

Experiences with National Sustainable Development Strategies in Europe

the last 10 years and taking stock of the current situation

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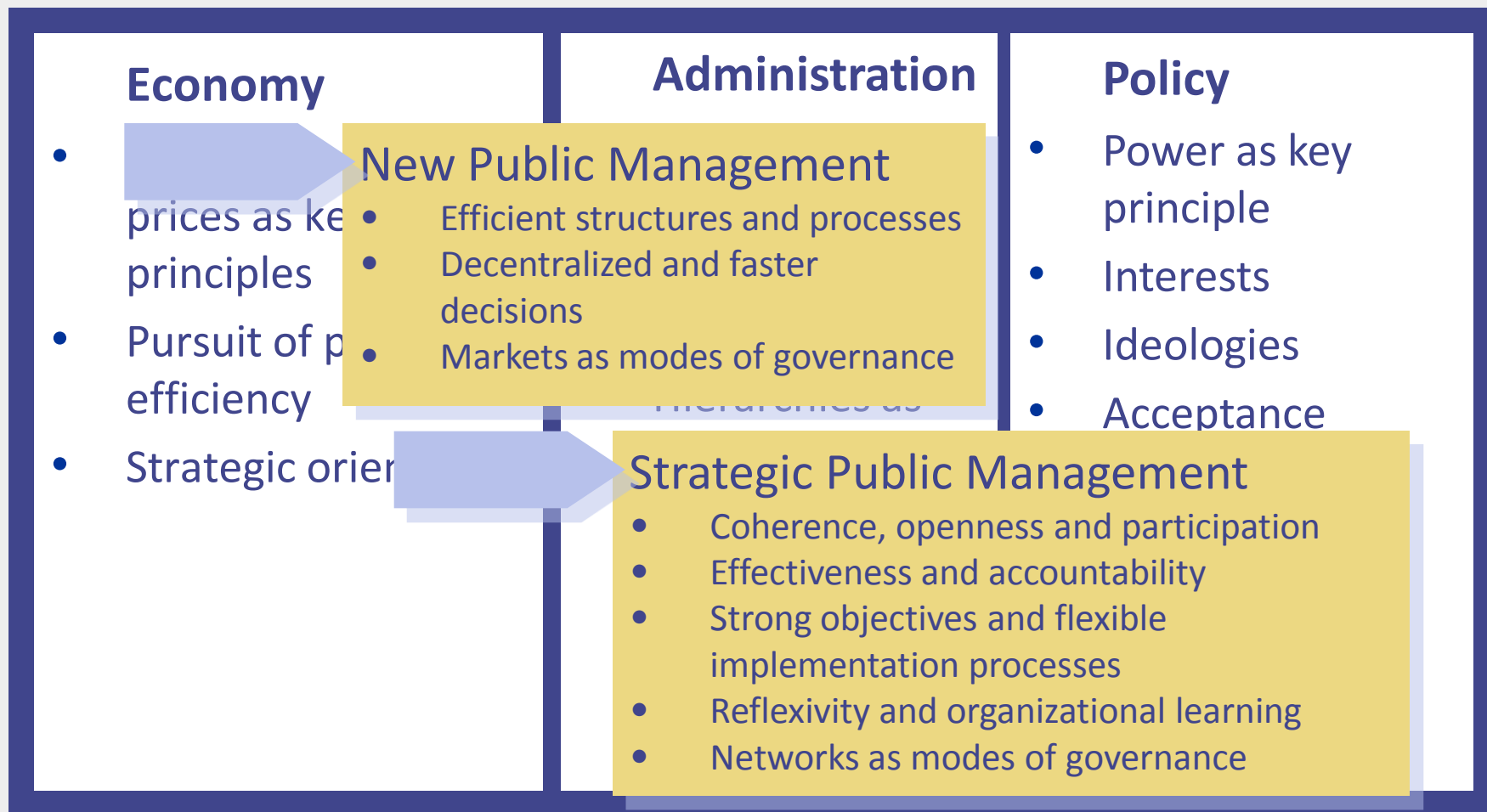
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Trends in Public Management



Key Characteristics of NSDSs

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

NSDSs and Governance

- a) achieve **better policy coordination and integration**
 - horizontally
 - vertically
 - temporally
 - across societal sectors

- b) NSDSs as a tool for **'reflexive governance'**
 - iterative processes and continuous learning
(not just a one-off exercise, but policy cycles)

- c) **vehicles for an ambitious governance reform**

The road to 2013



Europe 2020 changed the context

- **An overarching strategy** for all European policies
- “Mainstreaming Sustainability”
- Since then the EU SDS seems to have only **very limited impact**
- **What future is foreseen for the national SD strategies?**



The Rio+20 conference

Rio+20 Outcome Document Paragraph 98:

- **Develop and utilize** sustainable development strategies
- As **key instruments** for guiding decision-making and implementation of SD
- At **all levels** of government

Paragraph 101:

- need for more **coherent and integrated** planning and decision-making
- **strengthen** national, subnational and/or local institutions or relevant multi-stakeholder bodies and processes



RIO+20

United Nations Conference
on Sustainable Development

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Stock-taking of European NSDs

The **analysis** of 26 European countries is based on

- Country profiles on the ESDN homepage (updates May/June 2013)
- 2010 September ESDN Quarterly Report

Status quo and recent developments on:

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



1. Basic information about SD strategies

All 26 countries have a strategic SD policy planning tool in place:

- **23 countries have a National SD Strategy**
- **3 countries chose different forms (SLO, NL, UK)**

2011-2013: no activity at EU level but **12 European countries have been very active**: e.g. **Hungary** new NSDS 2013; in **France** and in **Finland**, new NSDS are expected to be launched before or right after summer 2013

Institutional anchoring: **responsibility usually with the national Ministries of Environment**; in some countries, coordination by the Prime Ministers Offices or State Chancelleries (e.g. DE, EE)

Coverage: **all three dimensions of SD**, but **more dimensions are highlighted** from international issues (e.g. AT) to governance (e.g. BE), culture (e.g. EE) and education (e.g. CZ)

2. Mechanisms of vertical integration

Coordinating and integrating SD strategies and policies **across different levels:**

Consultation activities: workshops or seminars (e.g. Finland), roundtables discussions (e.g. Austria), meetings (e.g. Germany), dialogues (e.g. Denmark), forums (e.g. Estonia)

Mechanisms to increase cooperation and coordination (both formally and informally) among different levels and as support for implementation (e.g. Austria, Finland, Germany, Switzerland)

Processes for awareness raising and for experience and information exchange (e.g. Hungary, Lithuania)

Several countries developed **institutionalised mechanisms** as councils, commissions, or other bodies, e.g. Switzerland with the 'Sustainable Development Forum')

3. Mechanisms of horizontal integration

Collaboration between the different ministries and administrative bodies on the national level for the delivery of SD policies.

- 1. Inter-ministerial bodies at the political level:** chaired by politicians or high-level administrators (e.g. Austria, Germany)
- 2. Inter-ministerial bodies at the administrative level:** representatives of national administration (ministries) led by Ministries of Environment (e.g. Finland, France)
- 3. Hybrid regimes:** enriched by participation and consultation processes of societal stakeholders like NGOs, business, academia, or civil society (e.g. Czech Republic)

Common functions:

- **coordination** purposes and **increase policy coherence**
- **advisory** and **supervisory** functions
- **political guidance and steering function**

4. Evaluation and review

Qualitative evaluations and reviews that assess SD strategy processes, policy instruments used and stakeholders involved

Internal reviews / progress reports - within the government ministries by an internal body responsible for the review process (e.g. Czech Republic, France);

External reviews - through private consultants or independent researchers: only few European countries conducted external reviews (e.g. Finland, Austria)

Peer reviews - share good practices and mutual learning :
conducted in **France, Norway, The Netherlands** and **Germany**;
Germany plans to conduct its next Peer Review in 2013

5. Indicators and monitoring

An assessment activity **based on a set of quantitative indicators**

Most countries have developed an SD indicator set ranging from 15 key indicators (e.g. France) to 155 indicators (e.g. Hungary), with an **average of 80 indicators**

In most countries the **national statistical offices** are responsible for the development and monitoring of SD indicators

Monitoring reports show the status and progress of SD within a country

Only few countries have developed regular SDI monitoring cycles (e.g. Switzerland)

6. Participation

Inclusion of a wide range of societal actors in the NSDSs processes

Although participation processes **vary among countries** in terms of the involvement of stakeholders and responsible institutions, they all display **common functions by providing space for debate, consultation and information exchange.**

All countries intend to broaden the involvement of stakeholder groups and civil society to **strengthen the ownership of NSDSs.**

Many countries have a **National Council on SD (NCSD):**
a multi-stakeholder mechanism to ensure participation of various stakeholders in policy-making (e.g. Finland, Germany)

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(UNOSD 2012 by Darren Swanson from IISD and ESDN QR Sept. 2010)

Weaknesses and constraints

1. Weak **political commitment towards sustainable development**: the EU SDS is a strategy with no political backing
2. The **current financial and budget crises** put several constraints on sustainable development policy
3. 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
4. Sustainable development is a complex and comprehensive concept that is **difficult to translate** into political practice and hard to understand for non-experts
5. 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, there are **trade-offs and losers**.
6. We **lack a visible, high-level champion**
(i.e. an Al Gore of sustainable development)

Reflections and points for discussion

Past experiences and future crucial dimensions

Important to take into account the six topics from the stock-taking

What role and future for national SD strategies in the new context?

The context in Europe changed in 2010 with the Europe 2020 strategy

European NSDSs, Rio+20 and the SDGs process

Reflect on the relationship between NSDSs and

- the new Rio+20 framework
- the work on the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)