



Poster-session, Salzburg

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Cooperation between the Flemish and environment and socio-economic councils: it takes two to tango

In Flanders, a council for sustainable development does not exist. Given the number of already existing or planned strategic advisory councils (11), it is the option of the Flemish government not to create one. This is a policy choice, formulated in the draft for the Flemish strategy for sustainable development.

Nevertheless the need for a structural debate between stake holders on SD-issues became very clear the last three years. Therefore, the Flemish socio-economic council (SERV) and the Flemish environmental council (Minaraad) chose to set up a joint venture. This implies that both councils started a formal cooperation on issues where the relationship between the three SD-dimensions is obvious and the stakes from the three points of view are high.

After a cautious start in 2004, the cooperation was strengthened in 2005, leading to a set of agreements on internal procedures and on external communication, once advices are endorsed. In the institutional context of Flanders, with the absence of an SD-council, this kind of structural cooperation between the environmental and the socio-economic council can be seen as a crucial instrument for the input of civil society in SD-policies and into more specific issues within an SD-context.

Of course, one can not be blind for the dark side of this cooperation-medal. The differences in culture and agenda-setting between both councils give problems now and then. This leads to a tango of two councils, with a series of push and pull movements. But some seem to like this way of dancing and in the end it gives added value any way.

The increasing productivity of the cooperation is an important indicator for this success: in 2004 we endorsed 2 advices and in 2005 we reached 9 joint advices. This year we produced already 4 advices but 7 others are 'under construction'. Apart from that, we

also organise joint debates and conferences (like on climate policy in 2005 and on strategic environmental assessment in June 2006).

To give an idea of the content of the cooperation, we give the headlines of a selection of joint advices Minaraad and SERV elaborated together.

- **Spatial planning (July 2004).** The councils emphasised in this advice that the role of spatial planning is twofold. In the first place it has to elaborate concepts concerning spatial quality, carrying capacity and sustainable land use. In the second place it has to organise effective procedures for balanced and responsible trade offs between the visions from specific sectors in society on land use. In this trade off, a debate with all policy fields and stake holders involved, is essential. Strategic advisory bodies play an important role in mobilising the views from these stake holders.
- **Integrated Water policy (February 2005).** A draft policy paper of the Flemish government did not provide the information and strategic vision which is needed. The councils found not all the targets, priorities and strategic headlines, which should be defined in a strategic paper on water policy. A more specific problem is the different concept of the paper, compared with the legislation on which it is based. The legislation uses the natural water system as concept, whereas the policy paper basically works with the water chain (between production and wastewater). A translation between both approaches is missing.
- **Rural policy (March 2005).** The councils supported the option to integrate the Flemish rural policy in a wider frame work of sustainable development, in coherence with the EU regulation. They asked for a balanced implementation of this option, not only on the level of target setting but also concerning the specific measures and the allocation of budgets. The councils asked the EU rural policy to create opportunities for rural areas under pressure of urbanisation. Given the specific role of 'urbanised' rural areas, Flanders needs a specific multifunctional approach in rural policy and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.
- **Governance for sustainable development (April 2005).** In a general advice on the institutional aspects of the SD-policy in Flanders, both council emphasized an 'incremental' approach. They preferred to 'steer' existing processes more towards sustainable development rather than creating new, parallel SD-processes. The most important is the 2001 Pact of Vilvoorde (the Flemish Lisbon-proces), in which government and stake holders agreed on 21 long term policy targets. This pact must be supplemented with an international dimension, give more room for 'SD-experiments' and include a plan for administrative reform. Essential parts of this reform are the establishment of a central unit for sustainable development, a

multi stakeholder forum and the reinforcement of the Flemish Parliament's involvement.

- **Recommendations of the climate conference (October 2005).** During several months, both councils organised an intensive and broad stakeholders conference on the Flemish climate change policy. Some strategic recommendations were: use the great reduction potential in buildings and mobility; give more attention to pricing measures and 'smart financing'; take care of an integrated policy for the development and promotion of renewable energy sources and look for a stronger interaction with innovation policy. The conference finally stressed that the new climate plan should already include a strategy with concrete actions for the post-2012 period.
- **EU thematic strategy on air (February 2006).** In this advice both councils pleaded for a strong European approach because tackling local air pollution with mainly domestic measures is problematic and much more expensive for small countries or regions. The councils also asked for additional measures to be taken after 2020, since the measures foreseen will not be sufficient to reach the long term targets of the strategy. What they have in mind are, for instance, stronger NO_x-standards and binding targets for fine particulate matter (PM 2,5), based on intensified research. They also warned for the risk of abuse of the derogation procedure by member states.