

Strengthening environmental and sustainable development dialogues in Europe in the context of the 2030 SD Agenda

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13th ESDN Workshop – Discussion Paper



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Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| 1 Defining stakeholder participation | 5 |
| 1.1 Key principles of stakeholder participation processes | 5 |
| 1.2 Benefits and challenges of public participation | 8 |
| 1.3 Participation in SD strategy processes: a reference to major UN conferences | 10 |
| 1.4 The stakeholders' view on participation | 11 |
| 2 National experiences and the role of stakeholders engagement and participation in SD policies and strategies | 13 |
| 2.1 Participation processes in the context of National SD Strategies: the situation in Europe ... | 13 |
| 2.2 Stakeholder participation in France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland | 15 |
| References | 20 |

Introduction

This workshop discussion paper provides background information for the **13th ESDN Workshop**, entitled **“Strengthening environmental and sustainable development dialogue in Europe in the context of the 2030 SD Agenda”**, which takes place in **Paris on 12-13 November 2015**. This ESDN Workshop is a **joint event with the [EEAC Annual Conference 2015](#)**, “Civil Society and climate change: On the road to Paris”. Both events are organized in cooperation with the French Ministry for Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy.

The **13th ESDN Workshop** focuses on environmental and sustainable development (SD) dialogues in the context of the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The development and implementation of SD related policies take place in a **multi-actor, multi-level and multi-sectorial** context. Continuous **learning and adaption** of policies and need for political commitment to pursue long-term goal in an active and adaptive manner are needed. As much as necessary is **stakeholder participation and engagement** in the construction and implementation of SD strategies, policies and projects, but also into the decision-making process. In recent years, the environmental dialogue between policy makers and stakeholders has gained important momentum in France with the unique annual “conférences environnementale” that bring together all stakeholders around the ecological transition towards sustainable development.

The main aim of the 13th ESDN Workshop is, therefore, to take stock of European experiences of environmental and sustainable development dialogues in different countries and reflect upon how to improve stakeholder dialogues, also in the context of the 2030 Agenda for SD.

The workshop will comprise four sessions followed by the annual EEAC conference:

- **Session 1:** Role of stakeholders in environmental and sustainable development dialogues
- **Session 2:** National experiences with environmental and sustainable development dialogues
- **Session 3:** Advancing environmental AND sustainable development dialogues – big ideas AND recommendations
- **Session 4:** The role of environmental and sustainable development dialogues in Europe and beyond

The workshop discussion paper has the following structure: Chapter 1 concentrates on what is meant by stakeholder participation, its characteristics, challenges, and potential benefits in the context of sustainable development.

Chapter 2 provides an overview on how stakeholder participation is incorporated in SD policies and strategies at the national level in Europe. We first give a general picture and then present the experiences of four European countries: France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland.

A full documentation of the keynotes, discussions and group work at the workshop will be published in a workshop report shortly after the event.

1 Defining stakeholder participation

Chapter 1 describes what is meant by stakeholder participation in the context of sustainable development, the rationale behind it, and its main characteristics.

In brief, **'stakeholder participation'** refers to the inclusion of various stakeholders that can affect, or are affected by, the results of policy-making and decision-making processes. In general, a number of institutions and actors are invited to participate in such processes, for instance, civil society organisations/NGOs, business representatives, social partners (i.e. trade union, chambers of commerce, etc.), sub-national authorities, academia, individual citizens.

In general, the participation of different stakeholders in decision-making processes has been a central principle of sustainable development since the concept emerged. Morse and Bell (2010) describe two main arguments behind this rationale:

1. that stakeholders have a fundamental right to be included in deliberations that will have an impact upon their lives; and,
2. that listening to the voice of stakeholders and including them within a process of change can help make that change better.

Moreover, the ambiguity of the SD concept and its goals, and the need to adapt to changing circumstances calls for a constant redefinition and reinterpretation of SD principles. Jordan (2008) argues that in the absence of a "centrally determined blueprint for sustainable development, its practical meaning will necessarily have to emerge out of an interactive process of **societal dialogue and reflection**. If this is the case, systems of governance will be needed to guide and steer these collective discussions towards a satisfactory level of consensus....resolve conflicts and to arrive at coordinated policies"(Jordan, 2008).

Sustainable development thus calls for decision-making that has an adaptive and participatory character to account for changes and uncertainty, harness different types of knowledge, and foster cooperation and shared objectives.

Participation has been in fact a central component of various policy documents. For instance, Agenda 21 put great emphasis on local community participation as a means of implementation (UNCED, 2002). The Rio+20 Outcome Document, 'The Future We Want', stresses its aim to 'enhance the participation and effective engagement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the relevant international forums and, in this regard, promote transparency and broad public participation and partnerships to implement sustainable development'(UN, 2012). Participatory arrangements of different stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, business, and academia in the policy-making process are thus a central steering tool for sustainable development governance.

1.1 Key principles of stakeholder participation processes

Several **key principles** describe the characteristics and reasoning of stakeholder participation processes in more detail (see for instance: Arbter et al. 2007; Duraiappah et al., 2005; Egger and Majeres, 1992; Hemmati et al., 2001):

- **Inclusion** of citizens or representatives of societal groups (stakeholders) who are affected by the results of a decision or a process;

- **Equal Partnership:** it should be recognised that every citizens and/or stakeholder representative has equal rights to participate in the process regardless of their status;
- **Increasing knowledge:** stakeholders possess different kinds of ‘knowledge’ (e.g. expert, regional/local or context specific knowledge) that can increase the understanding of certain issues;
- **Transparency:** all participants should contribute to create a climate of mutual trust, open communication and fair dialogue;
- **Access to information:** all participants should have access to relevant information and documents in the participatory process;
- **Ownership:** Involving stakeholders and citizens in participatory processes can increase their ‘ownership’ of the outcomes of participation;
- **Sharing responsibility:** each stakeholder should be provided with clear responsibilities and all stakeholders should have equal responsibility for decisions made in the respective participatory process;
- **Empowerment:** it should be clear from the beginning of the participatory process how much influence the participants have and what will be done with the results;
- **Process design:** the process design of participatory processes should take into account the duration of the participation and the resources required by all participants (e.g. personnel, time, budget, etc.);
- **Integrating in existing decision procedures:** Participatory processes in a representative democracy should be linked with existing decision procedures in order to clarify their role and status in the entire decision-making process.

The process principles outlined above can have different application practices in the policy process, depending on:

- (i) participation applied in the different **policy hierarchy levels**,
- (ii) the **different forms of participation**,
- (iii) the **degree of participation**,
- (iv) participation at the different political levels (**vertical participation**),
- (v) the **breadth of participation** and
- (vi) the **participation at different stages of the policy cycle**.

We will describe each of these six points in the following paragraphs:

(i) Policy hierarchy level

Participatory mechanisms can be applied at different policy hierarchies. Firstly, on the highest level in the development and/or implementation of **policies, strategies, overall concepts**, etc. which outline general objectives and policy goals. Secondly, participation can take place in the development/implementation of **plans and programmes** that define objectives and targets in specific policy fields. And thirdly, participation can take place in **projects** that have a clearly defined scope and specific running time.

(ii) Different forms of participation

Depending on the scope and objective of participation, there are different forms of participation processes. One can distinguish between:

- **ad-hoc forms** that are organised once for a specific purpose like, e.g. internet consultations, web-based debates, workshops, public hearings, conferences, presentations, round tables and dialogues, etc.

- **institutionalised forms** like, e.g. dialogues, partnerships, councils, committees, advisory groups, etc.
- **'hybrid forms'** are, for instance, councils or committees (e.g. national SD councils) supported by ad-hoc participation (e.g. forums, workshops and conferences addressing specific topics of SD).

(iii) Degree of participation

One can also distinguish participation mechanisms regarding the **intensity** with which stakeholder are involved. Several scholars have defined ways how to analyse this 'degree of participation'. For instance, Bass *et al.* (1995) developed six degrees of participation that are shown in Fig.1.1 below:

Fig 1.1: A typology of participation in policy processes and planning

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Participants are listening only</i> - e.g. receiving information from a government PR campaign or open database. 2) <i>Participants are listening and giving information</i> - e.g. through public inquiries, media activities, "hotlines". 3) <i>Participants are consulted</i> - e.g. through working groups and meetings held to discuss policy. 4) <i>Participation in analysis and agenda-setting</i> - e.g. through multi-stakeholder groups, round tables and commissions. 5) <i>Participation in reaching consensus on strategy elements</i> - e.g. through national round tables, parliamentary/select committees, and conflict mediation. 6) <i>Participants involved in decision-making on the policy, strategy or its components.</i> |
|--|

Source: Bass et al. (1995)

Another typology by Green & Hunton-Clarke (2003) distinguishes between informative, consultative and decisional participation:

- **Informative participation** describes processes that involve information being passed from one body to another. On the one hand, this includes the distribution of information from the central institution(s) to the stakeholders (e.g. websites, online reports, brochures etc.) in a one-way communication. On the other hand, it also includes processes with a two-way information exchange between the central institution(s) and the stakeholders (e.g. during information events, campaigns, etc.).
- **Consultative participation** refers to a higher-level of exchange between the central institution(s) and the stakeholders. At this level, the stakeholders are asked to contribute their views, knowledge and experiences at various stages of the policy process. Examples are consultation processes, round tables, dialogue forums, workshops, national SD councils, partnerships, etc. This form of participation not only comprises a stronger involvement of stakeholders, but also refers to issues like commitment in the process, resources applied, capacity-building, etc.
- **Decisional participation** describes mechanisms in which stakeholders participate in the decision-making process. This includes participation in actual political decision-making or in the preparation of political decisions. Examples are some national SD councils, sectoral policy dialogues, decisions on indicator sets, etc.

(iv) Vertical participation

Participation takes place at **different political levels**, i.e. on the supra-national (EU), national, regional and/or local level. Dalal-Clayton & Bass (2002) argue that in participatory processes at the supra-national and/or nation level, participation is often restricted to traditional stakeholder groups and 'classic' participatory mechanisms. In contrast, participation on the sub-national levels is often more interactive and innovative. Moreover, the motivation for stakeholder participation at the sub-national levels can be fostered by direct regional/local concern and experiences. The links between top-down and bottom-up dynamics in participation and the fostering of decentralised mechanisms as well as vertical integration itself are some of the main challenges of designing participatory processes.

(v) Breadth of participation (or horizontal participation)

This refers to the number of stakeholders involved in a participatory mechanism, i.e. how diverse and cross-boundary (e.g. cross-sectoral, inter-disciplinary, etc.) the set of involved stakeholders is. Based on Dalal-Clayton & Bass (2002), one can distinguish between:

- **Full participation:** All major sectors of society are involved, including individual citizens. Moreover, representatives of at least two political levels take part in the participation. There should be no administrative or technical restrictions in place (e.g. access to information, need of special technical equipment, etc).
- **Restricted participation:** Only some sectors of society are involved; individual citizens are not involved in participation. In most cases, not more than two political levels are involved. Administrative or technical restrictions can be in place. The central institution(s) define general terms for participation, including selection criteria.
- **Strongly restricted participation:** Only a selected few sectors of society are involved; individual citizens are not involved in participation. Not more than two political levels are involved. Administrative or technical restrictions are in place. The central institution(s) define clear terms for participation, including strong selection criteria.

(vi) Participation at different stages of the policy cycle

This characteristic refers to the three common stages of the policy cycle, i.e. participation in the **design, implementation, and review** of policies, strategies, programmes etc. Design refers to the drafting process of policies, strategies and programmes; implementation refers to those participatory mechanisms that are in direct relation to the implementation of policy or strategy objectives and the outcomes of those initiatives; and review refers to evaluating and monitoring the progress in achieving the objectives as well as to the further development of i.e. a policy, a strategy, a programme.

1.2 Benefits and challenges of public participation

Participatory processes can produce a number of **benefits** for the different stakeholders involved. Generally, these processes bring together people with different interests, views and ideas, who might otherwise have not cooperated. As they express their various perspectives, needs and experiences, a common pool of knowledge about the different aspects of a policy, strategy, plan,

programme or project is developed. The subsequent political decision process can then take this knowledge and the gathered ideas into account. The benefits of public participation processes differ regarding the involved stakeholders (Arbter et al, 2007):

- **Politicians** may acquire a *clearer picture of the needs* of different stakeholder groups and citizens. Participatory processes can render it easier to *accommodate conflicting interests* and promote the *culture of collaboration and dialogue*.
- **Public administrators** can benefit from stakeholder participation because issues have been discussed and worked out in *cooperation with stakeholders*. Therefore, administrators are less likely to be confronted with objections and subsequent complaints in the policy or strategy process. Moreover, participation may play an important part in *increasing stakeholders' trust in the administration*.
- **Business representatives** may benefit from bringing in their perspectives in the participatory process and, thereby, *influencing the development of policies and strategies*. Moreover, they are *informed about future developments earlier* and this may influence their business strategy and future activities.
- **Citizens or citizen representatives, incl. civil society organisations** have the chance to *present their ideas, views and thoughts* about a policy issue, strategy or project, and can influence the decision and policy processes. They also *gain up-to-date information and insights* into how decisions are reached.

Although there are many benefits of participatory processes, practical experiences show and research reveals (Steurer 2007) that establishing meaningful and effective exchange mechanisms between different stakeholders remains a **challenge**. Below we list some limits and costs of participatory processes and how they could be addressed (Arbter et al, 2007; Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002; UNEP, 2002):

- **Creation of unrealistic expectations:** To avoid this, the purpose and form of participation should be openly communicated in advance and it should be made clear that compromises are necessary in a process where conflicting opinions and interests meet.
- **Topics are too technical:** This is a risk stemming from omissions in the planning of participation. Obviously, special care needs to be taken to 'translate' a given problem into plain language and to provide participants the information they need to successfully participate.
- **Costs of resources, time and money:** Transaction costs of developing and maintaining institutional mechanisms for public participation, conflict resolution, time spent in meetings, costs for catering, transport and accommodation, etc., need to be taken into account.
- **Stakeholder selection and legitimisation of stakeholder groups:** This is one of the most sensitive elements of a participatory process. An open, transparent and profound stakeholder selection is necessary for successful outcomes.
- **Takeover of the process by dominant participants:** Careful design of public participation should ensure that participation is balanced, that all sides of the debate are heard.
- **Report on the outcomes of participatory processes:** Transparent and open public participation should also include a report about how the results of the participatory process have been used and an explanation when results were not used. This will potentially

increase efforts and costs, however, will contribute to the traceability of outcomes and trust of stakeholders involved.

1.3 Participation in SD strategy processes: a reference to major UN conferences

As we said before, participation has been a central component of various UN policy documents. We hereby expand on this notion and touch upon main references to main UN conferences until reaching the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In **Agenda 21**, the Action Programme adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992, includes a major reference to **stakeholder participation in the context of SD** (UNCED, 1992, para 23.2):

“One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. Furthermore, in the more specific context of environment and development, the need for new forms of participation has emerged. This includes the need of individuals, groups and organizations to participate in environmental impact assessment procedures and to know about and participate in decisions, particularly those which potentially affect the communities in which they live and work. Individuals, groups and organizations should have access to information relevant to environment and development held by national authorities, including information on products and activities that have or are likely to have a significant impact on the environment, and information on environmental protection measures.”

During the decades following the adoption of Agenda 21, the principle of stakeholder participation has been implemented into many processes of international SD governance, especially the UN system (i.e. the work of the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Habitat and UNAIDS programmes). Generally, stakeholder participation is identified as an objective in its own right and a fundamental equity principle of SD (UN, 2002).

More recently, the **Rio+20 Outcome Document**, ‘The Future We Want’, stressed its aim to ‘*enhance the participation and effective engagement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the relevant international forums and, in this regard, promote transparency and broad public participation and partnerships to implement sustainable development*’ (paragraph 76) (UN,2012).

In the months following Rio+20, the formulation of the SDGs itself was characterized by a particular effort to engage with different stakeholders and enhance the process through extensive public consultations. In the recently adopted the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the current goals and targets are the result of “*over two years of intensive public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world, which paid particular attention to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable*”(paragraph 6) (UN, 2015).

In the chapter on ‘**means of implementation**’, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the general role of stakeholders in the implementation phase: “We acknowledge the role of the diverse private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals, and that of civil society organizations and philanthropic organizations in the implementation of the new Agenda.” (paragraph 41). In addition, the 2030 Agenda outcome document refers to the necessary close cooperation between governments and public institutions and stakeholders in achieving the Agenda’s objectives: “Governments and public institutions will also work closely on

implementation with regional and local authorities, subregional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others.” (paragraph 45) (ibid.).

There is an emphasis on participation also in the different SDGs, as for instance SDG 6, ‘Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all’ has the sub goal 6.b that reads *“support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management”*. Another example is SDG 16 to ‘Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’ also has clear references to participation: *“Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance”* (16.8) (ibid.).

Furthermore, the document stresses **multi-stakeholder partnerships** as a way to engage with and enhance cooperation between different stakeholders. For instance, this is described in SDG 17.16: *“Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries”*. The rationale for a call to involve different stakeholders is **sharing of knowledge, the co-creation of new knowledge, and providing adequate finance**. Furthermore, partnerships between different stakeholder groups are also seen as an **effective tool of implementation** and this *“public, public-private and civil society partnerships”* (target 17.17) are encouraged.

Finally, the document also commits itself to **participation in the follow-up and review process**: *“The HLPF will support participation in follow-up and review processes by the major groups and other relevant stakeholders in line with Resolution 67/290. We call on these actors to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda”* (paragraph 89) (ibid.). Stakeholder participation is thus seen as positive at all stages of the policy process, from the formulation of objectives and policies, to implementation, and monitoring and reviewing.

1.4 The stakeholders’ view on participation

Tackling the transformative challenges of sustainable development requires and will be only achievable with the **full engagement and participation of a great variety of stakeholders in a constructive partnership**. Various stakeholders are needed at all stages of the sustainability cycle in order to contribute to the identification of goals and targets, as co-producers of the policies and measures needed to achieve the objectives as well as actions needed to change unsustainable practices and behaviours, as co-participants in monitoring and review processes in the form of ‘joint guardians’ and ‘watchdogs of progress’ (Osborn, 2015).

In a nutshell, the relevance of stakeholder participation is to be found first of all in their different forms of **knowledge**, or even **concerns** that they could bring on the table. On the other hand, in order to make use of their knowledge, a **democratic process** taking care of involving stakeholders and their interests is vital. Furthermore, **transparency** in decision making in the sense of **access** to

information and making the participation in an **open dialogue** are preconditions for effective stakeholder involvement and SD implementation (Stakeholder Forum, 2015; Osborn, 2015).

As far as the implementation of SDGs at EU level and at the national level is concerned, the engagement of stakeholders is, therefore, an essential need. As mentioned, the **necessity for new knowledge** is one of the major reasons for stakeholder participation. New knowledge on climate change, energy, resource efficiency, circular economy and the linked questions of air pollution, health, vehicle emissions and transport as well as new thinking about sustainable cities, about water and oceans is urgently required (Osborn, 2015). In this respect, various stakeholders are needed to **enabling and encouraging the SD debate**, and to **highlighting areas where new efforts are indispensable**. Therefore, modalities for stakeholder engagement should be considered and built so that stakeholders can themselves build up their capacity to engage productively at each stage of the sustainability cycle in a consistent and coherent way (Osborn, 2015).

So, what do stakeholders need in order to carry out their roles and to find a common consensus?

In order to support stakeholder participation, and a transformational sustainable development agenda, the following stakeholders' needs are to be considered:

- **Raise awareness** in order to improve stakeholders' understanding and recognition of the value of the new agenda for SD. The more stakeholders are involved in the process, the more inclusive the whole implementation of the agenda will be, therefore, enhancing communication between all stakeholders from civil society, governments and the media to raise awareness of the process and its importance.
- **Increase engagement** implies to provide opportunities and modalities for everyone to contribute their views.
- **Empower stakeholders** means to improve their ability to participate and influence, therefore, they need to be well-equipped to influence key processes and actors.
- **Coordinate advocacy** aims at increasing the visibility, inclusivity and impact of advocacy activities and policy responses.
- **Strengthen governance** that engages all stakeholders and provides transparency, guarantees access to information and justice as well as strengthens accountability (Stakeholder Forum, 2015).

2 National experiences and the role of stakeholders engagement and participation in SD policies and strategies

Chapter 2 provides an overview on how stakeholder participation is incorporated in SD policies and strategies by the national level in Europe. We first give a general picture and then we present the experiences of four European countries: France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland.

2.1 Participation processes in the context of National SD Strategies: the situation in Europe

Participation is and needs to be a **key element of SD strategy processes**. It has been addressed at various levels. For instance, Agenda 21 outlines that National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) “should be developed through the widest possible participation” (UNCED, 1992, para 8.7). Thus, public participation is included as an important element in UN and OECD guidance documents for preparing NSDS (UN, 2002; OECD, 2001).

Participation is also addressed by several of the policy guiding principles in the renewed EU SDS of 2006:

- **Open and democratic society:** “Guarantee citizens’ rights of access to information and ensure access to justice. Develop adequate consultation and participatory channels for all interested parties and associations” (European Council, 2006, 4).
- **Involvement of citizens:** “Enhance the participation of citizens in decision-making. Promote their education and public awareness of sustainable development. Inform citizens about their impact on the environment and their options for making more sustainable choices” (European Council, 2006, 5).
- **Policy coherence and governance:** “Promote the coherence between all European Union policies and coherence between local, regional, national and global actions in order to enhance their contribution to sustainable development” (European Council, 2006, 5).

Participatory tools and mechanisms can be found in the preparation, implementation and review of NSDSs in most EU Member States. In this context, 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 NSDSs. 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 the 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.

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 (NCSO)**, 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) (see chapter 2.2).

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 (see chapter 2.2). *Hungary* distributes emails with requests of participation to professionals, organizations, governmental and civil spheres who are then meeting up in a series of panel discussions. *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.

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 (please refer to chapter 2.2).

2.2 Stakeholder participation in France, Finland, Germany and Switzerland

In this chapter, we present four examples of stakeholder participation of four countries in Europe: France, Finland, Germany, and Switzerland. The information provided for each country is based on input received from representatives of the respective participation mechanisms.

France: Environmental dialogues, la Conférence environnementale and the National Council for ecological transition

The context

The governance around environmental public policies came to a turning point in France in 2007 with the “**Grenelle de l'Environnement**”. The “Grenelle de l'environnement” was a wide participatory process, with representatives from the state, local authorities, federations of employers, trade unions and NGOs. Today, the governance for defining, implementing and monitoring environmental public policies provides for the participation of those stakeholders that gathered since 2013 in the **National Council for Ecological Transition (CNTE)**. The CNTE is composed of 50 members of various organizations, divided into 6 official bodies which have the right to vote, and which represent federations of employers, trade unions, members of Parliament (including members of European Parliament), local authorities, environmental NGOs, and other associations. There is also a body of 8 “associated members” with no right to vote, but which take part to all CNTE activities. Under the law, the CNTE is consulted on:

1. Bills concerning primarily environment or energy policies;
2. National strategies for sustainable development, biodiversity and development of corporate social and environmental responsibility.

Consultation of the CNTE leads to a vote that will be the opinion of the CNTE. This opinion does not legally bind the government's decision, but it is made public and thus plays a strong role in governmental decisions. Within the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable development and Energy, the Sustainable Development Delegation (SDD) provides the secretariat of the CNTE and is responsible for coordinating the organization of the Environmental Conference, which we describe in more detail below.

A French feature for environmental dialogue: The Environmental Conference

Since 2012, when the French President of the Republic established it, the **Environmental Conference ('la Conférence Environnementale')** is an annual event that aims to set governmental priorities for ecological transition, after consultation with stakeholders. The government commitments at the end of the Environmental Conference are gathered into a roadmap for ecological transition. CNTE's stakeholders are the privileged interlocutors of the government in the preparation and negotiation of the roadmap during the Environmental Conference, and also in the monitoring of its implementation. So far, three Environmental Conferences have been held in 2012, 2013 and 2014:

- The 2012 Environmental Conference dealt with 5 themes (Energy, Biodiversity, Environmental health risks, Funding and taxation, Governance) and led to 84 measures, which formed the governmental priorities for ecological transition. For instance, the new

French law on energetic transition comes directly from the National Debate on Energetic Transition that was a measure taken through the Environmental Conference process.

- The 2013 Environmental Conference also dealt with 5 themes (Circular economy, Employment, Water policy, Marine biodiversity, Sustainable development education). The theme “Employment” was a proposition of the CNTE. In total, 50 new measures were decided in 2013.
- The 2014 Environmental Conference dealt with 3 themes (COP21, Transport, Environment and health). The theme “Transport” was proposed by the CNTE. A total of 75 new measures were decided in 2014.

The year 2015 is a turning point in Environmental Conference’s cycle: the process of the three successive conferences was improved from one year to the next, and the year 2014 gave satisfaction on all points. Currently, the time is up to take stock of the French practice of the Environmental Conference in order to examine the follow-up to be given to this major annual event for ecological transition.

Finland: a multi-stakeholder model for Sustainable Development

The context

Finland has a long tradition in developing and implementing strategies and programmes for sustainable development. The key mechanism has been the **Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD)** which was established in 1993, shortly after the first Rio Conference on SD. The Commission has continued to operate without interruption for 22 years now.

The Finnish Commission on Sustainable Development shows a **hybrid governance model**: it combines high-level leadership with broad-based participation. The 45 members of the Commission represent all spheres of the society. The Commission includes **ministers** and **high-level civil servants** from ministries working on sustainable development issues, **parliamentarians**, and a wide spectrum of **representatives from Finnish civil society**, business and industry, academia, trade unions, churches and scientific institutions. In autumn 2015, the Commission’s working methods will be renewed in order to make the meetings even more participatory. The **FNCSD meets 2-4 times per year**. In addition, the Commission prepares **seminars and workshops** in order to boost dialogue between stakeholders and produce innovative policies and solutions for the Finnish society: such seminars and workshop are held usually between 2 to 4 times per year.

All these years, the Finnish **Prime Minister** (or other ministers of the national government) has led the work of the Commission. Recently, with the change of the Government in spring 2015, the new Prime Minister, Juha Sipilä, has taken the reins. The challenge is now increasing with the 2030 Agenda for SD and the SDGs to be implemented, monitored and reviewed.

In 2013, the Finnish Innovation Fund, Sitra, established [an expert panel](#) alongside the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD). Such an **expert panel** on sustainable development brings a scientific perspective to politics. The panel prepares, challenges and evaluates the Commission's work and political decision-making. The SD expert panel comprises professors of

social, environmental, consumer, welfare policy and a senior vice president of finance and pension policy.

An inter-ministerial network secretariat prepares and supports the work of the FNCSD on a day-to-day basis and convenes about 8 times per year. The network secretariat now comprises about 20 members from 11 ministries as well as partners from Sitra, the Finnish funding agency for technology and innovation Tekes, the military headquarters and the defense administration, each taking the lead in preparing themes within their area of expertise.

New innovation for better ownership and participation: The Society's Commitment to SD

In order to generate action and engage larger segments of the society to sustainability work, the Finnish NCSO invented a new multi-stakeholder operational tool for sustainable development called: **“Finland We Want by 2050 – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development”**. This new approach is a new partnership model that aims at boosting ownership, action, innovative solutions and impact throughout the society: it brings together the public sector, companies, civil society actors, organizations and citizens in a unique way.

The vision of the Commitment is to have a **“prosperous Finland within the carrying capacity of nature”**. This can be achieved by implementing the **eight shared objectives** that have been jointly defined: (1) Equal prospects for well-being; (2) A participatory society for citizens; (3) Sustainable work; (4) Sustainable local communities; (5) A carbon-neutral society; (6) An economy that is resource-wise; (7) Lifestyles that respect the carrying capacity of nature; (8) Decision-making that respects nature.

The idea is simple: an organisation makes a commitment, takes a concrete action, and measures the progress. After one year already up to 160 organisations from large companies to ministries, schools and individual citizens have made their operational commitments. When put together, the individual commitments lead to greater results. They will bring systemic change and create a community of pioneers.

Genuine ownership and commitment can only be created by bottom-up, participatory approach with continuous dialogue and trust. Finland hopes that this new model can inspire countries to develop practical and participatory models to implement the new ambitious Agenda2030.

Germany: the 2016 review of the German sustainable development strategy

The context

The German National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) was adopted in 2002. Through a total of three extensive reports in 2004, 2008 and 2012, this strategy has been continuously updated over three changes of government. This underlines the broad, constant political consensus in Germany regarding the importance of sustainability.

The coalition agreement of the current government in November 2013 stresses once more that **sustainable development is the fundamental objective and benchmark of the government** and provides a number of measures to strengthen the efforts on national, European and international level.

The next NSDS Progress Report is due in autumn 2016. The NSDS will be an essential framework for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD as it provides new momentum and challenge for the further development of the NSDS, requiring at the same time a careful review of all essential aspects of the current strategy. The main elements of the current NSDS are: the institutional setting, the management rules, the 38 indicators and targets, the impact assessment for all legislative acts proposed by the government, regular reports assessing the progress e.g. the biannual indicator report and peer reviews (2009 and 2013). The main challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda are the review of the national targets and indicators in light of the SDGs, the strengthening of horizontal and vertical integration of SD policy and the implementation of the new global partnership including the multi-stakeholder approach.

The institutions with an important role in stakeholder participation

The institutions in place - State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development, the Council for Sustainable Development and the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development – have an important role regarding stakeholder participation and the further development of the national strategy:

- The **State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development** comprises the State Secretaries of all ministries and is chaired by the Head of the Federal Chancellery. The Committee is in charge of the further development and monitoring of the national strategy. It meets about 4 times a year and discusses specific items (lately e.g. sustainable consumption, sustainable cities) with relevant experts from business, science, associations, the *Länder* or local communities.
- The **German Council for Sustainable Development** is composed of fifteen individuals from businesses, trade unions, churches, the media, and consumer and environmental associations. They are appointed for three years by the German Chancellor and represent the three dimensions of sustainability according to their professional and personal backgrounds. The Council works independently and has two major tasks: to advise the Federal Government on all matters relating to sustainable development and to promote the dialogue with stakeholders and civil society. (Examples: yearly conference with more than 1,000 participants, development of the German Sustainability Code with business, investors and civil society, dialogue with 100 youngest local politicians; dialogue with mayors; started in 2012 the project of a yearly SD Action Day/Week).
- **Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development** comprises 17 MoPs of all parties represented in the *Bundestag*. It plays a role in developing goals, measures and instruments and defining them in concrete terms as well as to enter into dialogue with other parliaments, particularly in the European Union, and underpin the discussion within society on the subject of sustainable development. The Parliamentary Advisory Council has also been assigned to evaluate the sustainability impact assessment of the Federal Government.

The current stakeholder dialogue

Whereas in 2010/2011, when preparing the Progress Report 2012, the dialogue with stakeholders was mainly conducted by an internet consultation, the current stakeholder dialogue (2015/2016)

focuses also on a series of 5 stakeholder conferences, which, among others, treat several crucial questions such as for instance: How can the new global targets on SD be implemented on national level and what needs to be done in Germany to further promote SD? How should the new global partnership be implemented in Germany? How could and should sustainable economic activities and sustainable consumption be promoted? What should be the main focus of sustainable cities and infrastructure? What are the inter-linkages of poverty related questions and SD in Germany? How to strengthen vertical integration in Germany?

The results and findings of the conferences as well as further statements and comments via internet will be collected and evaluated for the further development of the NSDS. In 2016, the draft Progress Report 2016 will be published and consulted via internet and discussed with stakeholder. The review should be finalized in autumn 2016.

Switzerland: stakeholder dialogue and forum for sustainable development

In Switzerland, sustainable development is rooted in the Swiss Constitution as basic principle. The main policy-focus areas for sustainable development are set out by the Federal Council (government) in its Sustainable Development Strategy. The strategy itself is part of the legislative planning of the Federal Council and it is being renewed every four years.

For the renewal of the strategy for the legislative period of 2016-2019, a **broad stakeholder dialogue** was carried out with **150 national representatives of civil society** (NGOs and associations), **science, cantons, communes and the federal administration itself**. During a series of workshops in nine thematic fields (e.g. consumption and production, natural resources, health, social cohesion etc.), suggestions for long-term visions, goals for 2030, and measures for the legislative period were developed. The definition of the goals was based on the provisional SDGs by the Open Working Group. The results of the participatory process are being published in a report and served as a basis for the renewal of the national Sustainable Development Strategy.

The outcome of the process shows clearly that **participation is an essential requirement for sustainable development** and an important instrument to mobilize stakeholders for partnerships. The goals of the process were reached and it will be continued for the implementation of the national strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, the process had **several difficulties** due to the wide range of interests of the stakeholders and also because the participants had to express their interests without concrete previous propositions from the federal administration: this was considered difficult and nonsystematic.

The **ongoing process will be strongly based on the 2030 Agenda** and should have a focus on transversal topics and holistic discussions. Further, communication will be intensified, since the understanding of sustainable development can differ strongly between stakeholders. A clear communication of the added-value of sustainable development and a respective strategy is of crucial importance for including a representative spectrum of stakeholders, in particular economic players.

Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda will also be a major topic in the Sustainable Development Forum, which is the platform for implementing sustainable development processes and actions on the subnational level since 2001.

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