

Call for Papers for a Special Issue of “**European Environment**” on the Topic

**Sustainable Development Strategies in Europe:
Taking Stock**

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Background

In compliance with UN requests (in particular with those formulated in the Agenda 21 and at the so called Rio +5 summit in New York), and a respective decision at the Gothenburg European Council in 2001, most EU member states have adopted a National Strategy for Sustainable Development in recent years, most of them on the occasion of the Johannesburg summit in 2002. With these strategies, countries are supposed to halt or reverse trends which conflict with the societal guiding model of sustainable development. As the Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992, paragraph 8.7) puts it, country-driven SD strategies should “ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations”.

First overview and country studies have shown, that, on the one hand, some of these new efforts of reshaping policies across sectors go well beyond former environmental policy plans, not just in terms of their thematic scope, but foremost because they resemble evolving rather than static strategy processes. In this sense, they facilitate, for example, inter-ministerial collaboration through the establishment of new coordination bodies, participatory governance arrangements (such as stakeholder dialogues or permanent SD councils) and policy learning through monitoring and evaluation schemes. On the other hand, however, it seems that the effectiveness of many SD strategy processes is limited because of a lack of political will and a rather weak ownership among administrators in non-environmental ministries.

Overall, the record of SD strategies seems to be ambivalent. Although up to now most strategies may have fallen short in effectively shaping SD and environmental policies it is important to note that even administered strategies can unfold political leverage in at least two respects. First, the iterative mechanisms they facilitate, from the SD strategy process in general to annual working plans or SD monitoring schemes in particular, can serve as a foot in the door to a government’s political agenda. Second, SD strategies give administrators some leeway in introducing innovative governance structures and mechanisms aiming at SD and EPI, at least as long as they comply with budget constraints. In this respect, SD strategies are at least a step away from one-off planning efforts in predominantly hierarchical governance settings, towards more strategic processes of networking and learning.

Since the implementation of SD strategies is well under way and since some countries (such as France, Austria and Switzerland) have evaluated their strategies very recently, it is a good

time to review the first implementation experiences. The key objectives of the special issue are to describe some key characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of selected SD strategies, to explore related governance structures and mechanisms (such as evaluation and monitoring schemes) more in depth, and to explore the possibilities of strategic management in the public sector. This stocktaking will give a preliminary idea of how effective SD strategies are in reshaping policies according to the objectives stated in the strategy documents, and how their performance could be improved.

Key themes and possible contributions

In the editorial we plan to highlight that SD is not only about the “what” but also about the “how” of policymaking, that is, about (new modes of) public governance. In addition we will sketch a brief history of environmental planning and SD strategies.

We invite authors to submit abstracts on the following issues:

- § Overview of SD strategies in Europe
- § National SD strategy country-studies that give an overview of several key aspects of SD strategies
- § Case studies on sub-national SD strategies and/or on linkages between the national and the sub-national tiers of government in the context of SD policies
- § Structures and mechanisms of inter-ministerial collaboration/horizontal integration that are facilitated by SD strategies (such as cross-sectoral working groups, SD work plans, green budgeting etc.)
- § Structures and mechanisms of stakeholder involvement, preferably in the context of SD strategy processes (National Councils for SD, stakeholder dialogues)
- § Monitoring, evaluation and/or (peer) review procedures related to SD strategies
- § Strategic management in the public sector (opportunities, challenges and limitations, good practice examples etc.)

Technicalities and schedule

Since we would like to publish the special issue of “European Environment” in late 2007 we are aiming at a relatively tight schedule. We ask those interested in contributing a paper to **submit an abstract** (200-300 words) to Reinhard Steurer **by 5 May 2006**. A selection process will then be put into motion and contributors whose abstracts are felt appropriate for the special issue will then be asked to submit **full papers with up to 7000 words by 30 September 2006**. The submitted papers will undergo a double-blind review process, at the end of which five papers will be chosen for the special issue. The paper submissions should follow the editorial guidelines of “European Environment”, which can be accessed at <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/jabout/5299/ForAuthors.html>

If we receive more high-quality abstracts than we will be able to include in the special issue we will consider to publish those that do not make it into the special issue either in an **edited book on “Governance and Sustainable Development”**, or the editors of “European Environment” may propose to publish them as single contributions in one of the following issues.

The guest-editors and contact details

Reinhard Steurer and Andre Martinuzzi are senior researchers at the Research Institute for Managing Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. We have published numerous articles on environmental policy making, national SD strategies, corporate sustainability, CSR and stakeholder management (in 2005, for example, we have published a paper on key characteristics of SD strategies in Europe in “Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy”). In February 2006, a consortium of five European countries commissioned us to establish and run the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) Office for an initial period of two years. The ESDN Office is aiming to facilitate the exchange of experience among public administrators responsible for SD strategies on an ongoing basis.

For further information about our projects, please visit www.sustainability.at. For further details on the special issue and for the submission of abstracts by 5 May 2006, **please contact** reinhard.steurer@wu-wien.ac.at.

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