



Linking Strategies

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**Sustainable Development in an enlarged Union -
Linking national strategies and strengthening European coherence**

Good Practice Guide

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Abstract

In April 2003 the Workshop “Sustainable Development in an enlarged Union – Linking national strategies and strengthening European coherence” took place in Vienna. One item on the Workshop's agenda was the so-called "Innovation Market Place", i.e. a guided poster exhibition in which 10 countries presented 11 good practice examples, related to their National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSSDs). This paper summarizes each of the 11 good practice examples. In a theoretical section on policy learning it moreover briefly explores possibilities and limits of transferring them to other countries.

I. Introduction

The Workshop “Sustainable Development in an enlarged Union – Linking national strategies and strengthening European coherence”, which took place in Vienna from April 27-29, 2003 brought together more than 70 senior SSD experts from 24 European countries. The Workshop was initiated and hosted by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, 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.

A core objective of the workshop was to discuss both possible improvements and potential limits to the coherence of SSD processes in Europe. The primary purpose of the Workshop was to facilitate the exchange of experiences and information among European experts on SSDs. Based on the assumption that there is a great deal to learn from the successes and shortcomings in other countries, the conference organisers sought to bring together those who are responsible for SSDs and establish a network among them. As the participants of the Vienna Workshop agreed to continue their networking activities in a workshop format, it is likely that the Vienna Workshop will turn out to be part of a series of annual (N)SSD meetings, hosted by different countries.

A central item on the Workshop's agenda was a working group session with rotating character (for a discussion outline and the session design, please see the "Discussion Input Paper", accessible on www.nachhaltigkeit.at/lisstra). The working groups discussed six topics, addressing content and civil society issues, institutional settings and implementation of SSDs at both national and EU levels (for further details on the Workshop in general and on the discussion results, please see the Workshop Summary).

Another item on the Workshop's Agenda was the so-called "Innovation Market Place", i.e. a guided poster exhibition of good practices. All participants (most of them senior SSD experts from Environment Ministries) were invited to present a poster at the Workshop, dealing with an innovative policy process related to their country's NSSD. Ultimately 10 countries presented 11 good practice examples in a guided tour through the "Innovation Market Place". These examples are summarized in part II of this paper. In part III some possibilities and limitations of transferring such innovations to other countries are explored theoretically.

II. Good Practices in NSSD processes

The 11 good practice examples in NSSD processes throughout Europe, summarized in the following chapters, are (in alphabetical order of the countries):

1. Internet Data Base: A support tool for the implementation of Austria's NSSD (Austria)
2. Market creation for protecting biodiversity (Czech Republic)
3. The sustainability process as an expression of a new political style (Germany)
4. Elaboration of the Estonian Strategy on Sustainable Development (Estonia)
5. Networks for Sustainable Development (Finland)
6. Comhar: Ireland's National Sustainable Development Partnership and principles for Sustainable Development (Ireland)
7. Transitions: Innovating unsustainable societal systems (The Netherlands)
8. NSSD of the Slovak Republic (Slovak Republic)
9. Sustainable Development Forum (Switzerland)
10. Embedding Sustainable Development in Defra (United Kingdom)
11. Influencing decisions on UK Government spending (United Kingdom)

The following chapters summarize the posters presented at the Workshop and give some additional information (for the original posters please go to www.nachhaltigkeit.at/lisstra).

Country	NSSD of the country
Austria	http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at/strategie/pdf/strategie020709_en.pdf
Belgium	http://www.cidd.fgov.be/pub/PL200004/PL200004en.pdf
Czech Republic	http://www.ceu.cz/eng/sur/
Estonia	http://www.envir.ee/eng/sustainable.html
Denmark	http://www.mst.dk/homepage
Finland	http://www.vyh.fi/eng/environ/sustdev/program.htm
France	http://www.environnement.gouv.fr/english/default.htm
Germany	http://www.dialog-nachhaltigkeit.de/downloads/national_strategy_germany.pdf
Greece	http://www.minenv.gr/5/55/e5500.html
Hungary	http://www.ff3.hu/
Ireland	http://www.comhar-nsdp.ie
Italy	http://www.minambiente.it/SVS/svs/docs/strategia_azione_ambientale.pdf
Latvia	http://www.varam.gov.lv/varam/DOC/Eilgsp_att.htm
Lithuania	http://www.am.lt/EN/VI/
Luxembourg	http://www.mev.etat.lu/home.html
The Netherlands	http://www.vrom.nl/duurzameontwikkeling
Norway	http://odin.dep.no/archive/udvedlegg/01/05/nsbu_047.pdf
Poland	http://www.mos.gov.pl/index_main.shtml
Portugal	http://www.iambiente.pt/docs/5421/ENDS_dp.pdf
Slovak Republic	http://www.rec.sk/index_e6_02.htm
Spain	http://www.esp-sostenible.net/
Sweden	http://miljo.regeringen.se/hut/las_mer.htm
Switzerland	http://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/nachhaltig/index.html
United Kingdom	http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/uk_strategy/index.htm

Table 1: Links to NSSDs in Europe

1. Internet Data Base: A support tool for the implementation of Austria's NSSD

This example describes an internet data base, supporting the coordination of various actors, involved in the NSSD implementation process. It is of interest to those who are looking for technical support of an NSSD implementation process.

Context:

The Austrian SSD was passed by the Council of Ministers in April 2002 (for the strategy go to http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at/strategie/pdf/strategie020709_en.pdf). The implementation of the Austrian SSD is organized in annual work programs (for the first Work Program 2003 go to <http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at/strategie/pdf/AP2003gesamt.pdf>). The purpose of the work programs, predetermined already in the Austrian SSD itself, is to systematically break down the more or less general objectives of the Strategy into concrete measures. In order to coordinate the implementation process among various actors, the so-called “Committee for a Sustainable Austria” was established. The Committee, headed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (MAFEW) is made up by representatives from various ministries, social partners and county (“Länder”) delegates.

How the database works:

The unique feature of the implementation process is that the annual work programs are put together continuously by a variety of actors in an internet database. The database, accessible to members of the Committee and the NCSD only, documents measures, directly linked with the Strategy’s 20 key objectives and 200 sub-targets. The key purpose of the database is to support the decentralized implementation process. In addition the database documents changes (transparency) and allows for postings and discussions (communication). At the end of the annual cycles the measures listed in the database are re-edited and published as annual work program.

Experiences so far:

Of course the database doesn’t replace Committee meetings and negotiations. Nevertheless it seems to support the decentralized implementation process effectively. The experiences with the database can be summarized with the following 3 points: (i) the transparency of the database leads to a positive competition (“race to the top”) between the different actors. (ii) The annual character of the work programs increases the time-discipline of the implementation process. (iii) Multiple feedback loops increase the quality of single measures as well as of the whole work program

Outlook:

As not the number, but the quality of measures is crucial for reaching the SSD’s objectives and targets, a key challenge is to set up and assess the database rather in qualitative than in quantitative terms. Related questions are: (i) should there be a “quality threshold” for new measures? (ii) From what phase of the planning process on should measures be documented in the database in order to avoid wish-list character? (iii) If the focus is shifted towards a few key measures, who selects them on what basis?

Expectations for the future are that the database may be expanded from the federal to the county level and that the system may be used to support implementation processes in all kinds of policy fields.

2. Market creation for protecting biodiversity (Czech Republic)

This example is not about a policy process, but about a valuation method, allowing for an adequate taxation of biodiversity loss. It is of interest to those who are looking for a way of monetarizing and subsequently taxing ecological damages.

Context:

In the Czech Republic, two NSSD drafts were worked out by different academic institutions, but due to political decisions and changes none was passed by the Government. However, like in many other NSSDs, the protection of the natural environment as life-support system and the maintenance of biodiversity are considered as key challenges in both drafts.

One reason for the continuing loss of biodiversity can be seen in the fact that ecosystem services are not expressed in terms of human values up to now. Therefore, one approach to tackle this problem is to monetarize biodiversity as well as losses thereof and, subsequently, taxing responsible (economic) activities.

Market creation for biodiversity:

Making use of economic incentives in order to cope with environmental problems is nothing new in environmental policy: Environmental taxes are at least as old as environmental regulations and in the case of climate protection even a new market for emission trading is created on an international scale. In order to incorporate ecosystems services as relevant factor into human decision making, these services need to be given market value as well. But how and by whom should they be given value?

A method, taking into account ecological functions of certain biotope types as well as average revitalisation costs, has been developed in Germany and the Czech Republic (for details go to http://gis.ceu.cz/cmapa_en). The valuation of all kinds of biotope types is done by a group of ecologists according to the following eight ecological criteria:

- Biotope type maturity
- Biotope type naturalness
- Diversity of biotope type structure
- Diversity of biotope type species
- Rareness of biotope type
- Rareness of species of a biotope type
- Sensitivity/vulnerability of a biotope type
- Threat to the number and quality of a biotope type

Based on a valuation from 1-6 for each of these eight criteria, a ranking of biotope types has been worked out for the Czech Republic. The more points a biotope type has, the higher its life-supporting potential, respectively its environmental quality is. By translating the point values of biotope types into monetary terms, average national restoration costs are applied point by point. Consequently, any activity leading to a loss of biodiversity in certain types of biotopes can be taxed at a rate equal to the monetary loss of an environmental damage.

Outlook:

This method tries to translate the intrinsic value of nature in monetary values. It is capable of enlarging the economic ratio human activities are based upon by taking into account ecological considerations. Currently the method is developed further in a three-year project funded by the Czech Environment Ministry. The purpose of the project is to verify all biotope point values as well as the estimated average revitalisation costs for the Czech Republic.

3. The sustainability process as expression of a new political style (Germany)

This example describes the German SSD process as an expression of a new political culture, very much in favour of SD issues and policies.

Context:

The German Strategy for Sustainable Development “Perspectives for Germany” (<http://www.dialog-nachhaltigkeit.de>) was adopted by the German Federal Government in April 2002. The four guiding principles of the strategy are:

- Intergenerational equity
- Quality of life
- Social cohesion and
- International responsibility

How the German SSD process works:

The strategy was developed by a Committee of State Secretaries for Sustainable Development, coming from 10 ministries. This so-called “Green Cabinet” is chaired by the Chief of the Federal Chancellery and – like in many other countries – is advised by a National Council for Sustainable Development, consisting of 16 representatives of major societal groups. Currently the Cabinet is responsible for driving, coordinating and monitoring the NSSD process: It gives concrete tasks to the ministries, asks the Council for support in certain questions and decides about pilot projects.

Experiences so far:

One priority of the German SSD process is climate and energy policy. The key targets here are

- Phasing out nuclear energy until about 2020
- Improving energy efficiency
- Saving energy by using it economically
- Expanding use of renewable energy (off-shore wind energy should make up for 15% of electricity consumption by 2025)
- Developing new energy technologies.

For achieving these goals the German Federal Government has put several measures and programs in place, e.g.:

- Ecological Fiscal Reform
- Energy Saving Ordinance 2002 (increases the energy efficiency of buildings)
- Voluntary commitments by industries
- 100,000-roof photovoltaic program.

Outlook:

The progress of the strategy process is going to be reviewed every other year. The review is expected to show not only strengths and weaknesses. It is also supposed to question whether the priorities have been set correctly.

4. Elaboration of the Estonian Strategy on Sustainable Development

As the title says this example addresses the making process of the Estonian SSD in general. It is of interest to those who want to know how the development of an NSSD can be set up.

Context:

In 2000 the Estonian Commission on Sustainable Development (a body consisting of research institutes, NGOs and ministerial representatives) proposed the terms of reference for the upcoming strategy process. By approving these terms in 2001, the Estonian Government initiated the making of the SSD. Currently the strategy “Sustainable Estonia 21” (<http://www.envir.ee>) is discussed publicly among social partners, waiting for parliamentary approval later this year. The key purpose of the strategy is to provide long-term development principles for the Estonian society. A key issue of these principles is – as in other countries – to integrate economic, social and environmental issues.

Making of the Estonian SSD:

The driving forces of the Estonian SSD elaboration process were the Estonian Commission on Sustainable Development, a Consortium, NGOs, research institutes and last not least the Government itself. The strategy has been drafted in working groups and forums by different research institutes (among them the Tallinn Pedagogical University and the Institute of International and Social Studies). During the elaboration process, preliminary results were made available to governmental institutions as well as NGOs repeatedly in order build in their feedback. In addition, open forums were held throughout the elaboration process and all draft materials were accessible on a website.

Outlook:

The transition from the making to the implementation process of the Estonian SSD implies a couple of challenges and expectations. A key challenge for the Estonian society is to adapt to the requirements of a knowledge-based society. Against this background the key expectations are an improvement of institutional capacity and knowledge-based decision making processes, the spread of good governance and the establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms.

5. Networks for Sustainable Development (Finland)

This example is about the types, purposes, achievements and challenges of networks for SD within and between ministries of the Finish Government. It is of relevance to those who are interested in how to co-ordinate decentralized policies for SD.

Context:

The Finnish Government Programme for Sustainable Development (accessible on <http://www.vyh.fi/eng/environ/sustdev/english.htm>) was adopted by the Government already in June 1998. The 45 member counting Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD), established already in 1993 and chaired by the Prime Minister, plays a key role in the implementation process: In the years 2001 and 2002 for example it compiled draft progress reports, submitted by those administrative sectors involved in the implementation of the Programme. The publication of a final progress report is planned for mid 2003.

Networks for SD:

Besides the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development there are a couple of formal and informal institutions, supporting the implementation of SD, e.g. a network secretariat with 20 members from relevant ministries, networks for regional SD processes (like the Nordic Council of Ministers, Arctic and Baltic Strategy Processes) and a political forum for SD policy dialogue, involving all political parties and numerous representatives from relevant ministries.

In addition, the coordination of various SD processes is largely done by SD networks in and between ministries. While each ministry is free to set up its own kind of network (some are formal and planned, others informal and ad hoc), they all serve the common purpose of guaranteeing a timely horizontal and vertical coordination of SD policies. The networks are not only the main channels of communication among governmental actors, they also support the SD policy integration.

Experiences so far:

In the course of the SSD review process and the preparations for the WSSD in Johannesburg in autumn 2002, the networks among ministries proved to be very useful and got new impetus. Especially the so-called “permanent secretaries round” in the FNCSD did wake up many ministries (although such networks support the implementation process, they of course can’t prevent some ministries to be less active than others). However, despite the considerable supply-push factor of such networks (see also chapter 9 on Switzerland) a continuous guidance of the NSSD process is needed in addition. This can be done e.g. by a National Council for SD. Another key conclusion of the Finish SSD experience is that the process itself is very important. Therefore enough time should be taken for its preparation and planning.

Outlook:

A major challenge for the networks among ministries is to really integrate SD issues into all relevant policy fields. Like in many other countries, especially the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Trade and Industry are hesitant in this concern.

Despite a Government change, SD seems to remain high on the political agenda in Finland. A reason for this may be that all political parties have been involved in the strategy process so far. They all have a stake in the process and the issue. Currently a newly prioritised work program is developed, addressing the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

6. “Comhar”: Ireland's National Sustainable Development Partnership and principles for Sustainable Development

This example presents a kind of SD network, going well beyond NCSDs and institutions alike to be found in other countries. It is of relevance to those who are interested in ways of institutionalizing a participatory culture in SD policies.

Context:

With a NSSD dating back to the year 1997 Ireland was and still is among the forerunners of this new kind of policy planning. With “Making Ireland’s Development Sustainable: Review, Assessment and Future Action” it presented one of the first NSSD updates in 2002 (for details go to <http://www.environ.ie>). This leading role has to be seen against the background that the Irish economy doubled in size between 1990 and 2000, implying a considerable increase of environmental pressures (2001 greenhouse gas emissions were for example 31% above the 1990 level – far away from the Kyoto Target of plus 13% until 2008/2012).

What is “Comhar”?

“Comhar” (<http://www.comhar-nsdp.ie>) is the National Sustainability Partnership in Ireland, established in 1999. It is lead by an independent Chairman and consists of 25 members, representing stakeholders from the 5 pillars environment, community, economy, academia and state. The five Comhar Working Groups (covering the issues climate change, spatial planning/housing, waste economic instruments, awareness/education and international issues)

- Give advice to Government Ministers, specific sectors and the general public
- State their opinion on critical SD issues and developments (e.g. on the EU 6th Environmental Action Programme)
- Give recommendations on programs, policies and policy instruments
- Commission research and prepare reports (e.g. to the Earth Council on Ireland’s Progress on Agenda 21) and
- Fund certain activities in order to raise awareness.

Principles for Sustainable Development:

A recently concluded project of Comhar was the formulation of 12 Principles for SD, built around 7 themes.¹ The key purpose of the principles is to provide a basis for benchmarking certain policies with SD requirements. The problems of population loss in many rural communities and an increase of housing in open countryside given, the maintenance of the rural population in a balanced spatial distribution is one important issue where the principles need to be applied.

The most important lessons learned of the Comhar project are that (1) achieving consensus is a significant challenge, (2) the success of projects highly depends on the value they add and that (3) learning by doing is more important than one might expect.

¹ The 7 themes are (1) Satisfaction of human needs by the efficient use of resources, (2) Equity between generations, (3) Respect for ecological integrity and biodiversity, (4) Equity between countries and regions, (5) Social equity, (6) Respect for cultural heritage/diversity and (7) Good decision making.

7. Transitions: Innovating unsustainable societal systems (The Netherlands)

This example deals with the need for fundamental societal changes and policy implications thereof. As this topic plays a central role in the forthcoming Dutch Action Plan on SD it is not only of theoretical relevance. The example is of interest to those who are looking for ways of dealing with long-term time horizons in politics.

Context:

With its National Environmental Policy Plans (NEPPs) the Netherlands was the role model of environmental policy planning around the world for years. In summer 2003 the Dutch Action Plan on SD is expected to be finalised (for details go to <http://www.vrom.nl/duurzameontwikkeling>). If the Action Plan is passed by parliament, a continuous follow-up process will start. Within this Action Plan the concept of transitions plays a central role.

Transitions – what and how?

Transitions can be defined as long-term gradual changes, whereby complex societal sub-systems transform in a fundamental way. The drivers for such fundamental changes are interactions between technological, economic, ecological and institutional developments. Historic examples are the transition from a coal- to a fossil fuel-based energy supply or the transition from an agricultural to an industrial to a service economy. Both types of transitions may not have reached their final stage yet: While the fossil fuel-based energy supply may be changed into one of renewable energies, today's service economies may well turn into knowledge economies.

Paying attention to such (possible) transitions is important from a SD perspective because (1) related problems are increasingly complex and (2) incremental policies are not sufficient. But how can such a transition from its predevelopment phase through its take off and acceleration to its stabilisation phase be supported? Taken into account that the whole process may well take 30 years,

- A “transition arena”, i.e. a multi-actor network needs to be organized
- Sustainability visions and transition agendas should be developed
- Transition pathways need to be explored by experiments and joint actions
- Progress towards intermediate goals needs to be evaluated regularly and
- A possible next transition has to be taken into account, e.g. by adjusting visions and corresponding agendas.

Changing policy making:

Although such processes can't be managed top-down, they can be enhanced by a new kind of policy making. The differences to the current policy style can be summarized with the following four points:

- The currently prevailing short-term horizon needs to be expanded
- Facet approaches need to be replaced by integrated approaches, taking into account several political dimensions and a variety of actors
- Policies of incremental change need to be amended by policies aiming at fundamental transitions towards SD
- Traditional government practices (still focussing on regulation and liberalisation) need to take networking, facilitation and participation into account.

As certain transitions are going to happen sooner or later anyway it is to hope that this concept (a vision itself) is able to direct them towards SD.

8. NSSD of the Slovak Republic

This example describes the development and implementation of the Slovak NSSD. It is of interest to those who are interested in a good practice addressing participation, transparency and goal-orientation.

Elaboration Process:

In Slovakia the NSSD process (supported by UNDP) started in January 1999 with the preparation of an experts' "Vision of SD". Until February 2000 working teams worked out an elaborated analysis, following a structure agreed upon in advance. Until August 2000 the voluminous analysis was turned into a 350 page synthesis. This elaboration process, in which about 200 representatives from NGO's, academic institutions, the state administration, local communities, businesses and trade unions took part actively, was lead by a steering committee of 32 experts, with the NGO REC Slovakia playing a prominent role (for details go to <http://www.rec.sk>).

In the following seven months the synthesis report was reviewed and adapted in extensive internal (i.e. within the Ministry of Environment), public and inter-ministerial consultation processes, facilitating a website, seminars, conferences, public hearings, opinion polls and self-reflection. These consultation processes resulted in a final draft, approved by the Slovakian Government in October 2001 and by parliament in April 2002 (for the NSSD see <http://www.tur.sk>).

Scope and Structure:

The Slovakian NSSD, taking several background documents (like the Agenda 21 and Rio +10) into account, asks the following four questions:

- a. Where are we?
- b. Where do we go?
- c. Where do we want to go?
- d. How do we want to get there?

These questions are answered with analyses (ad a), assessments and scenarios (ad b), a vision and a strategy (ad c) and an action plan (ad d). In other words: The Strategy starts with definitions, principles and a 3-pillar vision. On this basis it proceeds with an analysis of the present state of society (other strategies, problems, trends) and of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) in various policy areas. These analyses and three scenarios are the basis for the strategic part of the NSSD, including 8 long-term priorities, 28 specific objectives, about 230 recommendations for specific target groups and numerous policy instruments.

Implementation and Monitoring:

In the resolution by which the NSSD was adopted by the Government, 38 concrete tasks (including deadlines and responsibilities) were formulated as a kind of action plan for the period 2002-05. The resolution by which the NSSD was passed by parliament requires the Government to report annually on activities set and results achieved. As the Annex of the NSSD lists indicators, taken from the UN Commission of SD, they should play a prominent role thereby. An additional monitoring mechanism can be seen in the fact that whenever the Government submits draft legislative acts to parliament, it has to provide information on how NSSD objectives have been incorporated.

The Slovakian example shows how top-down and bottom-up mechanisms can play together effectively, given there is enough time for a transparent elaboration process.

9. Sustainable Development Forum (Switzerland)

This example shows how SD policies in a highly decentralized country can be coordinated in a non-hierarchical way. It is of relevance to those who want to know how networks can push a policy process not only through the exchange of information, but also because they provide a stage for those more active than others.

Context:

Switzerland is a federal country with Cantons and communities playing a central role in many SD policy fields (like energy, transport, spatial planning and social policy). Therefore SD can be achieved only through multi-level governance. Whereas communities set numerous Local Agenda 21 activities and the Federal Council has approved a NSSD in March 2002 (<http://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/nachhaltig/index.html>), calling for an involvement of civil society and sub-national public entities, the cantonal level shows only little SD policy efforts so far. Nevertheless best-practice examples and lessons learned should be shared between all governmental levels. To facilitate this kind of domestic policy learning is one of the purposes of the Swiss Sustainable Development Forum.

What is the Sustainable Development Forum?

The Sustainable Development Forum is made up by the Federal Government, all Cantons and larger cities. It is a platform, established to support SD at the cantonal and municipal level in line with the Federal Council's SSD. The Forum serves the following four objectives:

- Adoption of common targets (e.g. quantitative LA21 targets for Cantons and cities)
- Exchange of information and best practices
- Benchmarking
- Coordination of common projects (like a common set of SD indicators)

The unique feature of the Forum is the common, non-hierarchical leadership by the Confederation, the Conference of cantonal Governments and the Swiss Towns Association.

How does the Forum work?

One of the major challenges was to bring Cantons and towns into the Forum without financial support or incentive. However, the foundation of the Forum was driven by a couple of very active Cantons and towns, willing to share their experiences. These actors, even further encouraged by the appreciation of the Confederation, created a certain political pressure on the others to participate as well.

Outlook:

The Forum shows clearly how important it is that SD activities are set on all governmental levels, although by now they have more the character of projects than of a well established policy. As the current economic and budgetary crisis may imply a setback for SD activities it is to hope that active Cantons and towns are able to create a supply-push force strong enough to make others follow their example. By providing a stage for active SD actors the Forum proved to be a platform for good practice exchanges in a very broad sense, including mere political agenda setting.

10. Embedding Sustainable Development in Defra (United Kingdom)

Many Environmental Ministries struggle with integrating SD across other ministries within their Government. This example shows that establishing a common understanding of SD has to start in Environment Ministries. One way of achieving this is a department-specific SSD.

Context:

The UK SSD “A better quality of life” (http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/uk_strategy/index.htm) was adopted by the Government in May 1999. Defra, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs leads the UK strategy process and has the following “delivery target”: “To promote sustainable development across Government and the country as a whole as measured by achieving positive trends in the Government’s headline indicators of sustainable development.” In order to live up to its leading role, Defra tries to establish a common understanding of SD among its employees and to embed SD in its own work. This is done by a SD strategy for the Department itself and a corresponding implementation campaign.

Embedding SD with a departmental SD strategy:

Defra’s SD strategy “Foundations for our Future” doesn’t aim at the UK Government, but at its own people. It sets out the principles and processes by which Defra will work to advance its vision of SD policies. The departmental SD strategy

- Sets the UK strategy’s ten principles for SD in context for Defra;
- Introduces an Integrated Policy Appraisal tool to improve policy and decision making for SD;
- Identifies key departmental indicators to measure progress on relevant policies and
- Includes commitments to annual reporting and review.

The Defra strategy is campaigned throughout the own department in order to change the culture of the organisation. This campaign encompasses the following activities:

- Group discussions (some facilitated by professional consultants and modified from setting to setting in order to meet the special needs of certain groups) received excellent reviews for their participative and innovative style, moving beyond the traditional information cascade.
- Discussions result in group action plans, feeding into their conventional business plans.
- SD contact points were established (e.g. by bringing them together through an away day) in order to strengthen the network.
- Best practice examples were made known throughout the department as so-called spotlight projects.
- A Workshop for the Defra senior management, drawing out their common understanding and commitment to SD should be considered.

Outlook:

The UK SSD will be reviewed in 2003. On the basis of this review a revised strategy will be worked out until 2005. Accordingly, also the Defra strategy needs to be reviewed. A core question of this review is whether the Defra strategy led to an increase in awareness and understanding of SD amongst staff and how this has affected their work.

It is to hope that a better understanding of SD within a key ministry leads to a better understanding in the rest of the Government, and consequently also in the general public.

11. Influencing UK Government spending

Fiscal considerations always play a crucial role in policy processes of any kind. Therefore UN and OECD guidelines require NSSDs to pay attention to budgetary details. The UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) follows two promising ways of shaping government spending according to SD objectives: a co-operation with the Finance Ministry in the spending round and the “New Opportunities Fund”. This example is relevant for those who are looking for ways of aligning fiscal policy with SD.

Context:

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Defra leads in the UK Government on SD. Within Defra the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) is responsible for promoting, developing, implementing and monitoring the UK’s SSD process. Of course SDU has to work with other Government departments to meet its objectives. One co-operation turned out to be a very powerful driver of SD: the one with the HM Treasury, the UK Finance Ministry.

Spending Round 2002 and SD:

UK Government spending decisions are made every two years. These so-called spending rounds set spending limits for Departments on the basis of their business plans. In 2002 Defra’s SDU worked with HM Treasury to make SD a key theme of the spending round. Government Departments had to produce SD reports, explaining how their top objectives would contribute to achieving SD. The HM Treasury held meetings with Departments to discuss the quality of the reports before funding decisions were made. In general the Spending Round 2002 made Departments not only thinking about the wider SD impact of their policies, but moreover led to new actions.

New Opportunities Fund:

The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) obtains its money from the National Lottery and awards grants to education, health and environment projects on the community level throughout the UK, but particularly in disadvantaged areas. Since 1998 the Fund raised and distributed about €4.5 billion. To make sure that NOF projects are in line with SD principles, the SDU and the NOF are working together. This co-operation led to a checklist of SD criteria, helping to embed SD in all funded projects. Moreover SDU helps to define grant round priorities which are in line with SD.

Outlook:

As the co-operation between Defra’s SDU and the HM Treasury in the Spending Round 2002 turned out to be a powerful tool of SD implementation throughout the Government, the co-operation is planned to be repeated in 2004. Challenges are to improve (SD) guidance for Departments and to increase the transparency of the process.

The key challenge with the NOF is to ensure that the communities that would benefit most from funding are able to apply in a way that they really receive grants. As this is not always the case, capacity building is necessary.

III. Transferring good practices: Implications of the policy learning theory

As already mentioned in the Workshop Summary the primary purpose of the LISSTRA Workshop was to facilitate exchange of knowledge and experiences among European experts on SSDs. Based on the assumption that there is a great deal to learn from the successes and shortcomings in other countries' NSSD processes, the Workshop organisers sought to bring together those who are responsible for SSDs and establish a network among them. The exchange of success stories was given special attention in the Workshop's agenda item "Innovation Market Place".

Of course the exchange of experiences is not supposed to be an end in itself, but ought to improve policies in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore we want to conclude this report about good practices with a brief theoretical exploration of two concepts relevant in this context, i.e. policy transfer and policy learning. Conclusions relevant for the LISSTRA Workshop series and the European SSD Network are emphasized in boxes at the end of each chapter.

Although the concepts of policy transfer and policy learning are around since the early 1970s² they became a major research focus in comparative political science not before the 1990s. This may be one of the reasons why the terminology is not clear yet: While there are many different concepts of policy learning advocated by various scholars (see figure 1 below), some try to pull them together to a single theory, referring e.g. to the concept of policy transfer.³ As the various learning concepts are rather complementary than exclusive, generating such a synthesis makes sense (see chapter 1 below). A fruitful way of doing so is by organizing policy learning or transfer analyses around a couple of questions, raised in the Policy Transfer Framework proposed by Dolowitz and Marsh.⁴ Some of the key questions are addressed in the following chapters.

1. *Transfer objects: What is transferred?*

Dolowitz and Marsh define policy transfer as "process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system."⁵ This widely accepted definition, embracing various policy learning concepts, clearly focuses on the objects transferred and can be illustrated with a heuristic model, bringing together the key elements of policy processes (in quadrangles) and various

² A very influential work on policy learning was Hecló, H. (1974): *Social Policy in Britain and Sweden*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

³ A good example for such trials are Bennett, C.J. & Howlett, M. (1992): "The lessons of learning: Reconciling theories of policy learning and policy change", in: *Policy Sciences*, 25, 275-294; Evans, M. & Davies, J. (1999): "Understanding Policy Transfer: A Multi-Level, Multi-Disciplinary Perspective", in: *Public Administration*, 77/2, 361-385.

However, using the concept of policy transfer as common roof for different notions of policy learning is not undisputed. Some researchers see policy transfer rather as a subset than a common roof of the policy learning theory (see Wolman, H. & Page, E. [2002]: "Policy Transfer among Local Governments: An Information-Theory Approach", in: *Governance*, 15/4, 477-501). As learning most often involves some kind of information transfer, the purpose of this paper allows us to use them as synonyms.

⁴ See Dolowitz, D.P. & Marsh, D. (2000): „Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making“, in: *Governance*, 13/1, 9.

⁵ Dolowitz, D.P. & Marsh, D. (2000): „Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making“, in: *Governance*, 13/1, 5.

concepts of policy learning (in ovals; see figure 1): While Halls concept of “social learning” focuses on basic processes of learning and change in societies (i.e. the rise and fall of Keynesianism), others concentrate on institutional reforms (“organisational learning”), political ideas, goals and programs (“lesson drawing”) or policies and policy instruments (“policy-oriented learning”).⁶

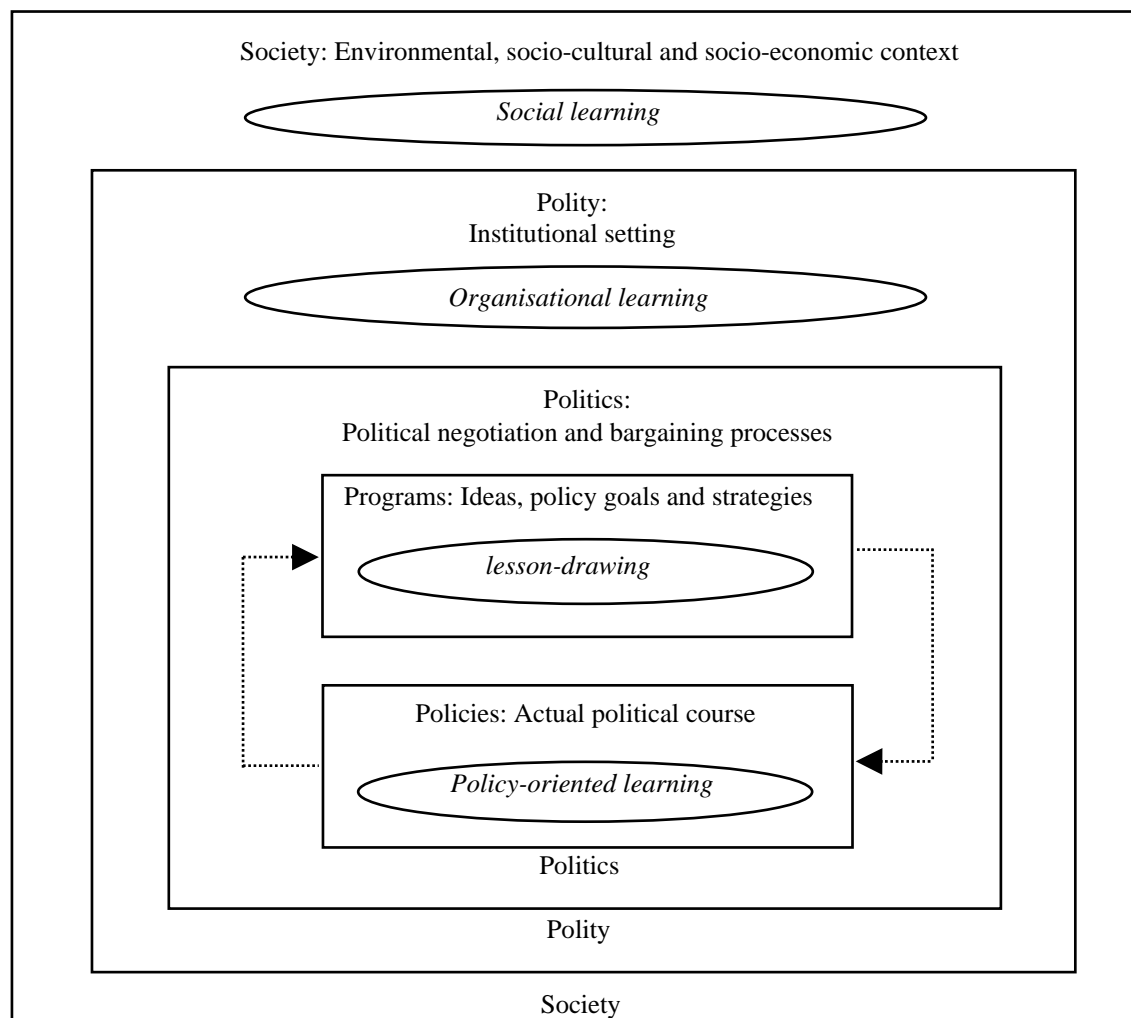


Fig. 1: Heuristic model of policy processes and respective policy learning processes

Conclusions regarding an NSSD network:

As section II of this paper has shown the SSD network clearly embraces all policy learning objects, i.e. (1.) institutional aspects, (2) ideas, goals and programs as well as (3) policies and policy instruments. By including civil society issues in the working group topics of the Vienna Workshop it (4) even addressed basic learning processes on the societal level. However, so far the network addresses the four learning objects on the level of experience exchange only. Yet, the important this initial step of policy transfer is, the latter always implies implementation in one way or another (see chapter 5 in this section). **Against this background we suggest not only to provide some kind of Good Practice Information on a**

⁶ A very good overview on the different policy learning concepts is given by Bennett, C.J. & Howlett, M. (1992): "The lessons of learning: Reconciling theories of policy learning and policy change", in: Policy Sciences, 25, 275-294.

regular basis (either as Internet Database or as periodic Innovation or Good Practice Guide. In addition also policy transfer experiences, triggered by the SSD network, should be made explicit (e.g. in a Policy Transfer Internet Forum) because such information strengthens the network (for another reason, see chapter 3). If the network is not able to trigger policy transfer in one way or another it may neglect some critical topics and issues or exclude key institutions and/or key decision makers.

2. *Transfer subjects: Who is involved?*

Policy transfer can be driven by politicians, civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs, international and supranational institutions, the media, corporations, consultants and researchers (i.e. think tanks). As especially the political scientist Paul Sabatier stresses, a loose group of actors often works together towards a common goal in so-called “advocacy coalitions”.⁷

Conclusions regarding an NSSD network:

The European SSD network is largely made up by civil servants from Environment Ministries (a few from DG Environment), dealing with SD on the national, the EU and the interface level. The following options of enlarging the network should be considered: (1) Representatives from the regional/local level which are important for NSSD processes should be involved at least occasionally (e.g. in thematic Workshops). (2) The same is true for representatives from other Ministries (like Economic Affairs and Finance). (3) Accordingly several DGs (besides DG Environment especially the DGs Budget, Transport and Agriculture) could play a role in the network too (see also chapter 4). (4) Not only occasional Workshops, but also permanent networks are likely to benefit from external consultants.

3. *Transfer motives: Why does policy transfer happen?*

The answer to this question covers a continuum between “want to” and “have to”; in other words: Policy transfers happen voluntarily, coercively or because of something in between, i.e. on the basis of negotiations, membership or treaty obligations. Behind the “want to” side is often the motive of increases in efficiency and effectiveness. Though, another reason for voluntary policy transfer (especially in relation with organisational learning) is the fact that “copied changes” often provide more legitimacy than genuine ones.⁸

Although treaty obligations may seem to be coercive, they are somewhere in the middle of the continuum – as long as there was the choice to join an organisation (like the EU) and/or a certain treaty (like the Maastricht Treaty) in the first place. In those cases it makes sense to speak of “obligated transfers”.

As the signatories of the Agenda 21 committed themselves to develop Strategies for Sustainable Development, NSSDs themselves are a good example for obligated transfers. However, because they are driven by international pressure rather than by treaty enforcement power, this kind of obligated transfer is rather on the “want to” side.

⁷ Sabatier, P.A. (1998): “The advocacy coalition framework: revisions and relevance for Europe”, in: Journal of European Public Policy, 5/1, 98-130.

⁸ See Radaelli, C.M. (2000): “Policy Transfer in the European Union: Institutional Isomorphism as a Source of Legitimacy”, in: Governance, 13/1, 25-43.

Conclusions regarding an NSSD network:

While NSSDs are the result of obligated policy transfers, the initiators of the 2002 The Hague and the 2003 Vienna NSSD Workshop try to support information exchange (and subsequently policy transfer) on a voluntary basis. In the long run such a voluntary project relies on some form of benefits. A crucial benefit is when participants observe that their networking activities add value to their work. Against this background we encourage “SSD networkers” to document learning and transfer processes not only because such a transparency strengthens the network itself (see chapter 1 in this section). As transparency regarding policy transfers is likely to reveal some lessons learned (as we emphasize in chapter 6, transferring a policy from one context to another most often teaches some interesting lessons), others are given the chance to benefit not only from the original, but also from transfer experiences. In other words: **As soon as policy transfer takes place it is important to expand the exchange of information and experiences correspondingly.**

4. Policy Transfer Pathways: From where to where?

Policy transfer can take place between and even within the international, supranational, national, regional and local level, summing up to 25 policy transfer pathways encompassing the past as well as the present. Policy transfer within e.g. the national level means that actors can learn either from other national institutions within their own country or from other countries. Only day-to-day learning processes within an institution are normally not accounted for as policy learning.⁹

Conclusions regarding an NSSD network:

As the emergence of NSSD processes in general can be traced back to the Agenda 21 and as the European NSSDs are shaped by EU policies, they can be seen as prominent focal points of policy transfer between the international, the supranational and the national level. So far the SSD network mainly facilitates cross-national policy learning with some supranational elements. **As already mentioned in chapter 2 of this section it should be considered to involve especially the EU Commission - one of the key agents of policy transfer in Europe¹⁰ - more closely in the SSD network, both as participant and as supporter of the network. As the UN and the OECD play a central role in the worldwide diffusion of NSSDs we suggest to letting them benefit from the network and workshop activities.**

5. Degrees of Transfer

Richard Rose (and with him many other scholars) distinguishes four degrees of transfer: Copying (direct and complete transfer), emulation (transfer of certain elements of a program or policy), hybridization (transfer of elements of different policies as mixture) and inspiration (policy change inspired by practices elsewhere). Dolowitz and Marsh add that “while politicians tend to look for ‘quick-fix’ solutions and thus rely upon copying or emulation, bureaucrats, on the other hand, are probably more interested in mixtures”.¹¹

⁹ See Evans, M. & Davies, J. (1999): “Understanding Policy Transfer: A Multi-Level, Multi-Disciplinary Perspective”, in: Public Administration, 77/2, 367f.

¹⁰ See Radaelli, C.M. (2000): “Policy Transfer in the European Union: Institutional Isomorphism as a Source of Legitimacy”, in: Governance, 13/1, 26f.

¹¹ Dolowitz, D.P. & Marsh, D. (2000): „Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making“, in: Governance, 13/1, 13.

Conclusions regarding an NSSD network:

Regarding the appropriate degree of policy transfer there is of course no one size fits all. Sometimes copying may be required because a certain procedure works only with all elements in place; at other times it may be necessary to emulate or even hybridize various approaches to make them work in another context. When emulation or hybridization is required there are probably many ways which lead to successful transfers. However, all of them bear some risk of failure. In other words: The appropriate degree of policy transfer varies from case to case and can be determined by careful ex-ante and ex-post assessment only. If the proposed documentation of policy transfers would also pay attention to success factors of the example and to the degree of transfer applied, there were probably some more valuable lessons to learn about related factors of success and failure.

6. How to transfer policies successfully?

As mentioned already above there is no single answer to this crucial question. However, Dolowitz and Marsh raise three general points which at least can help to avoid failure: First, important information is missing or it is not obeyed by the transferring country, resulting in an *uninformed transfer*. Second, a transfer may be too selective, excluding crucial elements of a policy or a program (*incomplete transfer*). Third, “insufficient attention may be paid to the differences between the economic, social, political and ideological contexts” in the involved countries, leading to an *inappropriate transfer*.

How good various policy transfers really work and how they can be improved in the future needs to be assessed by professional evaluators case by case. Such reviews and evaluations could reveal success factors of policy transfer, relevant well beyond the single case studied. Unfortunately the policy transfer literature doesn’t tell much about this important point so far.

Conclusions regarding an NSSD network:

The assumption that successful policies in one country will be equally successful in another is wrong. Most often similar problems in different socio-economic contexts require tailored solutions. The fact that the three kinds of failures (uninformed, incomplete and inappropriate transfer) can be documented by researchers in ex-post evaluations helps to prevent them ex-ante in the future. Therefore the importance of evaluations can hardly be overestimated in this context. However, a precondition for such (process oriented) evaluations is that learning and transfer processes are made transparent. By doing so (i.e. **by supporting learning about policy learning**) the SSD network could lead to groundbreaking insights from which it would benefit the most.

7. Concluding remarks on policy learning in networks

What relevance does this theoretical excursion have for the SSD network? The most important points addressed in the boxes above can be summarized with the following seven points:

- Innovations and good practice examples should be circulated on a regular basis
- Policy transfers should be documented because such a documentation
 - Strengthens the SSD network
 - Provides additional information about the transfer of a particular policy
- The European Commission as key agent of policy transfer in Europe should play a prominent role in the SSD network, both as participant and as supporter

- As the UN and the OECD play a central role in the worldwide diffusion of NSSDs we suggest to letting them benefit from the network and workshop activities
- Not only occasional Workshops but also a network is likely to benefit from some kind of permanent support, be it a coordinating secretariat, an adequate IT (i.e. database) infrastructure or the service of external consultants. Secretariat services could be delivered by existing MS administrations and/or by external consultants
- Evaluations as well as process reviews of policy transfers can reveal valuable lessons concerning success factors
- By making policy transfers transparent (e.g. in a kind of policy transfer database) the SSD network would support learning about policy learning

In the long term networks which facilitate exchange of experiences and information need to be a positive sum game, i.e. they have to trigger some kind of learning effects, outweighing at least the transaction costs (especially time). Regarding the transaction costs most network participants face the following dilemma: “Ideally I would like to have a greater awareness of what’s happening elsewhere. But that’s very constrained by time and resources.”¹² These constraints given, the sum of the “game” can become or remain positive by following one of two basic strategies: First, a network can try to maximise learning effects. However, research suggests that this often requires close-knit networks or even policy communities, implying rather high transaction costs.¹³ The second strategy is to keep transaction costs for each member as low as possible. **To avoid that this strategy runs into diminishing learning effects, a network needs support. Such support can be provided by distinguished participants (like individual member states or the EU Commission) and/or by external consultants.** Transaction costs of learning processes can be kept low not only by regular Workshops, but moreover by a supported online forum (e.g. on policy transfer) and a regular Innovation or Good Practice Guide.¹⁴

In the last few decades political scientists observed a growing emphasis on informed and evidence-based policy making in the context of an increasingly competitive state.¹⁵ As policy learning processes address both major trends – the development of a globally linked knowledge society and the competition of ideas – they are supposed to play a key role in today’s political life. If the SSD network is able to maintain a good balance between transaction costs and benefits it will proof to be an important mechanism in this context.

¹² Wolman, H. & Page, E. (2002): “Policy Transfer among Local Governments: An Information-Theory Approach”, in: *Governance*, 15/4, 484.

¹³ Evans, M. & Davies, J. (1999): “Understanding Policy Transfer: A Multi-Level, Multi-Disciplinary Perspective”, in: *Public Administration*, 77/2, 374.

¹⁴ In a UK policy network on the local level, informal conversations proved to be the most useful channel of policy transfer ahead of regular publications (like government publications, good-practice guides, newsletters and practitioner journals) and seminars and conferences. For details, see Wolman, H. & Page, E. (2002): “Policy Transfer among Local Governments: An Information-Theory Approach”, in: *Governance*, 15/4, 485.

¹⁵ Sanderson, I. (2002): „Evaluation, Policy Learning and Evidence-Based Policy Making“, in: *Public Administration*, 80/1, 1-22.