicles for an ambitious governance reform**, marrying the better regulation/good governance agenda with the principles of sustainable development (see EC 2005, Steurer 2009), towards:

- Incrementally transform national policy-making in the direction of a more network-oriented and effective multi-level governance;
- Fostering a change towards openness, transparency and public/stakeholder participation; and,
- Improving the knowledge processes related to decision making so that decisions are made on the basis of sound evidence and integrated understanding of the effects of the decision and the involved trade-offs (see e.g. OECD 2001, EC 2005).

### Key characteristics

During the last twenty years, the **key characteristics** of national sustainable development strategies have been discussed and described in a number of policy documents. We give an overview of these characteristics in Box 1.1 below.

#### Key characteristics of NSDSs

##### Box 1.1

- Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives;
- Multi-stakeholder participation, effective partnerships, transparency and accountability;
- Country ownership, shared vision with a clear time-frame on which stakeholders agree, commitment and continuous improvement;
- Capacity development and an enabling environment, building on existing knowledge and processes;
- Focus on priorities, outcomes and coherent means of implementation;
- Linkage with budget and investment processes;
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation.

(Based on Meadowcroft 2007; UNDESA, 2004)

#### NSDSs as a tool for reflexive governance

As Meadowcroft (2007) pointed out, SD strategies should be understood as **iterative processes** where **continuous learning** is of extreme importance. Therefore, SD strategies should not be envisaged as one-off exercises but as “repeated cycles of analysis/decision/planning/implementation/review” where “the outcomes of early initiatives are monitored and evaluated, and policy orientations are subsequently adjusted” (p.154). In other words, SD strategies are seen as a tool for ‘**reflexive governance**’ because sustainable development requires “continuous reflection about the path that has been traversed and the future we have yet to build” (Meadocrowft, 2007, p.160).

## 1.2. The road to 2013: from 1992 to the present situation

#### The 70s and 80s: environmental policy planning

Although **environmental policy planning** has been an issue ever since environmental policy became an independent policy field in the early 1970s, actual policy plans did not get off the ground on a broad basis until the so-called **Brundtland Report in 1987** (Steurer and Martinuzzi, 2005, p.457). Although important policy documents for environmental policy, environmental policy plans (e.g. the National Environmental Policy Plans – NEPPs in the Netherlands) had a largely sectoral orientation and were not conceived for horizontal policy integration that is intrinsically required for sustainable development.

#### 1992: Rio UN Conference and Agenda 21

**National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)** are considered to be among the prime tools for realising governance for sustainable development (SD). They date back to **1992 and Agenda 21**, which suggested that “[g]overnments [...] should adopt a national strategy for sustainable development” which should “ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations” (Agenda 21). As Agenda 21 contained no submission date, only a few countries developed an NSDD in the subsequent years. Instead, several countries either already had or were working on an environmental policy plan and assumed that this effort was adequate. However, because most environmental plans facilitated the old pattern of more or less top-down policy planning, they did not satisfy what the UN called for, namely “a coordinated, participatory, iterative and cyclical process of thoughts and actions to achieve economic, environmental and social

1997: Rio+5 summit	objectives in a balanced and integrated manner" (UNDESA, 2001, paragraph 4). Thus, in June 1997 the so-called <b>Rio+5 summit</b> agreed that "by the year 2002, the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development that reflect the contributions and responsibilities of all interested parties should be completed in all countries" (UNGASS, 1997, paragraph 24) (Steurer and Martinuzzi, 2005, p.457).
End of 90s  2002: Johannesburg World Summit	In fact, many countries started preparing their own NSDSs towards the end of the 1990s, culminating in a relatively speedy preparation in most of the European countries shortly before the <b>2002 UN World Summit</b> on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. In addition to Agenda 21 and the linkage to the Rio commitments, NSDS development was spurred by further UN effort, work of the OECD and by the EU through the European Council's Presidency Conclusion from Gothenburg 2001, which marked the first EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS).
2006: Renewed EU SDS	On the basis of the renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EC 2006), all EU Member States were requested to develop their NSDSs (if they had not prepared one before) by 2007 and to address linkages between their NSDSs and the EU SDS in future NSDS reviews.
2008-2012	As analysed in Gjoksi, Sedlacko and Berger (2010) through interviews with national SD coordinators, most European countries started to revise their NSDSs between 2006-2008 (e.g. Denmark, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Lithuania, Bulgaria), some others in the period 2009-2010 (e.g. Austria, Czech Republic, France, Latvia, Luxembourg). NSDS revisions from 2006 onwards were strongly linked to the topics and objectives included in the renewed EU SDS of 2006. In this period (2010-2012), revised NSDSs were adopted in Finland, France and Slovenia. Germany continued to update its NSDS with the 2012 progress report and Austria in 2011 developed an SD strategy as jointed effort between the national and regional level, the first of its kind in Europe.
The Rio+20 Conference	In the context of international SD policy and strategy, a crucial recent development has been the commonly known <b>Rio+20 Conference</b> . The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) took place in Rio de Janeiro from 20-22 June 2012, twenty years after the UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), which was also hosted in Rio in 1992 <sup>1</sup> . The main three objectives of the Rio+20 Conference were: 1) <i>to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development</i> ; 2) <i>to assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development</i> ; and 3) <i>to address new and emerging challenges</i> . The conference focused mainly on two themes: (i) a green economy in the context of SD and poverty eradication; and (ii) the institutional framework for SD. In addition, one of the major outcomes of the conference has been the agreement by Member States to launch a <a href="#">process to develop a set of sustainable development goals</a> (SDGs).
	The conference finally produced an 'Outcome Document', entitled " <a href="#">The Future We</a>

<sup>1</sup> Pisano, Umberto, Endl, Andreas, Berger, Gerald. 2012. **The Rio+20 Conference 2012: Objectives, processes and outcomes**, ESDN Quarterly Report June 2012. [http://www.sd-network.eu/quarterly%20reports/report%20files/pdf/2012-June-The\\_Rio+20\\_Conference\\_2012.pdf](http://www.sd-network.eu/quarterly%20reports/report%20files/pdf/2012-June-The_Rio+20_Conference_2012.pdf)

NSDSs in Rio+20  
outcome  
document:  
paragraphs 98 ...  
... and 101

[Want](#)". In terms of **sustainable development strategies**, very significant is **paragraph 98** that encourages "*regional, national, subnational and local authorities as appropriate to develop and utilize sustainable development strategies as key instruments for guiding decision-making and implementation of sustainable development at all levels*".

Furthermore, paragraph 101 not only emphasizes the "*need for more coherent and integrated planning and decision-making at the national, subnational and local levels*", but also calls upon countries to "*strengthen national, subnational and/or local institutions or relevant multi-stakeholder bodies and processes, as appropriate, dealing with sustainable development, including to coordinate on matters of sustainable development and to enable effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development*".

## 1.3. The European perspective

### 1.3.1. The past and current context in Europe

The European  
perspective

In general, European countries are considered to be the leading examples in NSDS formulation and in the practice of strategy-making and implementation of actions for sustainable development (UNOSD, 2012; Meadowcroft, 2007). This is also true not only at the national levels but also at European level (with the presence of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy) and "more and more at the subnational and local levels" (UNOSD, 2012, p.9). In addition, the work of the [ESDN](#) (European Sustainable Development Network) and of the [EEAC network](#) (European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils) needs to be acknowledged in terms of knowledge and best practices sharing as well as of research and reporting.

The European experience dates back at the beginning of the 1990s when several European countries had already developed their NSDSs (e.g. Sweden and United Kingdom in 1994; Switzerland in 1997; Finland in 1998), and the beginning of the 2000s thanks to the European Council of Gothenburg 2001 and the Johannesburg World Summit in 2002, when a considerable number of European countries (e.g. Belgium in 2000; Germany and Austria in 2002) developed their national SD strategies (Steurer and Martinuzzi, 2005). By the year 2007, all EU Member States have developed an NSDS due to the requirement included in the renewed EU SDS of 2006. With this in mind, most European countries have at least **ten years of experience** in dealing with their strategies for sustainable development. In this context, we present some reflections on successes and weaknesses of the European experience in the following boxes.



## Box 1.2

### Successes and Innovations in Europe

**Germany:** Has *high-level political commitment* and the State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development is a political body that fosters cross-sectoral integration of sustainable development into all government departments. This institution guarantees that the strategy is embedded into the political process;

**Finland:** Has a very good *national sustainable development council* that represents the most important stakeholder groups and steers the strategy processes;

**Switzerland:** Aligned the strategy process with the *legislative period*;

**Austria:** Was very successful in establishing a national sustainable development strategy that is *binding for the national and sub-national levels*. The exchange mechanisms between the national and regional level was established a number of years ago and has been continued ever since;

**United Kingdom:** Introduced by the Labour Government, *departmental Sustainable Development Action Plans* are prepared, guaranteeing that the national strategy is addressed in sectoral ministries;

**SD indicators:** Are developed on the EU level and in most countries. There is no one sustainable development indicator set, but the EU system is fairly comprehensive to measure what has been achieved – the main drawback being that a failure to achieve objectives has no consequences.

(Based on UNOSD, 2012; Gjoksi, Sedlacko and Berger, 2010)

## Box 1.3

### Weaknesses and constraints

- It can be argued that the biggest drawback in Europe at this point in time is the **weak political commitment towards sustainable development** in general, and towards implementing strategy objectives in particular. The EU sustainable development strategy process shows this very clearly – it is a strategy that has no political backing;
- The **current financial and budget crises** put several constraints on sustainable development policy implementation and on strategy processes as well. Budget cuts mainly happen in Europe in those areas that would be crucial for sustainable development (e.g. environmental policy, poverty reduction, etc.);
- There are several good practices in parts of NSDS processes, but **there is no single example where the whole strategy process was a big success**. Such a success story is needed to achieve media attention and public awareness.
- The **movement lacks a visible, high-level champion** (i.e. an Al Gore of sustainable development);
- Sustainable development is a complex and comprehensive concept that is **difficult to translate** into political practice and hard to understand for non-experts; and
- The focus on win-win situations dominated the national sustainable development discourse for a long time and created the **false impression** that with sustainable development you can only win. In reality, however, there are trade-offs and losers – this needs to be addressed and decisions have to be made accordingly.

(Based on UNOSD, 2012; Gjoksi, Sedlacko and Berger, 2010)

### A new context: Europe 2020 Strategy

The context in Europe changed considerably in 2010 when a new 'growth' strategy was deployed by the EU Commission. The Europe 2020<sup>2</sup> Strategy was published by the European Commission in March 2010 and adopted by the European Council in June 2010 with the sub-heading '**A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**' which

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Europe 2020 and the EU SDS, please also refer to: Pisano, U., G. Berger, A. Endl and M. Sedlacko (2011) Sustainable development governance & policies in the light of major EU policy strategies and international developments. ESDN Quarterly Report September 2011. Available at: [http://www.sd-network.eu/?k=quarterly%20reports&report\\_id=22#qr1](http://www.sd-network.eu/?k=quarterly%20reports&report_id=22#qr1)

represent the three “mutually reinforcing priorities” (EC, 2010, p.3) of the strategy:

- **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.

At the moment, it is a fact that *Europe 2020* represents the overarching strategy for all European policies. In contrast, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy seems to have only very limited impact and steering power as a policy document. In fact, as the EU Commission’s Communication of February 2013 revealed, it seems that the Commission believes that SD is sufficiently integrated into the Europe 2020 Strategy ([A Decent Life for All: Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future](#)).

#### A critical perspective

However, it is currently debated, at least in the SD community, if a separate/revised EU SDS could continue helping to achieve a better balanced approach and policy coherence for SD – this was very much the focus of the ESDN workshop in February 2013. Therefore, it needs to be understood for Europe what future is foreseen for the national SD strategies and their relationship with the Europe 2020 strategy. At the moment, the cited EU Commission Communication (27 February 2013) stresses two crucial points in this regard:

1. ***The Europe 2020 Strategy is seen as the main instrument for pursuing SD*** as the EU’s overarching strategy for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth.
2. The implementation and regular review of the Europe 2020 Strategy is seen as key to contribute to ***greater coherence, mainstreaming and integration of the three dimensions of SD*** in EU policies at large.

### 1.3.2. The ESDN Conference 2003 in Vienna

#### The ESDN Conference 2003

The ESDN Conference 2003<sup>3</sup>, “**Sustainable Development in an Enlarged Union – Linking National Strategies and Strengthening European Coherence**”, hosted by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, took place in Vienna in late April 2003, in co-operation with the European Commission (DG Environment), the Hungarian Ministry for the Environment and Water Management, the Dutch Ministry for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment and the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

#### Purpose

The primary purpose of the conference was to facilitate the exchange of experiences and information among European experts on SSDs. Based on the assumption that there was a great deal to learn from the successes and shortcomings in other countries, the conference organisers sought to bring together those who were responsible for NSDSs and establish a network among them.

#### Main discussions

Most consistent with our present discourse were the reflections over the contents of SD

<sup>3</sup> This section is based on the workshop report of the 2003 workshop “Sustainable Development in an Enlarged Union - Linking National Strategies and Strengthening European Coherence” available at [http://www.sd-network.eu/pdf/conferences/2003\\_vienna/workshop\\_summary.pdf](http://www.sd-network.eu/pdf/conferences/2003_vienna/workshop_summary.pdf)

strategies where, among others, the **need for coherence and effectiveness** of the SD strategies was very much stressed. In fact, SD strategy coherence was emphasised by highlighting that SD strategies should:

- be both general and detailed at the same time;
- start with a general vision and the analysis of trends, then move on to principles and objectives, providing concrete targets and indicators;
- pay attention to policy processes (i.e. important actors and their role in the implementation process) and review processes.

Another major conclusion underpinned the ***need for SD strategies to address conflicts more openly***: the integration of the three dimensions of SD (economic, social and environmental sustainability) is not possible without frictions. Yet, SD strategies rarely address such conflicts, but more often imply harmony not only between the three dimensions of SD, but also between relevant actors. ***A first step in coping with such conflicts would therefore be to acknowledge them***, for instance, by identifying interests, working on a mutual understanding, and being wary of widely acceptable policy alternatives.

## 2. Comparative stock-tacking of European NSDSs

### 26 European countries

This chapter provides a comparative overview of NSDS processes in **26 European countries** and presents the recent developments in 21 EU Member States and 5 other European countries (Norway, Switzerland, Montenegro, Croatia, and Iceland). In particular, it describes the status quo and recent developments in the following aspects of the NSDS processes:

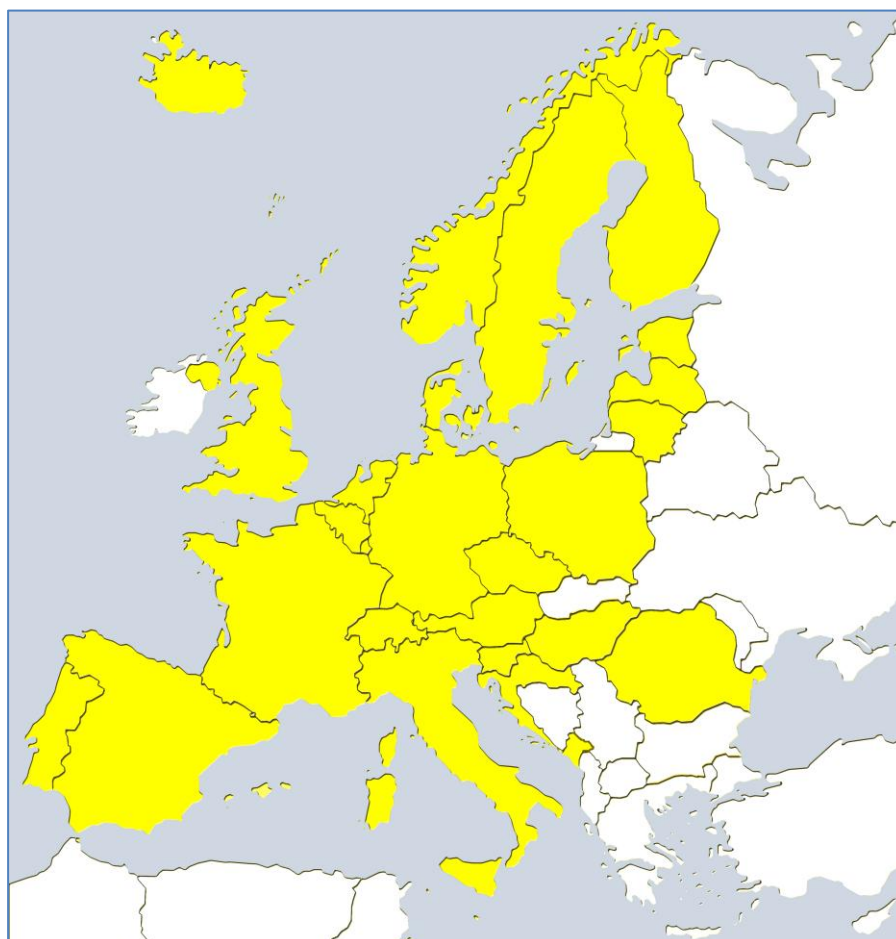
1. Basic information about SD strategies;
2. Mechanisms of vertical integration;
3. Mechanisms of horizontal integration;
4. evaluation and review;
5. Indicators and monitoring;
6. Participation.

The information collected for individual countries is based on the information provided in the respective [country profiles](#) on the ESDN homepage. In addition, the [2010 September ESDN Quarterly Report](#) - compiled for a similar stock-tacking exercise concerning National Sustainable Development Strategies in Europe in 2010 – has been also used as main reference for this new analysis, including the interviews with national SD coordinators that have been undertaken for the Quarterly Report in the summer 2010.

From the 33 country profiles available on the ESDN homepage, 26 are up-to-date (status May 2013) and included in this comparative overview. From the rest of the countries, we were either not able to receive updates in time or the countries asked us to exclude them as they are currently in a transition phase of their NSDS process (e.g. Ireland, Malta). Please find below a table and a geographical map with all countries included in our analysis.

European Countries considered for the analysis	
1) Austria	14) Lithuania
2) Belgium	15) Luxembourg
3) Croatia	16) Montenegro
4) Czech Republic	17) Norway
5) Denmark	18) Poland
6) Estonia	19) Portugal
7) Finland	20) Romania
8) France	21) Slovenia
9) Germany	22) Spain
10) Hungary	23) Sweden
11) Iceland	24) Switzerland
12) Italy	25) The Netherlands
13) Latvia	26) United Kingdom

Graph 2.1: Map of the 26 countries included in the analysis



## 2.1. Basic information about SD strategies

This section presents the status quo and recent developments of NSDSs in European countries, including some future developments expected in several countries. Then, the NSDSs' institutional anchoring is presented together with an overview of the typologies of these strategies and the most important dimensions covered within them.

### NSDSs recent developments

**All 26 countries have a strategic SD policy planning tool in place.** In total, **23 countries out of the 26 included in this overview have developed a National SD Strategy (NSDS)** as a single policy strategy document. However, NSDSs come in various types and differ from each other in terms of structure, focus and pages. What most have in common, though, is that they formulate a vision for SD, include objectives on the three dimensions of SD (economy, social issues, environment), and describe a governance process for implementing the strategy, including monitoring and evaluation schemes.

The width of these strategic documents range between few pages such as in United Kingdom with a 7 pages document, to the longest strategy being the German NSDS with 252 pages. However, the majority of European countries have strategies that range between 50 and 100 pages (e.g. Portugal with 51 pages, Sweden with 98 pages).

NSDS documents vary from classical versions (e.g. Germany, Finland), to documents with different titles such as 'federal plan' (e.g. Belgium), 'framework' strategies (e.g. Czech

Republic, Hungary), 'national plan' (e.g. Luxembourg), general 'development strategy' in which SD is part of a larger policy strategy (e.g. Slovenia), 'sustainability agenda' (e.g. The Netherlands), and a 'government vision' (e.g. United Kingdom). A stand-out example is the Austrian ÖSTRAT, a strategy adopted by and applicable at the national and regional level.

As mentioned, **three countries do not follow a "classic" approach to NSDS but chose different forms**. In Slovenia, SD is part of a larger and comprehensive national development policy strategy. In the Netherlands, instead of a classical NSDS, the "Sustainability Agenda: A Green Growth Strategy for the Netherlands" is a much shorter and straightforward document that sets out the government's ambitions to make society more sustainable mainly focusing on so-called **Focal Points** - or five priority areas (Raw materials and production chains; Sustainable use of land and water; Food; Climate and energy; Mobility; Cross-cutting actions) - and respective **Actions**. In the UK's 'Government Vision' (2011), for instance, building on the principles that underpinned the UK's 2005 SD strategy, ministers have agreed on an approach for mainstreaming SD which in broad terms consists of providing 1) ministerial leadership and oversight, 2) leading by example, 3) embedding SD into individual policies, and 4) transparent and independent scrutiny.

Historically, as presented in the [September 2010 ESDN Quarterly Report](#), the first NSDSs were developed in the mid- to late-1990s: Sweden and UK adopted their first NSDSs already in 1994, followed by few other countries (e.g. Finland in 1998, Belgium in 2000). Most countries, however, developed their first NSDSs in preparation to the UN World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, other countries followed later in the 2000s. Most European countries started to revise their NSDSs between 2006-2008 in order to bring their NSDS in line with the objectives included in the renewed EU SDS of 2006 (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland), some others in the period 2009-2010 (e.g. Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Latvia, Luxembourg).

In the **period 2011-2013**, few updates can be reported. In **Austria**, in 2011, the Federal Council of Ministers mandated to revise the old federal strategy of 2002 (NSDS), which is currently under way. In **Belgium**, the intention is to develop an NSDS, which is currently under negotiation, valid both for the national and the federal level. In **Lithuania**, in 2011, the NSDS was updated again by making few minor corrections in the text. In **Norway**, the strategy was updated in 2011 as well. Also in **The Netherlands** and in the **United Kingdom**, SD policy strategies changed in 2011: respectively, a "Sustainability Agenda" was published in The Netherlands whilst in the UK, the new coalition government published "Mainstreaming sustainable development - The Government's vision and what this means in practice". In 2012, in **Switzerland**, a new NSDS was approved by the Federal Council.

Table: Overview countries

Country	Current NSDS version	Number of revisions	Year of first NSDS and revisions
Austria	2002	0	2002 (NSDS)
	2011		2011 (Östrat)
Belgium	2010	2	2000, 2004, 2010



Croatia	2009	0	2009
Czech Republic	2010	1	2004, 2010
Denmark	2009	1	2002, 2009
Estonia	2005	0	2005
Finland	2006	1	1998, 2006
France	2010	1	2003, 2010
Germany	2012	3	2002, 2004, 2008, 2012
Hungary	2013	1	2007, 2013
Iceland	2010	1	2002, 2010
Italy	2002	0	2002
Latvia	2010	1	2002, 2010
Lithuania	2011	2	2003, 2009, 2011
Luxembourg	2010	1	1999, 2010
Montenegro	2012	3	2008, 2009, 2011, 2012
Norway	2011	1	2002, 2011
Poland	2000	0	2000
Portugal	2007	0	2007
Romania	2008	1	1999, 2008
Slovenia	2005	0	2005
Spain	2007	0	2007
Sweden	2006	2	1994, 2004, 2006
Switzerland	2012	3	1997, 2002, 2008, 2012
The Netherlands	2011	2	2003, 2008, 2011
United Kingdom	2011	3	1994, 1999, 2005, 2011

#### Foreseen Developments

Several countries have recently finished or are in the process of updating/reviewing their NSDS: for example, **Belgium** intends to develop an NSDS, which is currently under negotiation, and its adoption will imply that the NSDS will be applicable for the national as well as sub-national levels, with a stronger cooperation between the different political levels. Whilst in **Hungary** a new Framework Strategy for SD has been adopted in March 2013; in **France** and in **Finland**, new National SD Strategies are expected to be launched before or right after summer 2013. Some strategies are also in a process of being reviewed, such as for example in **Austria**, **Montenegro** and **Slovenia**.

#### Institutional anchoring

In general, it can be said that the **responsibility for NSDS lies usually with the national Ministries of Environment** (see the following table). However, in some countries, NSDS processes are now coordinated by the Prime Ministers Offices or State Chancelleries (e.g. Germany, Estonia, Latvia). In Austria, for example, there exists a cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and the Federal Chancellery in steering the NSDS process. In Norway, it is the Ministry of Finance that holds the responsibility in this matter. In Belgium, the responsibility for the coordination of the SD Strategy Process lies in the Minister or Secretary of State on Sustainable Development, supported by the Federal Public Planning Service Sustainable Development (PPS SD).

**Table:**  
**Institutional**  
**anchoring**

Country	Institutional Anchoring
Austria	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management + Federal Chancellery
Belgium	Minister or Secretary of State on Sustainable Development
Croatia	Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection
Czech Republic	Government Council for Sustainable Development
Denmark	Ministry of the Environment
Estonia	Government Office
Finland	Secretariat of the FNCSD (Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and Assistant) at the Ministry of the Environment.
France	Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, and energy
Germany	Federal Chancellery
Hungary	National Council for Sustainable Development + Ministry of Rural Development
Iceland	Ministry for the Environment
Italy	Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea
Latvia	Cross-sectoral Coordination Centre (directly subordinated to the Prime Minister)
Lithuania	Ministry of Environment
Luxembourg	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures (Department for Environment)
Montenegro	Division for the support to the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) in the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism
Norway	Ministry of Finance
Poland	Ministry of the Environment + Ministry of Regional Development + The Chancellery of the Prime Minister
Portugal	Ministry of Agriculture, Sea, Environment and Spatial Planning
Romania	Ministry of Environment and Climate Changes
Slovenia	Ministry of Economic Development and Technology + Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development
Spain	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment
Sweden	Ministry of the Environment
Switzerland	Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE)
The Netherlands	It depends on the government level: at the National level is the Minister of Environment
United Kingdom	At UK Government level Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

**Dimensions**  
**covered**

In most cases, NSDSs cover **all three dimensions of sustainable development**. In several strategies, **more dimensions are highlighted** that ranging from international issues (e.g. Austria, Denmark) to governance (e.g. Belgium), culture (e.g. Estonia, Slovenia) and education (e.g. Czech Republic).



## 2.2. Mechanisms of Vertical Integration

**Vertical policy integration mechanisms** For vertical policy integration mechanisms, we present the way countries deal with the challenge of coordinating and integrating SD strategies and policies **across different levels of governance**, from the European via the national and regional to the local levels.

**Information from countries** The NSDSs are in most countries a policy strategy only binding for the national government. A notable exception is Austria, the only country in Europe that has adopted a federal SD strategy (the so-called ÖSTRAT), that is binding both for the national and the regional level. A similar path is foreseen for Belgium that intends to develop an NSDS - currently under negotiation - as a common strategy of the national and regional levels, which will be applicable for the national as well as sub-national levels with a strong cooperation between the different political levels.

**Functions of mechanisms** In general, the analysis shows **three main mechanisms** for vertical policy integration. First of all, many countries (16 out of 26) have made use of *consultation activities* as elements of vertical policy integration, generally in the form of workshops or seminars (e.g. Finland), roundtables discussions (e.g. Austria), meetings (e.g. Germany), dialogues (e.g. Denmark), forums (e.g. Estonia) and online activities (e.g. Hungary). In these consultation activities, sub-national levels are usually either given advice how to implement certain parts of the NSDS or asked to provide information for the national level on regional processes and/or data. Secondly, several countries (10 out of 26) have started diverse *mechanisms to increase cooperation and coordination* (both formally and informally) among different levels and as support for implementation (e.g. Austria, Finland, Germany, Switzerland). Through these mechanisms, a better coordination of activities and implementation mechanisms between the different levels of government is envisaged. Thirdly, several countries established processes for *awareness raising and for experience and information exchange* (e.g. Hungary, Lithuania). This last mechanism is the weakest among the three in terms of coordination for actual implementation.

The majority of countries use these processes especially during the preparation or revision of national SD strategies. However, in several countries, some of these processes have been planned and applied on a regular basis. For instance,

in **Estonia**, the Joint Commission of Ministerial Bodies (JCMB) provides a forum for multi-level cooperation; it meets annually and discusses relevant policy topics.

Several countries were also able to **institutionalise some of these mechanisms** through the formation of councils, commissions, or other bodies. Notable experiences are highlighted below:

In **Switzerland**, vertical integration mechanisms are relatively strong. Linkages between the federal, regional (cantons) and local levels of governance are managed within the framework of the 'Sustainable Development Forum'. The Forum was set up in 2001 as an initiative of the Federal Office for Spatial Development. Forum events involve representatives from cantons and cities and take place twice a year. The Forum is dedicated

to exchanging information on current SD projects and plans, starting up new SD projects, monitoring, and on promoting participation possibilities. Another important goal of the SD Forum is the joint development of national targets for LA 21 projects.

In **Germany**, as the NSDS it is the strategy of the national government only, the NSDS is not binding for the federal countries for their strategies. Nevertheless, a stronger cooperation between the national level and the Regions for NSDS implementation has developed. The Länder (federal states) are involved in the formulation process of concrete measures based on the NSDS. They participated in the consultation process to the progress reports 2008 and 2012.

In **Latvia**, the National Development Council (NDC) serves as a coordinator between the national and sub-national level in the NSDS process. The sub-national levels (government authorities and regional planning institutions) are members of the NDC, which is also chaired by the Prime Minister.

In **Finland**, in order to improve the coordination of SD policies between the national and sub-national levels, the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD) established a new sub-committee on regionally and locally sustainable development in June 2007. The sub-committee was mandated to promote SD in regional and local administrations as well as in their cooperation with each other and with the national government. As a special task, the sub-committee is designed to contribute to the implementation of the NSDS and take initiatives on the national SD policy process. Generally, the sub-committee held about four meetings every year. Moreover, several working groups were established.

In other cases, vertical policy integration has been **formalised within legal acts** such as, for instance, in Croatia or in Slovenia. For instance, the Croatian experience is reported below:

In **Croatia**, mechanisms of vertical integration are described in the Environmental Protection Act (OG 110/07) that sets out responsibility for sustainable development on different political levels, including national government, counties, cities, and other relevant stakeholders. This responsibility is regulated through sustainable development and environmental protection documents, of which NSDS is the highest level document (Environmental Protection Plan, Environmental Protection Programme and Environmental Status Report): NSDS and Environmental Protection Plan regulate SD on the national level, Environmental Protection Programme regulates it on sub-national, regional level, while being in conformity with national documents, and Environmental Status Reports can be made at both national and sub-national level, referring to either the Plan or the Programme.

## 2.3. Mechanisms of Horizontal Integration

### Horizontal integration

Horizontal integration refers to the **collaboration between the different ministries and administrative bodies on the national level** for the delivery of SD policies.

Generally, European countries have developed various forms of inter-ministerial and cross-departmental mechanisms for coordinating the implementation of NSDSs objectives. The format of these mechanisms varies from **inter-ministerial working groups** (e.g. Estonia), **commissions** (e.g. Belgium) **committees** (e.g. Committee for a Sustainable Austria, or Committee of State Secretaries', in Germany) or **networks** (e.g. inter-ministerial network secretariat in Finland).

### Institutional structure

In terms of **institutional structure**, horizontal mechanisms can be categorized in three groups. First, **inter-ministerial bodies at the political level**: in this case, the inter-ministerial body is chaired by politicians or high-level administrators (e.g. Austria, Germany). A notable example is Germany.

In **Germany**, since 2000, the State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development exists as a high-ranking coordinating and monitoring body for sustainability. It decides about the strategy and its further development (subject to later formal approval of the cabinet), and keeps a close eye on implementation of the strategy. This Committee consists of state secretaries (representatives of the minister, top level of civil servants) from all ministries. It is chaired by the Head of the Federal Chancellery, which serves as the main leader in the national SD process. The responsibility lies not with one ministry but the Chancellery itself is in charge for the topic. This mechanism is considered as a **key success factor for SD in Germany**. It prevented classical conflicts between ministries and ensured that quantitative objects have been met. The Chancellery has not only a coordination role, but is also steering the process and providing important inputs to the relevant ministries.

A second group of horizontal mechanisms is formed by **inter-ministerial bodies at the administrative level**: participants are mainly representatives of the national administration (ministries) under the lead of the Ministry of Environment (e.g. Finland, France, Luxembourg). An interesting experience with such a body exists in Finland:

In **Finland**, the work of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD) is outlined and prepared by an Inter-ministerial Secretariat, which **operates as a network and convenes 8-10 times a year**. The Secretariat consists of about 20 members from different ministries, each taking the lead in preparing themes within their area of expertise. The FNCSD's Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General come from the Ministry of the Environment.

The third category is described by **hybrid regimes**: in this format, the processes of horizontal policy coordination (politicians and administrators) are enriched by

participation and consultation processes of societal stakeholders like NGOs, business, academia, or civil society (e.g. Czech Republic, Hungary). A noteworthy example is for instance Czech Republic:

In **Czech Republic**, the Governmental Council for Sustainable Development is responsible for coordinating SD policy-making among the central administrative authorities on an inter-departmental basis. Representatives of all ministries and of main stakeholders participate in the different bodies of the Council-committees and working groups.

## Functions

The horizontal mechanisms described in the various inter-ministerial bodies (at both the political, administrative and hybrid regimes levels) have a number of common functions. First of all, almost all countries use horizontal mechanisms mostly for **coordination** purposes and to **increase policy coherence**. An important example is France.

In **France**, the coherence of actions of all ministries is controlled by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Sustainable Development (ICSD), which is also responsible for the definition, coordination and follow-up of national SD objectives.

In other countries, horizontal integration mechanisms are also used with an **advisory** function, especially in the preparation of policy drafts and reports on SD issues (e.g. Belgium, Estonia). However, these mechanisms also have a **supervisory** function, especially to control implementation of policies (e.g. Germany, Italy) or review progress in the implementation of the NSDS (e.g. Portugal). In other cases, mechanisms have a **political guidance and steering function** (e.g. Austria, Germany). The Austrian experience is in this case very valuable:

In **Austria**, horizontal coordination on the Federal level is fostered by the 'Committee for a Sustainable Austria' that consists of representatives of all Federal Ministries, social partners and the chairs of the 'Expert Conference of National and Regional SD Coordinators'. Moreover, a 'Sustainable Development Steering Group' was established on the national level to coordinate SD activities among the different ministries. As of 2010 the Committee is co-chaired by the Federal Chancellery and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. These mechanisms work as a means of coordination through common projects and programmes, political guidance and steering mechanism. Horizontal coordination on the level of federal provinces is facilitated by the Regional SD Coordinators that assist implementation of SD within the provincial administrations.

## 2.4. Evaluation and Review

This section gives an overview of the evaluation and review approaches applied in the context of SD strategies in Europe. It focuses on **qualitative evaluations and reviews** that assess the quality of SD strategy processes, policy instruments used and stakeholders involved.

**Information from countries** NSDSs are not only strategic documents but also foster strategic processes. As NSDS processes constantly need to adapt to new situations and challenges, the evaluation of these policy processes and the achievement of the NSDS targets is important and has been introduced in almost all European countries.

The review processes of NSDSs can take three forms: **internal reviews**, **external reviews** and **peer reviews**.

**Internal reviews** **Internal reviews** are conducted within the government ministries by an internal body responsible for the review process. Usually, this depends on the country's institutional setting and on the particular institution charged with SD tasks. However, in many of the countries, review processes take the form of progress reports (e.g. Czech Republic, France). In other countries evaluation and review is undertaken within the horizontal mechanisms and inter-ministerial bodies also responsible for coordinating the preparation and implementation of NSDSs (e.g. Estonia, Luxembourg, Switzerland).

The internal review process can be classified according to timing. Some countries have a bi-annual review process that culminates with the publication of a so-called progress report (e.g. Luxembourg, Latvia, Lithuania). Some others perform annual reviews or annual progress reports (e.g. France, Slovenia, Switzerland). Several countries have a less tight schedule that does not display regularity or is represented by a one-off exercise (e.g. Poland, Romania). Germany has a four-year review process cycle. Also for the Austrian ÖSTRAT, evaluation is intended to be done every four years. In Iceland, the NSDS is also revised every four years.

**External reviews** Not many European countries contemplate the reliance on an **external review**. Two options are usually employed. Either the responsible institution for the NSDS review process commissions a private consultant (e.g. Switzerland, Finland) or the task is given to independent researchers (e.g. Austria). A very important case can be found in the Finnish experience:

In **Finland**, a comprehensive national assessment of sustainable development was completed in December 2009: The main objective of the assessment was to evaluate the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of 2006 and assess the importance and impacts of sustainable development in Finnish policies and administrative practices, as well as give a picture on the state of sustainable development in Finland. The assessment was conducted as an external evaluation (undertaken by Ramboll Management Consulting), and discussed in the meeting of the Finnish National Commission for SD in December 2009. The report has been

translated into English and is available on the internet.

## Peer reviews

**Peer reviews** have been conducted in four countries, in France (2005), Norway (2007), the Netherlands (2007) and Germany (2009). The idea behind the peer reviews of NSDSs is to identify and share good practices in a process of mutual learning where, usually, other countries are taken as peers in the process. The peer review of an NSDS is voluntary and is undertaken upon the initiative of the country concerned. The peer reviews are intended to address all three SD pillars and the peer-reviewed country is free to choose to undertake a review of the whole NSDS or focus on one or more specific issues. Recently, **Germany decided to conduct its next Peer Review in 2013.**

**France** was the first EU Member State that organized a peer review process to evaluate the implementation of the NSDS with the inclusion of four peer countries (Belgium, Ghana, Mauritius and the UK). The peer review report was issued in 2005.

In **Norway**, as part of the process of developing the new strategy, the Norwegian Ministry of Finance initiated a peer review of the Norwegian NSDS. It was conducted by a group of Swedish experts, with support from a representative from Uganda on trade and aid. The group delivered its report "A Peer Review of Norway's Policy for Sustainable Development" in 2007.

In **The Netherlands**, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated a peer review of the Dutch NSDS, which was partially financed by the European Commission. Germany, Finland and South Africa were selected as peer countries. From each peer country, four experts were invited to the peer review team, representing the government, business, science and NGOs. During the peer review process, several activities were undertaken, including a scoping meeting and interviews with Dutch stakeholders. The final peer review report was presented to the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment on 21 June 2007 and includes 46 recommendations for a new SD framework.

In **Germany**, In 2009, the German Federal Government mandated Björn Stigson, the President of the World Business Council for SD, and a group of peers to conduct a Peer Review of Germany's SD policies from Sweden, Finland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, India, Canada and the USA that brought their experiences to bear on the opportunities and challenges for Germany's SD policies in an international context and in the context of innovations towards a low carbon economy. The Peer Review came up with a set of clear recommendations addressing politics, the parliament, the business community and civil society. The German Council for Sustainable Development facilitated the reviewing process.



## 2.5. Indicators and Monitoring

### Monitoring

Monitoring is an assessment activity, usually **based on a set of quantitative indicators**. The higher and stronger the link between indicators and policy objectives in the NSDSs, the more measurable are the deliveries of the strategy. This section outlines shortly the status quo in development and revision of the set of indicators, and their utilization in the NSDS review process.

### Indicators for SD

Most countries have developed a set of SD indicators together with the development of their NSDSs. The number of SD indicators ranges from a small number of 15 key indicators in France or the Norwegian experience with 19 indicators, to the largest number of Italy or Hungary with 150 and 155 indicators, respectively. However, the majority of countries uses between 70 and 100 indicators, with an average of 80 indicators (e.g. Austria with 82). Germany and Finland use respectively 38 and 34 indicators. Additionally, few countries make use of headline indicators (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Sweden), mainly for communication purposes.

### Responsible institutions

In several countries the **national statistical offices** are responsible for the development and monitoring of SD indicators (e.g. Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland). In other countries, different bodies have this responsibility, for instance:

In **Belgium**, Sustainable development indicators are published by the Task Force on Sustainable Development (TFSD) of the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) as part of the Federal Reports on Sustainable Development. The latest set, updated in May 2013, consists of 25 headline indicators of sustainable development.

In **Denmark**, monitoring and reporting are coordinated by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency, although there are no exact deadlines or exact format for reports on the strategy.

### Processes

The **monitoring reports** show the status and progress of SD within the country. The monitoring processes vary among countries, based on timing and on institutional capacities. Only a few countries have developed regular SDI monitoring cycles. These monitoring cycles are usually on a yearly basis (e.g. Italy, Montenegro, Romania, Slovenia) or are performed bi-annually (e.g. Austria, Estonia, Germany, Latvia). There are also countries that have monitoring processes different times but have not regular and fixed reporting mechanisms (e.g. Czech Republic). A notable experience is from Switzerland:

In **Switzerland**, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO), the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) and the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) joined forces to create the MONET measurement system. With about 75 indicators, this monitoring tool facilitates regular reporting on the status and progress of SD throughout Switzerland. The MONET system was revised in 2009 and is now more in line with the themes of the European Union's SD indicators system. The revised system now has 75 indicators (instead of 130),

twelve of which are new.

## 2.6. Participation

### Participation

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 National Sustainable Development Strategies. It covers participatory and consultation processes, institutions and bodies involved, and different forms of cooperation between various actors and stakeholder groups.

### 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 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. Examples are shown in the following table:

Country	Year of versions
Austria	SD Strategy Group
Belgium	Interdepartmental Commission on SD, Federal Council for SD
Croatia	Council for Physical Planning, Environmental Protection and SD Council
Czech Republic	Governmental Council for SD
Germany	Federal Chancellery, Parliamentary Advisory Council on SD, The German Council for SD
Luxembourg	High Council for SD
Sweden	Advisory Commission on SD
The Netherlands	Council for the Environment and Infrastructure

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 (NCSD)**, 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). In this regard, the German case is very interesting.

In **Germany**, the **German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE)** was established by the German Government in April 2000. Its members are appointed by the chancellor. Currently, it is composed of 15 members, coming from various social groups, business as well as of science and research. Its mission is to advise the German government on all matters relating to sustainable development and to contribute towards the further development of the NSDS. At the same time the Council is an important stakeholder in the public dialogue on sustainability. A Statement of the RNE was published as a chapter in the progress reports 2008 and 2012.

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. *Hungary* distributes emails with requests of participation to professionals, organizations, governmental and civil spheres who are then meeting up in a series of panel discussion. *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. A noteworthy example comes from United Kingdom:

In the **United Kingdom**, there is a unique method to involve stakeholders, especially all government departments. Its goal is to increase transparency through publishing all government departments' business plans and reports on their embedding of sustainable development. Stakeholders are involved by the Government's Sustainable Development news website – *SD Scene* – the monthly e-newsletter which is sent to 8000 subscribers each month. The vision of mainstreaming sustainable development across the government is pursued by interactive elements, making use of user comments, SD Scene Twitter feed and online surveys. Hereby, the SD Scene serves as main stakeholder engagement tool, which is complemented by meetings and direct engagement.

#### 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:

In **Finland**, the NCSD fulfils its functions by organizing thematic seminars, awareness raising and education activities, holding regular meetings where various topics are discussed and recommendations to the government presented and installing evaluation sub-committees or external consultant which review government programmes.

### 3. Reflections and points for discussion

In the course of this discussion paper, we touched upon many areas that require reflections. In this last chapter, we focus on few **crucial topics** for further discussion:

#### 1. National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs): Past experiences and future crucial dimensions

When discussing about NSDSs, it is important to take into account at least six crucial points that will be further explored in the course of the conference:

- **Institutional anchoring** of NSDSs,
- Securing **political support and leaders' commitment** for NSDSs,
- **Inter-ministerial cooperation** and the **steering capacity** of NSDSs,
- Fostering **monitoring** and **evaluation**,
- Promoting **stakeholder participation** in NSDSs processes and the role of national SD councils,
- Effective **implementation** of NSDSs.

In terms of policy and governance, much attention should be also reserved to the **learning component of SD strategies** as shown in the figure below:

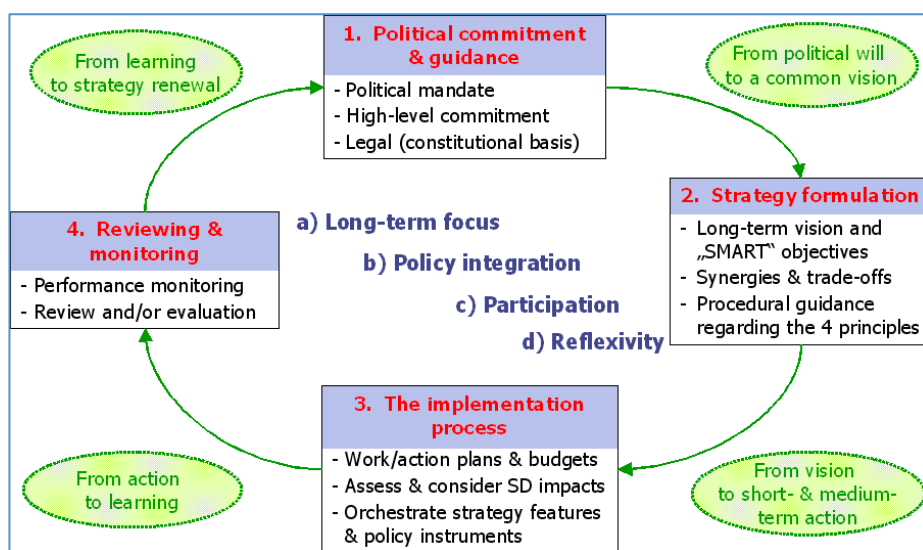


Figure: The SD strategy cycle (Hametner and Steurer, 2007)

#### 2. A changed context in Europe: What role and future for the national SD strategies in the new context?

The context in Europe changed considerably in 2010 when the Europe 2020 Strategy was published by the EU Commission. At the moment, it is a fact that *Europe 2020* represents the overarching strategy for all European policies. In contrast, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy seems to have only very limited impact and steering power as a policy document. In fact, as the EU Commission's Communication of February 2013 revealed, it seems that *the Europe 2020 Strategy is seen as the main instrument for pursuing SD* and its implementation and regular review is seen as key to contribute to *greater coherence, mainstreaming and integration of the three dimensions of SD* in EU

policies at large. In addition, it is currently debated, at least in the SD community, if a separate/revised EU SDS could continue helping to achieve a better balanced approach and policy coherence for SD – this was very much the focus of the ESDN workshop in February 2013. Therefore, it needs to be understood for Europe what future is foreseen for the national SD strategies and their relationship with the Europe 2020 strategy, their positioning outside or within Europe 2020's governance architecture and their relation to the National Reform Programs (NRPs).

3. **The role of the international dimension: European NSDSs, Rio+20 and the SDGs process**

In the context of international SD policy and strategy, a crucial recent development has been the commonly known **Rio+20 Conference** (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), Rio de Janeiro, 20-22 June 2012). The conference finally produced an 'Outcome Document', entitled "[The Future We Want](#)". In terms of **sustainable development strategies**, very significant is **paragraph 98** that encourages "*regional, national, subnational and local authorities as appropriate to develop and utilize sustainable development strategies as key instruments for guiding decision-making and implementation of sustainable development at all levels*". Furthermore, paragraph 101 not only emphasizes the "*need for more coherent and integrated planning and decision-making at the national, subnational and local levels*", but also calls upon countries to "*strengthen national, subnational and/or local institutions or relevant multi-stakeholder bodies and processes, as appropriate, dealing with sustainable development, including to coordinate on matters of sustainable development and to enable effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development*". In addition, one of the major outcomes of the conference has been the agreement by Member States to launch a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs). With this in mind, it seems necessary to reflect on how European national SD strategies fit in the new Rio+20 framework and whether and in what way European NSDSs experiences can contribute to the SDGs process.

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