

# **21<sup>st</sup> ESDN Workshop Discussion Paper**

**Culture and Sustainable  
Development**

**&**

**SDG Implementation in Policymaking  
– Approaches in SDG Budgeting,  
Mainstreaming, and Performance  
Management**

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## Introduction

This Discussion Paper will provide participants taking part in the 21<sup>st</sup> European Sustainable Development Network Workshop with some background information on the Workshop and the topics that will be covered by speakers and presenters. This year, the Workshop title is twofold, as the ESDN will be covering two different topics on each day of the Workshop. The first day of the Workshop will look at the topic of “Culture and Sustainable Development”, whereas the second day of the Workshop will look at the topic of “SDG Implementation in Policymaking – Approaches in SDG Budgeting, Mainstreaming, and Performance Management”. The Workshop will take place in Vienna, Austria on 22-23 May 2023, and will bring together over 80 participants from 15 European countries over the course of the two days.

This Discussion Paper will provide some background information on culture and sustainable development and how this concept has developed since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, as culture is not typically considered when discussing sustainable development, as the economic, environmental, and social aspects tend to dominate. Chapter 1 of this Discussion Paper will focus on the culture and sustainable development as seen by the United Nations and the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign, as they have been monitoring this topic since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, whereby the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign campaigned to have culture as an individual SDG. They also outline why culture is vital for sustainable development and implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. As this is the focus on day one of the ESDN Workshop, it is important to understand how culture impacts on sustainable development and how efforts look to incorporate this important aspect into discussions about sustainable development, in general.

Chapter 2 will focus on the keynote speeches that will be taking place at the Workshop during the culture and sustainable development part as a way for participants to be brought up to speed on what is happening in some European countries regarding culture and its interplay with the SDGs.

Chapter 3 will focus on the topic of day two of the Workshop “SDG Implementation in Policymaking – Approaches in SDG Budgeting, Mainstreaming, and Performance Management”, and feature short snippets of the keynote speeches, including the OECD, the European Commission and SDG Watch Europe, where good practice examples and approaches in SDG implementation will be highlighted, as well as the recently published European Union Voluntary Review for this year’s High Level Political Forum in July in New York. This chapter will also include information regarding the Workshop’s 3 rounds of Exchange Spaces, so participants can already think about the three tables they would like to visit on the 23 May and the discussions they would like to have on different implementation approaches in policymaking, such as SDG budgeting, policy integration and mainstreaming, impact assessments and sustainability checks, as well as policy performance management. There will be seven tables to choose from, and each of the three rounds lasts 45 minutes. Each Exchange Space table will have around 8-10 participants and will provide the chance to ask questions, discuss further on these pertinent topics, and exchange experiences.

The final Workshop documentation can be found on the [ESDN website](#) under Workshops in the events menu. After the Workshop, keynote presentations will be uploaded to this page once consent has been provided by the speakers.

# Chapter 1: Culture and Sustainable Development

The topic of culture and sustainable development has not yet been covered by the ESDN. However, work has been done by the United Nations to delve deeper into the interplay and effect culture has on sustainable development, as well as on the SDGs, in particular.

The two years since the adoption of resolution [72/229](#), a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 2017 on culture and sustainable development, which outlined the benefits culture can have on sustainable development and the SDGs. In this resolution, it was set out that the General Assembly:

1. Reaffirms the role of culture as an enabler of sustainable development that provides people and communities with a strong sense of identity and social cohesion and contributes to more effective and sustainable development policies and measures at all levels, and stresses in this regard that policies responsive to cultural contexts can yield better, sustainable, inclusive and equitable development outcomes;
2. Recognizes the potential of culture as a driver of sustainable development, which contributes to a strong and viable economic sector by generating income, creating decent jobs and addressing both the economic and social dimensions of poverty through cultural heritage and cultural and creative industries, while providing innovative and effective solutions to cross-cutting issues, such as education, health, gender equality and the environment;
3. Emphasizes the important contribution of culture to the three dimensions of sustainable development and to the achievement of national development objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, and in this regard acknowledges:
  - a. That culture contributes to inclusive economic development, as cultural heritage, cultural and creative industries, sustainable cultural tourism and cultural infrastructure are sources of income generation and job creation, including at the community level, thus improving living conditions and fostering community-based economic growth, and contribute to empowering individuals;
  - b. That culture contributes to inclusive social development for all, including local communities and indigenous peoples, with respect for cultural diversity, safeguarding of the cultural and natural heritage, fostering of cultural institutions and strengthening of cultural and creative industries;
  - c. That culture contributes to environmental sustainability, since the protection of cultural and biological diversity and the natural heritage is crucial to sustainable development, while supporting traditional systems of environmental protection, and resource management can contribute to the increased sustainability of fragile ecosystems and the preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, reducing land degradation and mitigating the effects of climate change.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 2017. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/467/33/PDF/N1746733.pdf?OpenElement>

The United Nations system organizations have worked together to highlight the role of culture as a vital component for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In the Report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on 5 August 2019, it was confirmed that a more holistic approach has been adopted that better integrates the safeguarding of built and living heritage, promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions and support to the creative economy, demonstrating culture's transformative power in areas including education, gender equality, social cohesion, poverty reduction, human rights, migration and tackling climate change. A dedicated implementation and monitoring entity was established to spearhead UNESCO efforts to strengthen and measure culture's transformational impact on the realization of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, UNESCO reinforced its cross-cutting programmatic capacities to reflect this change in paradigm through a comprehensive mapping of the contributions of its conventions on culture across the 17 Goals and their 169 targets. That effort culminated in the publication in 2018 of the UNESCO brochure Culture for the 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, the 120 Voluntary National Reviews that were submitted to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development between 2017 and 2019, show notable progress regarding the integration of culture into national policies. Information on culture in those Voluntary National Reviews shows an overall trend towards greater linkages with social inclusion and education, as well as new emphasis on indigenous communities, economic development and technology.<sup>2</sup>

However, a report "[Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda](#)" by the Culture 2030 Goal Campaign, which takes stock of the first four years of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda from the perspective of culture, provides an analysis of the presence of culture and associated concepts in the annual progress reviews for the SDGs, focusing on the VNRs submitted to the HLPFs in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

The report expresses concern about the limited presence of culture in the VNRs and in the broader documents emerging from the HLPF review process, including the relevant ministerial and political declarations. This is especially acute in SDG16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which fail to take advantage of the potential of citizen participation in cultural life and of local, national, and international cultural collaborations.

The reality is that references to culture in the SDGs are scarce and do not sufficiently acknowledge the many ways in which cultural aspects influence and contribute to sustainable development. The keyword analysis of the VNRs research finds that the cultural dimension of sustainable development lags significantly behind (between one eighth to one fifth of) the other three recognized dimensions (the social, economic, and environmental) of sustainable development.<sup>3</sup>

Though culture is acknowledged as being important and influential on sustainable development, its uptake seems to be lagging behind other aspects of sustainable development. Given that culture informs so many aspects of the way different people interact and view the world, more attention should be given to this important aspect for enhanced sustainability. This is one of the main reasons the ESDN chose to address culture in the context of sustainable development and the SDGs.

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. August 2019. P.3.  
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3826015?ln=en>

<sup>3</sup> Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. P.3.  
[https://www.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/culture2030goal\\_en\\_exres.pdf](https://www.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/culture2030goal_en_exres.pdf)

## Chapter 2: Keynotes on Culture and Sustainable Development

This chapter provides short introductions to the keynote speeches that will be held on the first day of the Workshop. Participants will hear from Austria about a museum initiative that is dealing with the SDGs, from Italy about the transversal nature of culture and sustainability, and from Romania, where the government has supported cultural initiatives to promote and integrate the SDGs into society. Finally, participants will also hear about different sustainability cultures that are not inherently European and whether and how the SDGs fit into other cultures' understanding of sustainable development.

### Culture, Art, and Sustainability: Opportunities and Mutual Inspiration, Including the Project “17 Museums x 17 SDGs”

Austria's “17 Museums x 17 SDGs” is a project that should show that museums are not only familiarizing themselves with the SDGs but are also making concrete contributions to their implementation. It aims to raise awareness and visibility, both internally, towards all employees, and externally, towards the public, i.e., the visitors and stakeholders.

### Culture for Sustainability as a Transversal Instrument for Agenda 2030 and NSDS Implementation

The topic “Culture and Sustainable Development” represents one of the action fields of the “Sustainability Vectors”, the enabling conditions for the National Sustainable Development Strategy's implementation in Italy, with a multi-level and multi-actor approach. The Ministry of Environment has also recently financed (at the beginning of 2023) a call for proposals addressed to universities, foundations, and research centers, aiming at promoting research projects to support the widespread uptake of culture for sustainability at national and territorial level, in coherence with the NSDS's vision and objectives.

Italy presented its second Voluntary National Review in July 2022, where the VNR provided three thematic insights on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), localizing the SDGs, and stakeholder engagement, respectively. The VNR included a focus on culture for sustainability (Vector 2) as a transversal instrument for Agenda 2030 and NSDS implementation in Italy.

### Theater and Cultural Models for Sustainability

This keynote speech will focus on the significance of literature, theater, and the audiovisual as a crucial part of culture in the successful implementation of Agenda 2030. While Agenda 2030 aims to address poverty, environmental protection, and global peace, the role of culture is often overlooked. Culture is, and always has been, a vital part of human development, social cohesion, and sustainable societies. Culture influences a society's views regarding gender equality, inclusive education, sustainable economic growth, and combating climate change and can contribute to promoting positive sustainable development in these areas. Theater, in particular, has the ability to connect people on an emotional level, transcending

language and cultural barriers. It can inspire, educate, entertain, and raise awareness about social and environmental issues, making it a valuable tool for achieving the goals of Agenda 2030.

To exemplify the integration of culture and sustainable development, Romania's Department of Sustainable Development initiated several cultural projects. One project, titled "Is SUSTAINABLE WORLD DEVELOPMENT a cultural act? Antipa, Brancusi, Roegen," included an exhibition at the Antipa Museum (Bucharest) showcasing the work of three Romanian creators who contributed to the concept of a sustainable world. The project also offered online resources for education and research purposes. Another project, the National Educational Theatre Caravan, aimed to promote the Sustainable Development Strategy and the 17 SDGs among high school students. These initiatives revealed the openness of the younger generation to sustainability and their desire to be part of positive change. Overall, theater's power to inspire, educate, and engage audiences can significantly contribute to the comprehensive implementation of Agenda 2030.

## SDGs and Different Sustainability Cultures

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)— a normative (non-binding) global international environmental agreement (IEA)—claim to be universal, as they were multilaterally negotiated between UN member states. However, is giving the Global South a seat at the table truly inclusive development?

This keynote speech will look at a cross-cultural comparison of the African philosophy of Ubuntu (specifically in South Africa), the Buddhist Gross National Happiness (Bhutan) and the native American idea of Buen Vivir (e.g., Ecuador) and how they view the SDGs, how they view 'development', 'sustainability', goals and indicators, the implicit value underpinnings of the SDGs, prioritization of goals, and missing links, and leadership.

Viewed through the lens of the three cosmovisions of the Global, the SDGs do not effectively address the human–nature–well-being interrelationship. Other cosmovisions have an inherent biocentric value orientation that is often ignored in academic and diplomatic circles. These claim to be more promising than continuing green development approaches, based in modernism. On the positive side, the SDGs contain language of all three worldviews. However, the SDGs are not biocentric, aiming to respect nature for nature's sake, and thereby enabling reciprocity with nature. They embody linear growth/results thinking, which requires unlimited resource exploitation, and not cyclical thinking, replacing growth with well-being (of all beings). They represent individualism and exclude private sector responsibility. They do not represent collective agency and sharing, implying that there is a need for 'development as service', to one another and to the Earth. Including these perspectives may lead to abolishing the word 'development' within the SDGs, replacing it by inter-relationship; replacing end-result-oriented 'goals' with process thinking; and thinking in a cyclical nature, and earth governance, instead of static 'sustainability'.

The glass can be viewed as half full or half empty, but the analysis shows that Western 'modernism' is still a strong underpinning of the SDGs. Bridges can be built between Happiness, Ubuntu and Buen Vivir in re-interpreting goal frameworks, global governance, and the globalization process.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This keynote is largely based on the article by Van Norren 2017 (Development as service, a Happiness, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir interdisciplinary view of the Sustainable Development Goals. Doctoral dissertation, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands, 2017).



## Chapter 3: SDG Implementation in Policymaking – Approaches in SDG Budgeting, Mainstreaming, and Performance Management

This chapter will cover the different keynote speeches and Exchange Space topics of the Workshop. Session 1 of the Workshop will focus on experiences in policymaking on SDG implementation and will feature presentations from the OECD, the European Commission’s Directorate-General – Budget, and from SDG Watch Europe. The goal of this session is to provide an overall framing of policymaking when it comes to implementing the SDGs.

The Exchange Spaces will then focus on more explicit cases and focus along four policy areas, namely SDG budgeting, policy integration and mainstreaming, impact assessments and sustainability checks, as well as policy performance management. All of these different approaches will be looked at in more detail at the individual Exchange Space tables. After participants have visited three tables over the course of the three rounds, participants will join together in small breakout groups to reflect on what they have learned throughout the day and at the Exchange Spaces to discuss with colleagues and attempt to answer the two overarching questions of: What is the main benefit of each of the four mechanism for SDG implementation?, as well as what is needed in practice to apply each mechanism?. The results of this will then be shared in plenary with the use of Mural, so results can be seen instantaneously.

### OECD: European Experiences on Policy Coordination for the SDGs

The presentation from the OECD will provide an introduction to the [2019 OECD recommendation on PCSD](#) and review practical tools that countries adopted to use the SDGs as a road map with data evidence to balance different sustainability dimensions in policy-making. Some of the tools considered mainstream more systematically in sustainability decision-making, budgeting, procurement, and regulatory impact assessment at different levels of government. The OECD’s country work in [Luxembourg](#), [Italy](#), [Poland](#), [Romania](#) and [Malta](#) will be used to illustrate these tools.

### EU Commission: Mainstreaming Green, Biodiversity, Gender, and Digital Contributions of the EU’s Budget

This contribution explains how Green, Gender and Digital objectives in the EU Budget are currently mainstreamed. As not all transversal priorities had been developed at the same time, this shows methodologically different stages from tracking until tagging. In a second part, we will dive into the status quo of SDG tagging in the EU Budget and reach out for possible future developments and how the other mainstreamed priorities already partly cover some SDGs.

### SDG Watch Europe: Halfway to 2030 – What do policymakers still need to do until 2030?

Serving as the first ever Europe-wide Voluntary National Review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the European Voluntary Review (EU VR) has the potential to spark a bold political reset of the SDG Agenda. However, the report published on May 15, 2023, by the European Commission does not go far enough in its content or process, with civil society organizations and citizens left out in the cold as the report was drafted.

The Voluntary Review, which merely assesses what the EU has done so far and promotes its flagship policies, lacks any real vision for structural changes, nor does it provide an action plan at EU level to address gaps and challenges identified by civil society organizations on SDG implementation.

The EU VR process should be an honest and forward-looking stock taking, as well as a steppingstone to an overarching strategy on the SDGs, complete with a fully financed action plan. As of now, it is not clear how Europe intends to make structural changes in areas where the data shows regression, and particularly where negative external impacts of Europe's policies on the rest of the world can already be seen.

## **Exchange Spaces: Practical Experiences and Good Practices in Effective SDG Implementation with Different Mechanisms**

During the Exchange Space portion of the Workshop, participants will take part in three rounds of exchanges with colleagues. The Exchange Spaces, as well as the topics that will be covered are provided below. Participants will have the opportunity, therefore, to visit three different Spaces that are centered around different good practices and mechanisms in effective SDG implementation. The different mechanisms can be roughly grouped along four streams:

- 1) SDG budgeting;
- 2) Policy integration and mainstreaming;
- 3) Impact assessments and sustainability checks; and
- 4) Policy performance management.

It is encouraged that participants ask their Exchange Space presenters follow-up questions, engage in discussions, bring in their own practical examples, as well as ask advice from colleagues.

Apart from fostering discussions, participants are encouraged to keep two questions in their minds, as the group work after the Exchange Spaces will seek to make use of everything participants have heard throughout the day, especially at the Exchange Spaces. The two questions that will be discussed further will draw upon the four streams listed above to answer the questions:

- What is the main benefit of each mechanism for SDG implementation?; and
- What is needed in practice to apply each mechanism?

The different Exchange Spaces are outlined below and should help in informing which tables you will visit during the Workshop.

### **North Rhine Westphalia – SDG Budgeting**

In many municipalities, the implementation of sustainability is still seen as an add-on - projects that have to be financed on top of the municipal core business. The challenges of our time show that sustainability

must be integrated into standard municipal procedures across all sectors. Only in the context of budget planning can a sufficient allocation of human and financial resources be ensured. This is where the project "Municipal Sustainability Budget" of the LAG 21 NRW, a registered association, with the support of the Ministry of the Environment NRW comes in.

## Netherlands - Integrating Well-Being Indicators into Budgets and Policy Cycles

Moving towards a well-being economy has been high on the political agenda in the Netherlands. In line with other international and national efforts to move 'beyond GDP' in economic analysis, Statistics Netherlands publishes a 'Monitor of Well-being & Sustainable Development Goals' yearly since 2018, which includes a large set of indicators on a multitude of well-being topics.

In recent years, the Dutch government has also taken serious steps to integrate well-being in its budgetary cycle. For example, the yearly budget includes well-being priorities and an overview of developments in regard to well-being and related policies. Also, the governments Financial Year Report not only discusses economic and financial results, but also how well-being has developed in the given year. Questions remain however: how can well-being be a leading concept in all of the policy- and budget cycle? What is the role of the government, and how can this topic be implemented consistently among countries?

In this ESDN Workshop the work of Statistics Netherlands and the Dutch government to integrate well-being in policy is briefly presented. There will be plenty of room for questions and comments on these steps taken, and room for discussion on further steps that are necessary. We are curious if and how your country is working on this matter and how we can learn from each other.

## Luxembourg – Sustainability Check

The objective of the sustainability check is to assess the impact of a draft law on sustainable development in Luxembourg, to improve the policy coherence for sustainable development, to ensure that the priority areas of the Nation plan for Sustainable Development are better considered in legislation, and to advance the understanding and ownership of a sustainable development approach in public affairs. The sustainability check is primarily an internal government working document that will form an integral part of the annexes to draft legislation.

## Youth-proofing Policies through the Intergenerational Test(s)

Policies are only truly sustainable if they do not affect young generations in an adverse way. Therefore, there needs to be a way to ensure that youth is considered throughout all policies. Whilst outlining flagship examples, such as the European Youth Test or the UN Generational Test, the ESDN Youth Delegates would like to ask Workshop participants whether policies in their countries are future-proof.

## Romania – Mainstreaming SDGs in Regulatory Impact Assessments

This Exchange Space will focus on how Romania has been working towards mainstreaming the SDGs in their Regulatory Impact Assessments.

## Austria – Performance Management: Outcome Orientation and the Sustainable Development Goals

Since 2013, public administration at the Federal level is managed according to the principle of outcome orientation. In other words, management will be based on contributions towards achieving objectives in connection with solving societal problems. As budgets are tight given the multiple crises in Europe and the need for budget consolidation, public funds must be optimally allocated to meet people's needs and maintain the present high level of service in the long-term. This is why since 2013, the focus has been shifted on outcome orientation. Future Federal Budgets will show the societal effects aimed at by ministries and other public bodies, as well as how to achieve these and how to measure progress. By comparing the intended outcomes to the available budget, it will be easier to see whether the resources to be used are proportionate to the objectives pursued. With the shifting focus on outcome orientation in 2013 also came the introduction of the regulatory impact assessment. The regulatory impact assessment is the implementation of the principle of outcome orientation into the policy-making and evaluation process. All new laws, regulations, and bigger projects will be discussed on the basis of their desired outcomes and outputs in certain defined policy areas and their success will be measurable by the use of indicators.

With the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals through the United Nations, a worldwide focus on sustainable development in all different kinds of policy fields has been created. The importance of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals has drastically increased over these past years in Austria. Since 2020, the department on outcome orientation has tried to strengthen the relation between the SDGs and the data on outcome orientation coming from the federal ministries in Austria. During the process of quality assurance, ministries will be asked specifically whether a connection between their goals and the SDGs is significant enough to publish this in the next budget plan. The report on outcome orientation shows which goals of the government are connected to which SDG and how successful the ministries were in achieving their goals. On the other hand, the evaluation report on the regulatory impact assessment presents its introduced laws and projects, while displaying the contribution those actions make for achieving the SDGs in Austria. Important to mention is, that the ministries are reporting on the SDGs on a voluntary basis.

Currently, the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport and the Federal Ministry for Finance are working on solutions to develop the connection between the SDGs and the system of outcome orientation. The goal of this is to:

- Strengthen the relation between SDGs and outcome orientation;
- Create a bigger picture on the SDG-activities on the federal level in Austria; and
- Make a clearer connection between the phases of planning and evaluating.

## Hungary – Output Orientation and Performance Management and the EU Voluntary Review

Output orientation and performance management will be discussed from a Hungarian Advisory Council perspective. This will also be coupled with bringing in experiences from the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Council Network (EEAC Network) that shares national experiences for

better practice. Lastly, a discussion around the output orientation of the recently published EU Voluntary Review will take place.