



**Governance models for Sustainable Development:
comparative analysis**

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List of abbreviations

BMU	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DOEB	Sustainable Impact Assessment
DPSIR	Driving forces, Pressure, State, Impact, Response
EAC	Environmental Audit Commission
EU	European Union
FCSD	Federal Council for Sustainable Development
ICDO	(Belgian) Interdepartemental Commission for Sustainable development
IDH	Sustainable Trade Initiative
KADO	Kabinetsbrede Aanpak Duurzame Ontwikkeling
NEP	National Environmental Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDS	National Strategy for Sustainable Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POD DO	(Belgian) Federal Public Planning Service for Sustainable Development
PSE	Public Service Agreement
RMNO	Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and the Environment
RNE	Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung (German Council for Sustainable Development)
SD	Sustainable development
SDAP	Sustainable Development Action Plan
SDC	Sustainable Development Commission
SDI	Sustainable development indicator
SDS	Sustainable Development Strategy
SIA	Sustainability Impact Assessment
SER	Social Economic Council
SOGE	Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment And Development
VNO-NCW	The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers
VROM	Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning
VSDO	Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development
WGDO	(Flemish) interdepartmental working group on sustainable development

1. Introduction and methodology

This paper examines governance models in several countries as part of the project Institutional aspects of sustainable development policy making in Flanders' undertaken by the Flemish Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Development and funded by the Flemish government of Belgium.

In a preparatory phase, academic governance theories for sustainable development were studied (Spillemaeckers and Bachus 2008). The present sustainable development policy in Flanders was examined in a second paper (Spillemaeckers and Bachus 2009). Using the theoretical framework of the first study, this paper analysed the governance model and strategy as well as their implementation.

The present paper describes the next stage of the project. This consists of the study of governance models applied by other countries or regions and the application of the findings to Flanders. The theoretical framework used for this study is based on the theoretical findings of the first paper, a review of several academic sources and the analysis presented in the second paper. Four governance systems were selected, which were expected to yield the most useful information for Flanders: the German Federal government, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the Belgian federal government were selected. None of them are subnational regions, like Flanders. There are two reasons for this choice: first, historically, most of the sustainable development governance systems are to be found of the national level, and secondly, the subnational regions are studied in project 3 of the Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Development.¹

First, the methodology used for the comparison will be explained. Subsequently, this methodology will be applied to the four case studies. The most interesting aspects of the governance cases will therefore be singled out and elaborated. The overview of the comparison between the four case studies is provided in the annex of this research paper. Finally, some recommendations regarding feasible sustainable governance models and practices for Flanders will be formulated.

1.1 Theoretical framework

Based on a study of the governance for sustainable development in 12 countries, Bachus et al. (2005) recognised four types of governance models for sustainable development: the holistic governance model, the governance principles model, the ecological approach of sustainable development and the environmental integration model. The first two consider sustainable development as an integrating meta-concept, the last two part from the idea that for sustainable development first the environment must be preserved, as it is the basis to build upon social and economical development.

The first step towards the implementation of each of these governance models is through the elaboration of governance strategies. Each UN country is supposed to develop such a strategy, as in 1992 179 countries signed Agenda 21, and subsequently engaged themselves to develop a National Sustainable Development Strategy (UNCED, 1992). In addition, the EU committed itself to introducing National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) in all its member

¹

See www.steunpuntdo.be

countries during the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 (IEEP-SERI, 2006).

The last decade many studies have been done on the realisation and implementation of NSDSs and the improvement of governance for sustainable development (Lafferty, 2004; OECD, 2002a, b and c, 2006 and 2007; Connor and Dovers, 2004; Lafferty and Meadowcroft, 2003; Niestroy, 2005; Dalal-Clayton et al., 2002; Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002). They show that every country has its own way of interpreting NSDSs. Also, it was never the aim to come to a unified NSDS-model, applicable to all countries. The UN DESA explains that *‘there is no one type of approach and no single formula by which national sustainable development strategies can or should be undertaken. Every country needs to determine, for itself, how best to approach its sustainable development strategy preparation and implementation depending upon the prevailing political, historical, cultural, ecological circumstances’* (UN DESA, 2002:8).

Still Lafferty finds two key features of political sustainable development are to be recognised. These are ‘the inherent nature of the SD programme as a strategic effort to achieve change’ and ‘a strong normative commitment to hold governments responsible for effective implementation’ (Lafferty, 2004:4). A third feature is added by Swanson et al. (2004:7), stating that leadership is perhaps the most critical aspect of strategic management, and a restructuration leading to more open decision making processes. *‘The overall objective of NSDSs is not the development of new strategies, but to improve or restructure the decision-making process so that consideration of socio-economic and environmental issues is fully integrated and a broader range of public participation assured’* (UNCED,1992). But of course sustainable development needs more than a strong hand and a large public support. Swanson and Pinter (2007) found out through comparative studies of 20 countries plus the European Union that for each of the governance elements they selected effectiveness criteria could be established. These can be found in the table beneath published by the OECD (see table 1). In table 3 we will apply this framework to the Flemish governance model. The rest of this paper will be dedicated to applying the framework to the four case studies.

Governance elements
Nature of strategy and government co-ordination
Placement of overall responsibility
Legislative underpinning
Link to budget processes
Stakeholder involvement
Links to local levels

Table 1: NSDS governance elements and effectiveness criteria (adapted from OECD 2007:36)

But not only the OECD developed an interesting summary. The European Sustainable Development Network also issued a list of principles and governance challenges that should be addressed by SD policies in general, and by SD strategies in particular which summarises several guideline documents (see table 2). Both theoretical frameworks are merged and used for the comparative study.

Principles
Common vision and strategic objectives
High-level commitment
Horizontal integration
Vertical integration
Participation
Implementation mechanisms and capability-building
Monitoring, evaluation and strategy renewal

Table 2: adapted from ESDN Quarterly Report March 2009 (Berger, Sedlacko, 2009)

All in all, SD strategies are an important step from grand rigid planning schemes to flexible strategy processes, accompanied by a transition from clear-cut sectoral authorities to cross-cutting competencies, from pure hierarchies to an amalgamation of hierarchies and networks, from top-down control to process and policy assessments, and from knowing to learning.

1.2 Governance strategies and implementation of sustainable development in Flanders

The theoretical information was complemented with the results of the study on the Flemish policies and their implementation. Most of this study was done and described in the second paper of this governance project (Spillemaeckers and Bachus 2009).

At the beginning, most initiatives of the Flemish government concerning sustainable development were initiated by two departments: the ministry of the environment and the ministry of foreign affairs. A small number of projects involving several departments were started on sustainable building and sustainable consumption patterns. However, the success of these unco-ordinated actions remained dependent on the priority that was given to them by their responsible minister.

After the World Summit in Johannesburg, some members of the administration spontaneously created an interdepartmental working group on sustainable development (WGDO). This working group started coordinating strategic thinking on sustainable development policy. They brought sustainable development at the Flemish agenda and were at the origin of the first official Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development (VSDO), published in 2006.

In these first years, the main priority was the development of an institutional framework. Next to the introduction of sustainable development in the Belgian constitutional law, a Flemish decree on sustainable development was voted in 2008. It advocates a holistic policy and obliges all departments to implement sustainable development into their policies. Stakeholders are involved in the development policies, yet not in a structural way. Sustainable development is also mentioned in the Flemish coalition agreement 2004. Furthermore some other long term policies begin to take up aspects of sustainable development.

In 2004, sustainable development was recognised as a policy field by the Flemish government. It was decided that all horizontal themes with a social implication would be co-ordinated by the department of general governance of the Minister-president. An administrative co-ordination cell for sustainable development was created to co-ordinate all government actions concerning sustainable development and to support the Minister-president. At the same time

the interdepartmental working group on sustainable development (WGDO) was officially created.

The newly operating Flemish governance structure for SD developed the first official strategy for sustainable development (VSDO). This two-phase strategy was approved in 2006. The first phase was a vision text written by experts and ministerial cabinets, in consultation with a large number of stakeholders. The second phase, which is still running, focuses on the process and on an action plan. In 2010, an update of the vision text is ongoing, which will lead to an actualisation of the strategy by the end of the year.

This information enables us to classify Flanders' policies using the OECD methodology of table 1. This classification gives a brief overview of the Flemish policy for sustainable development and its link to the OECD effectiveness criteria (see table 3). It can be concluded that Flanders scores high on the presence of elements enabling an effective governance for sustainable development, thanks to the combination of the legislative framework and the strategy.

Governance element	Effectiveness Criteria
Nature of strategy and government co-ordination	<p>Relevance and comprehensiveness: The concept of sustainable development is explained and the main action points. Planning, monitoring and capability building are mentioned in a general way, but not defined.</p> <p>Department involvement: The individual departments and other levels of government are expected to introduce SD into their departments. They can do this in their own way.</p>
Placement of overall responsibility	Top-level leadership: The Minister-president is responsible for SD policies.
Legislative underpinning	Legislative embeddedness: Sustainable development is embedded by a decree for the promotion of sustainable development and in the Belgian constitution.
Link to budget processes	Integration: Sustainable development has its own programme in the governmental budget. It concerns a small amount for the administration for sustainable development and for subsidies.
Stakeholder involvement	Formality: Stakeholder participation is foreseen in the strategy, but not in a structural way.
Links to local levels	<p>Guidance: The Flemish strategy provides main focuses for SD policies.</p> <p>Sub-national co-ordination: The Flemish government is working together with municipalities and other levels of government for the introduction of sustainable development.</p>

Table 3: the OECD methodology, applied to Flanders (based on OECD, 2007:3)

The Flemish governance model emphasizes the process of implementation of sustainable development, coupled to the integration idea of all dimensions of sustainable development (horizontally and vertically) and to participatory policy making. Planning, monitoring,

reporting, evaluation, consultation structures and support must be present. In practice, the realisation of some of these features remain a challenge for several reasons.

In general sustainable development is not considered as a political priority, although it is a topic of interest in most political discourses, and although it was due to the influence of the Minister-president that the legislative framework was introduced. As a consequence, compromises were made to enable the introduction of a common policy. Despite the holistic view and the strong strategy, the choice was made for a minimum co-ordination, thus limiting the interference of sustainable development policy with existing departmental policy lines. Policy departments are given maximal freedom and can decide for themselves how to implement sustainable development.

To endeavour the introduction of the holistic model with a minimum of structural changes an 'inclusive' policy was introduced, meaning that the individual departments are expected to integrate sustainable development into their way of policy making without much steering. In general this approach needs adequate capability building and a strong co-ordination to start up the process, which was not foreseen. Knowledge on sustainable strategy development is limited in most departments. Only the departments that have built up some tradition in the past continue to develop actions. Furthermore no participative concrete common goals are defined for Flanders.

1.3 A framework for governance elements and effectiveness criteria for sustainable development policies

According to the academic theories, sustainable development needs both a strong leadership and an open governance structure with participative methods. In Flanders some first steps are taken, but there is a need for more political support and more capability building. To find out how further progress can be made in a structural way, a framework is proposed adapted to the Flemish needs (see table 4). It integrates both the governance elements and the effectiveness criteria used by the OECD for evaluating the NSDS as mentioned in table 1 and the ESDN list of principles and governance challenges (see table 2). The table also refers to several other publications of the OECD (2002a, b and c), UNEP and the IISD (Swanson et al. 2004) and was adapted to the characteristics of the Flemish government as mentioned above.

The framework was used to design a questionnaire for the interviews with open and closed questions. In each country at least one civil servant, one NGO and one (academic) expert was consulted. The questionnaire was used in a flexible way, and was adapted to the function of the interviewee.

Governance elements	Effectiveness Criteria for sustainable development policies
Model	Definition of the model: if the strategy relies on a model for sustainable development, this will enhance its comprehensiveness, and will facilitate the definition of goals and scope.
Nature of strategy	<p>Relevance and comprehensiveness: The more departments and levels of government for which the SDS is relevant, the better. This implies that the SDS is comprehensive with respect to economic, social and environmental issues.</p> <p>Clear goals and scope: If clear goals are defined, implementation and monitoring will be more efficient.</p>

<p>Common vision and strategic objectives</p>	<p>Long term vision: An SD strategy should define a common long-term vision for SD.</p> <p>SMART Operationalisation: The vision for SD should be operationalised with strategic objectives that are SMART, i.e.:</p> <p>Specific (ideally stating a quantified target);</p> <p>Measurable (with SD indicators, see below);</p> <p>Achievable (neither too easy nor too demanding);</p> <p>Realistic (to be achieved with the given resources and political circumstances);</p> <p>Time-bound (indicating a start date and target year).</p> <p>Continuous learning: Monitoring and reviewing results/reports should be considered in the continuous adjustment and the cyclical renewal of an SD strategy so that evidence-based policy learning takes place.</p>
<p>Horizontal integration</p>	<p>Department involvement: The more individual departments and other levels of government are involved in the SD process, the better.</p> <p>The integration of economic, environmental and social issues should be taken into account in the SD strategy document (e.g. by highlighting links and trade-offs between the three dimensions of SD);</p> <p>Interdepartmental cooperation: SD-governance should be done through cooperation between different ministries and departments.</p>
<p>Vertical integration</p>	<p>Embeddedness: An SD strategy should be in line with priorities and implementation activities at other levels of governments (EU, national/federal, regional, local).</p> <p>Guidance: The clearer the recommendation in the SDS for sustainable development related strategies at the state/provincial and community levels, the better.</p> <p>Sub-national co-ordination: The more co-ordination between SDS objectives and the objectives of state/provincial and community levels, the better.</p>
<p>Placement of overall responsibility</p>	<p>Top-level leadership: The more involved the Prime Minister or President's office is in the SD-process, the better.</p> <p>High level support: An SD strategy and SD-policies should be backed by high-level political commitment (from the entire government, from influential lead institutions).</p> <p>Strong co-ordination: The better the co-ordination the more the implementation can be done in a harmonious way.</p>
<p>Legislative underpinning</p>	<p>Legislative embeddedness: The more embedded the SD-process is in legislation, the better.</p> <p>Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA): Policies must be assessed by an SAI before their implementation.</p>
<p>Link to budget</p>	<p>Integration: The greater the integration of the SDS vision and</p>

processes	objectives, with the plans and budgets that departments submit to planning and finance departments, the better.
Implementation mechanisms	Implementation: The objectives of an SD-strategy should be addressed with provisions and mechanisms of implementation (budgeting, annual or bi-annual work/action plans) in which political responsibilities are clearly defined. Efficient implementation mechanisms are needed for the implementation of SD-policies.
Citizens and stakeholder involvement	Involvement: Different stakeholder groups should be involved in the development and implementation of an SD strategy. Formality: The more formal the requirements for stakeholder involvement in the development and ongoing implementation of the SDS objectives, the better. Capability building: The more stakeholders are informed on sustainable development and the SD policies, the better.
Capability-building	Capability building: The objectives of an SD strategy should be addressed with adequate institutional and/or personal capacities or capability building activities that are necessary to achieve the objectives.
Reporting, Monitoring and evaluation	Reporting: Transparency must be guaranteed by regular reporting. Monitoring: The effectiveness of an SD strategy in achieving its objectives should be monitored continuously with a set of SD indicators (mostly quantitatively). Evaluation: The effectiveness of the SD strategy must be reviewed/evaluated in regular intervals (mostly qualitatively).

Table 4: framework for governance elements and effectiveness criteria for sustainable development policies

2. The German case study

2.1 Introduction

From the early seventies on Germany is one of the pioneers of environmental policies. German scientists and institutions are renown for their innovative work on climate change and other global challenges. Their research enabled German industries to develop a worldwide reputation for their advanced environmentally friendly technologies. Furthermore German policy makers have always been driving forces in European and international fora on sustainable development and climate change (Peer review 2009 p13, Janicke et all, 2002).

Although a first mover in environmental issues, the German government was relatively late to integrate SD in its policies. It was the coalition agreement of 1998 that gave the first serious guidelines for SD-governance. The main reason was the fact that in the 90ties it had severe domestic problems due to the integration of East- and West-Germany into one country (Niestroy 2005, p136).

It took until 2002 to develop the Strategy for Sustainable Development. According to Niestroy 'overall the work on the SDS, including its implementation and monitoring of progress, despite some delay, has been taken seriously the last three years in Germany' (Niestroy 2005, p136). She claims that due to the structure of the governmental institutions it is not easy to introduce an integrated approach in the German Federal government. The Ministries have a strong independent position, and German politics are characterised by conflicts between the Ministries. Therefore the chancellery took the lead by coordinating and steering the process (Niestroy 2005, p137). A secretaries' of State Committee on sustainable development² was created, and an independent SD-council (RNE) was established. According to some interviewees it is still not a priority, but the introduction of SD as a basic concept for governance policies is supported at high level, and by a number of motivated civil servants.

2.2 Model and strategy

At the beginning sustainable development was approached from an environmental point of view, and was promoted at the institutional level by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU). In 1996 they issued the first German policy paper on SD called 'steps toward a sustainable development'³.

The parliamentary decision of 1998 asked the government to elaborate an integrated Strategy for SD and to establish a SD council (Niestroy 2005 p136). As a result, the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development, at the start called the 'green cabinet', was installed in 2000, presided by the Chancellor. This allowed the German Federal government to evolve to a more holistic approach.

The first strategy was written by the Chancellery and was issued in 2002. It details targets, indicators, timetables and initiatives to meet key challenges (Peer review 2009). It was commented by the SD-council, whose advice was followed and is considered as the backbone of SD. Nevertheless, an interviewee said he considers the first version of the SD-strategy as a decision of the cabinet, because it was developed without involving the parliament. Primarily most stakeholders were not consulted, and therefore he considered that the ambitions expressed in the Strategy are not always legitimate. Furthermore, the Strategy is said to lack vision and strategic approach (Niestroy 2005, p158). At the same time it was remarked that even if the Strategy cannot direct the whole government, this does not prevent it to provide some steering.

Interviewees described the Strategy as a learning path. As sustainable development concerns a large number of different projects and aims, all changing continuously, it is impossible to encompass everything. Therefore, the Chancellery deems it is essential to insure the continuity of the process through a streamlined governance system. To find ways to guarantee a long term approach, the last Progress Report on the National Strategy for Sustainable Development contains a chapter on the sustainability management, summarising the existing elements of control and processes of the German Strategy for Sustainable development.

² A German Secretary of State is the administrative head of a Ministry and is not elected (Niestroy 2005 p138).

³ BMU 1996 'Schritte zu einer nachhaltigen, umweltgerechten Entwicklung'

2.3 Co-ordination, policital responsibility, horizontal integration, vertical integration

After a parliamentary decision in 1998, the German government decided the Chancellery would take the lead and steer the SD process. They chair the high-ranking co-ordinating and monitoring body for sustainability called the State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development. This committee makes decisions concerning the strategy and keeps a close eye on its implementation. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the main motivations to give the Chancellery the lead seemed to be to avoid conflicts between Ministries (ESDN, 2010a). In the German Federal government, traditionally Ministers have a strong position and can lead their Ministry independently. A certain rivalry exists between these Ministries, in particular when they don't share the same political background. So if the Ministry of Environment would host SD, it would be difficult to introduce the concept into the other departments. This does not keep the Ministry of Environment from staying a pacemaker for SD (Niestroy 2005, p138).

According to some interviewees, opinions on governance for SD are divided within the Environmental Ministry. Some think SD needs this integrated approach because it facilitates integrating social or economic aspects in their projects, and introducing environmental questions in other domains. Others consider it necessary to put the main focus on environmental aspects, as this is considered as the most urgent problem. They argue that the integrated approach could weaken the position of the environmental Ministry. It opens the door for others to enter into their playing ground. More criticisms are to be expected, and the Environmental Department has put more effort in defending its projects and justifying its budgets.

The current Chancellor is a former Federal Environment Minister and is said to be genuinely committed to SD. She even sets her own targets for SD. Her lead responsibility and the high level Committee on SD are key success factors for the implementation of SD (ESDN, 2010a). Nevertheless, some interviewees were afraid SD was used by the chancellery to gain influence on the Ministries. Historically, the independence of the Ministries is a consequence of World War II. As the Allies feared Germany would gain too much power, they forced them to adapt a decentralised political structure, with independent Länder and departments. Putting sustainable development forward as political guiding line enables her to strengthen the global governance policy and to have more grip on other departments.

The last Progress Report of the National Strategy for SD (2008) proposes to strengthen the role of the Chancellery, by giving more rights to the state secretaries' Committee on SD that is situated within the Chancellery and presided by the Chancellor (Federal Government, Progress Report 2008, p12). Some interviewees mentioned that even with the Chancellor promoting SD, it is still far from mainstream in the governmental strategy. SD is said to concern mainly side projects. If a subject is considered as very important by the government, like climate change, it will enter in the regular politics, and will be dealt with in the regular Committees.

Horizontal integration

As German Ministries are used to working independently. The constitution emphasises the "principle of ministerial autonomy", this is the 'right of Ministers to conduct their affairs autonomously and on their own responsibility within the limits set by the Chancellor's guidelines'⁴. Bilateral cooperation is not unusual on specific subjects, but it is seldom done in a structural way.

⁴ <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/EN/Federal-Government/FunctionAndConstitutionalBasis/function-and-constitutional-basis.html>

The implementation of SD topics is regularly discussed during the State Secretaries' Committee on SD organised by the Chancellery and attended by Secretaries of State of all Federal Ministries. These secretaries of State are the heads of administration of the different departments, representing the highest level of the administrative hierarchy. The meetings of the Committee are prepared by a working group, composed of heads of section.

During the meetings of the Committee the ongoing projects and actions of each Ministry are presented. These projects rarely concern more than one or two departments. No structural collaboration between departments is foreseen. According to interviewees, collaboration is hampered by the fact that each Ministry has its own interpretation of SD and that most do not take into account the guidelines of the Strategy. Still, on several topics bilateral actions are initiated. The peer review mentions that in the future more cross-departmental projects will take place (Peer review 2009, p28).

Vertical integration

Given the German federalist constitution, governance for SD needs action at the level of the Länder and municipalities besides what is happening at the federal level. Many of the objectives dealt with in the Strategy are the responsibility of the Federal States or Länder and the municipalities. But due to historical facts, the Länder are not automatically drawn to collaborate with the Federal Government. Till recently there was no structural collaboration or exchange of information on SD between the federal level and the country level (Niestroy 2005, p142).

In 2008, the MPs of the Federal States were invited by the Committee on SD to discuss possible collaborations. As a result the progress report of 2008 contains for the first time a chapter written by the länder. Later on a number of ad hoc working groups on SD were organised. According to an interviewee this was a success, and gave birth to a new committee, set up with the Länder and the Chancellery to discuss three priority topics of SD: procurement, land use and indicators.

The peer review accounts that some Länder and municipalities 'have in fact been at the forefront of activity on sustainable development both in their areas, and through networks operating within and beyond Germany, but others lag behind' (Peer review 2009, p16). The pioneers of the Länder started even earlier than the federal level. Most concentrate on environment, with the exception of Hessen and Baden G. Horizontal consultation on SD takes already place between the länder in the länderarbeitsgruppe (BLACK), but it does not involve the Federal level.

2.4 Implementation mechanisms

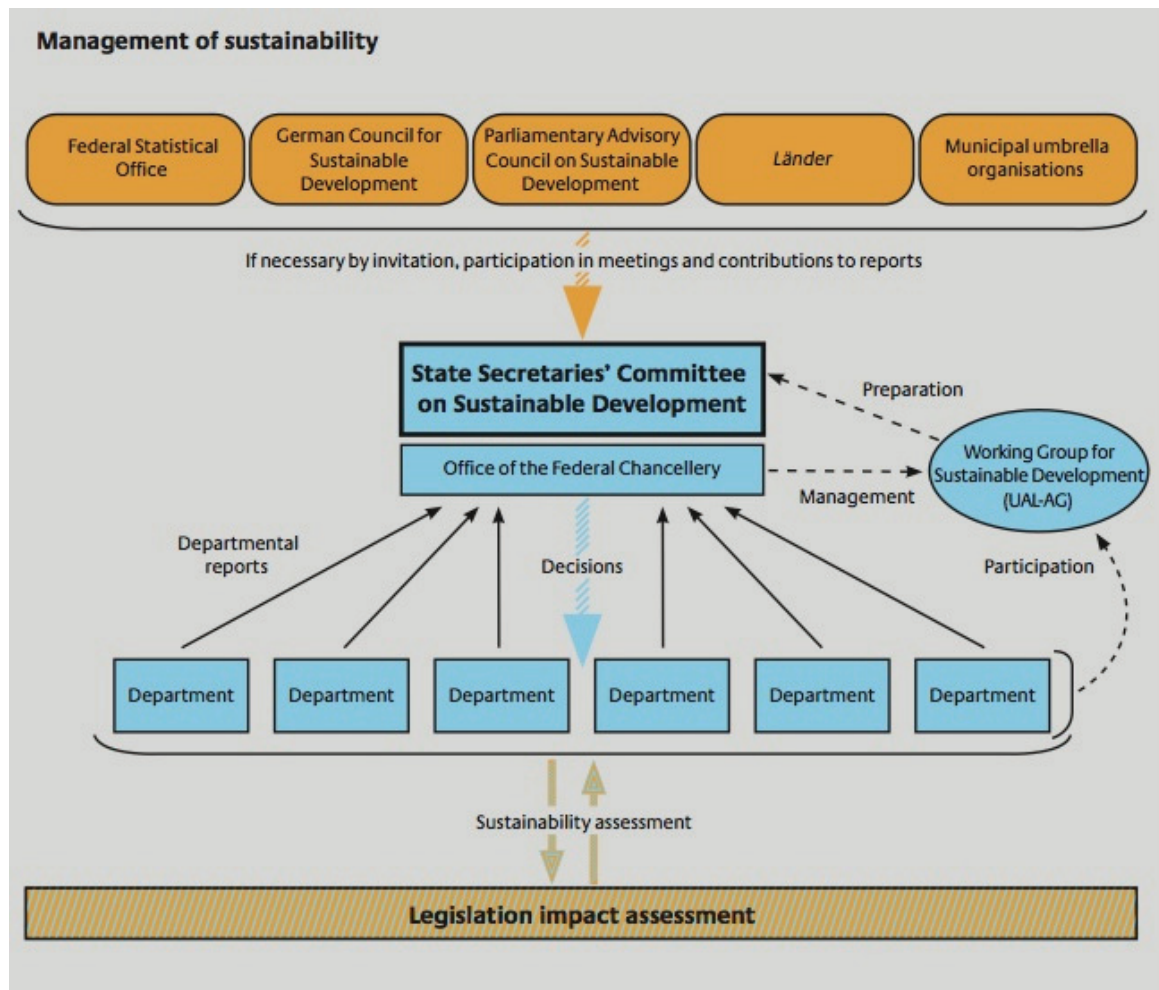


Figure 1. Implementation structure of the German federal governance model (Source: Federal Government, 2008 p34)

The **Federal Cabinet** is responsible for the approval of the Strategy for Sustainable Development. Here all decisions concerning SD are made.

Since 2000, the leading political institution for SD is the **State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development** situated at the Chancellery. All Ministries are represented in this Committee that is chaired by the Head of the Federal Chancellery. Its main tasks are

- The further development of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development.
- To regularly monitor the development of the sustainability indicators.
- Being the contact for the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development, for the Länder, and for municipal umbrella organisations.
- Giving advice on current topics of Federal Government work related to sustainability.

The meetings of the State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development are prepared by a working group under the direction of the Federal Chancellery in which all of the Ministries are represented by the heads of section related to the respective subject (Federal Government, Progress Report 2008 p211). This working group sets the agenda of the

committee. Both the Committee and the working group are organised by the office of the Chancellery⁵ on SD and environment. He is assisted by a secretariat.

During interviews it was explained that at first the committee for SD met only 2 or 3 times a year, each time back to back with another meeting. But recently, some pressure was put to improve its functioning through the Progress Report of 2008 and other sources showing that the outcome of the SD policies was far from satisfying. Now they meet once a month, following a strict agenda indicating a particular focus for every meeting. During these sessions Ministries report on their progress and future projects are discussed in depth during more than an hour. To obtain a broader view, stakeholders and experts are regularly invited. According to the Progress Report of 2008, these reports and the involvement of other actors including the federal states in the discussions at the Federal level, will in the future ensure that the new approach is integrated into everyday political life (Federal Government, 2008 p12).

In the Committee on SD the decisions of the cabinet are prepared by concluding a preliminary consensus. To assure a representation at high level, the membership of the Committee is strictly limited to the permanent Secretaries of State⁶. If a secretary is absent, he must give an authorisation to another Secretary of State to represent him. It is not possible to delegate to a lower in rank. Some interviewees said that this obliges them to be present, if their department wants to have some impact.

One of the interviewees explained the working relationship between the departments is very positive within the committee. The attitude is one of problem solving, even if there are different viewpoints. Most conflicts arise between the economic and the social department, but these are discussed openly. Within the group they speak quite freely, which was said to be uncommon in Germany.

Each Ministry appoints a civil servant **responsible for SD**. In most cases a head of section is appointed. They share out information on SD to all sections of the department. A civil servant said that as none of them is exclusively working on SD, good intentions cannot always be realised due to a limited time budget.

The **Parliamentary Advisory Council** exists since 2004 and was created on the initiative of the German Bundestag (parliament). As it is only a council and not a commission, they have to start the process all over again after every election. The Council submits proposals for the Strategy, provides recommendations and asks questions about the implementation of SD policies. An interviewee explained that the growing transparency due to the SD-reporting allows them to get more impact. As the importance of SD policies is growing, the parliament is showing more and more interest, although some interviewees said their activities are still limited.

2.5 Reporting, Monitoring and evaluation

The development and the monitoring of the indicators are done by the Interdepartmental Working Group on Sustainability Indicators, under the lead of the Federal Ministry for the Environment and with the participation of the Federal Statistical Office. Every two years, an Indicator Report is published. (Peer review 2009)

Once every legislative period, the Chancellery publishes a Progress Report on the National Strategy for Sustainable Development. The first report was published in 2004, the second in 2008. Its main objective is to evaluate the implementation of the Strategy, to propose concrete measures for the achievement of the stated goals, and to further develop the Strategy in selected focal areas (Peer review 2009). The Chancellery, in consultation with all departments,

⁶ http://www.sd-network.eu/pdf/doc_workshops/2009%20brussels/Bauernfeind.pdf

writes the first draft. This draft is reviewed by all Ministries and their remarks are integrated. Furthermore, the German Council for Sustainable Development, the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development in the German Bundestag, the federal states and the leading associations of local authorities are invited to make their own contributions to this report.

Each Ministry has to publish its SD-report on the web. An interviewee said this transparency moves decision makers to act, as they don't want these reports to be empty. Therefore Ministers are now beginning to ask their administration to develop projects and to report on sustainable development.

In 2007, the German federal government mandated a peer review on the progress of sustainable development in Germany and ways of advancing it further. An international group of experts evaluated the German sustainability policies and gave some practical recommendations. The peer review was facilitated by the German Council on Sustainable Development and was published in 2009. An interviewee told this report and the peer review of 2008 were both catalysts, resulting in an increased interest of Ministers and their departments for SD.

2.6 Capability-building

Some interviewees consider the lack of knowledge on SD forms an obstacle to the implementation of SD-policies in the German Federal government. Within the Chancellery, different topics are discussed at the high level working groups when preparing the decisions of the State secretaries' Committee on SD, often in the presence of experts. These topics are subsequently discussed in the Committee, and presented at the Cabinet. Thus the information is directly delivered to the Ministers, allowing them to get familiarised with SD. This encourages them to introduce certain subjects into their Ministries, resulting in a broad capability building within each department. Furthermore, the Chancellery, the Ministry for Environment and other instances enhance the capacity by organising conferences and by developing several other information flows. So knowledge about SD grows.

The implementation bodies are very committed, and interviewees confirmed many improvements were realised. But most would like to move on faster. A civil servant said many ideas are circulating, but cannot be realised because there is a lack of staff. Even at the Chancellery only one civil servant is appointed part time to work on SD. Some interviewees said that German SD-policies are depending on not more than 20 civil servants of the different departments, all of them having other assignments than SD, but all very motivated. One person explained understaffing is currently a common problem for the administration of all departments. Due to the bad reputation of the German federal administration, it is being restructured, which leads to a general capacity problem.

The example of the unit for SD of the Ministry for consumer affairs illustrates this problem. They invited some persons from the departments of consumer protection and of agriculture to see how different problems concerning sustainable development could be managed coherently. Of the 18 units of the Ministry 13 units made contributions. By wanting to reframe the problems globally and by addressing persons instead of units an open discussion was possible. The output was a long list of possible actions. A detailed planning for SD was made. The planning is monitored regularly and is reported. The process was fascinating, but the programme worked out to be too ambitious. It is never quoted as a good example, as it involved too much work. Due to a lack of capacity the civil servants became overburdened and were not able to realise the follow up.

2.7 Legislative underpinning, link to budget processes

Since 1994 the German Constitution (Grundgesetz) includes environmental protection and responsibility for future generations as a national goal (article 20a) (Janicke 2001, p 17). The constitution does not mention SD as such. Institutional aspects of SD are not legally defined and the government has no specific budget for SD.

The regulatory impact assessment for legislation implies a sustainability impact assessment (SIA). Consequently, the preparation of every new law and legislation has to include a verification of its impact on SD issues, as they have to be in line with the SD-Strategy. The procedure is not fully formalised yet, but it obliges to think about the consequences of new legislation. Another advantage is that it gives the parliament the opportunity to assess the law and to give comments.

The majority of the Länder working on SD foresee a small budget for the members of staff, and for projects. Only Baden Gutenberg has a different approach by setting up projects linked to a budget.

2.8 Citizens and stakeholder involvement

The main body for encouraging stakeholder involvement is the German Council for Sustainable Development. It was created in 2001 by the Federal Cabinet to provide the government with independent advice on sustainable development issues, to contribute to the further development of the Strategy for Sustainable Development and publish statements on individual relevant topics. Their main task however is to raise public awareness and to enhance the dialogue on sustainability in society. The Federal Chancellor appoints the members of the Council as private persons. They are seen as a Council of sages having different backgrounds and as thus representing societal groups. Their public statements are the result of an open discussion between the members and therefore represent a consensus view on the different topics of SD. The Council is highly regarded for its success in promoting SD through campaigns and conferences. To enable the Council to continue to broaden their scope, the government recently increased its budget. (Peer review 2009)

The last progress report of 2008 took some time to realise because it was accompanied by a large stakeholder consultation directed by the BMU. First a short proposition was submitted to an Internet consultation through an online mechanism, the website “dialogue for sustainability” established in 2004. The most important NGOs reacted, as did a small number of citizens. The next version was discussed during a stakeholder meeting with 150 civil servants, politicians and other stakeholders, like the trade unions, environmental organisations, parliament and scientific advisers. The report was again changed.

Pinter remarks that ‘there is still a sense that the National Sustainability Strategy continues to reach experts, but has not yet engaged a broader public. (Pinter 2006, p23) One of the interviewees explained that in general NGOs and civil society organisations remain with their core business, because the Strategy for SD stays in the periphery of political decisions. Seen the lack of political interest for this issue, they think it is a waste of time to put efforts in trying to influence SD policies. In his opinion stakeholders will get interested in SD if it is put at the core of decision making.

During the interviews, the lack of structural stakeholder consultation for SD was stated, but there seems to be a growing tendency to invite stakeholders even beyond the SD agenda. The consultation for the Progress Report 2008 is one of the examples. More and more civil servants are expected to develop campaigns with stakeholder involvement, and to organise round tables. For the German federal government this is a new and more open way of policy making, and is not yet a generalised practice.

2.9 Conclusion

Sustainable development was introduced only recently in the German federal government. The main focus of the Chancellery is to ensure continuity. Sustainable Development is considered as a learning process, and reliable structures offering a solid framework for all SD plans and actions is seen as a priority.

Although there is no budget and only a limited number of civil servants and politicians promoting it, its implementation is considered by all interviewees as a success. Steadily, the concept seems to find its way within the existing governance structures. The high level commitment is often cited as one of the main reasons for this success, together with the enthusiasm of the civil servants concerned. Recently, the latest Progress report and the peer review created a momentum opening new doors within the different Ministries.

However, generally recognised downsides are still the limited staff number and the lack of explicit budgets. If these difficulties are solved in the future, the German sustainable development governance model can grow to become a consistent and successful model, that can be able to realize a high degree of implementation.

3. The United Kingdom case study

3.1 Introduction

Although the United Kingdom is considered to be a country with relatively little government intervention in the economy, it is also regarded as a relative frontrunner in environmental policy and sustainable development strategies. (Niestroy (2005), Russel (2007), Swanson (2004)).

In 1997-98, after referenda in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the UK central government gave certain powers to these three subnational regions, which are since then called 'the devolved governments'. England is the only subnational region in the UK without its own competences and Parliament.

The competences of the devolved governments include health, education, justice, rural affairs, transport and sustainable development. The central government remains legally competent to legislate on any subject, though where primary legislative responsibility for a matter has been devolved, it normally does so only by agreement of the devolved legislature.

This case study focuses on the UK Central government; for more analysis on subnational governments and sustainable development, we refer to other work of the Policy Research Centre on Sustainable Development.⁷

The UK case is interesting, because the 2005 UK National Sustainable Development Strategy was considered to be one of the best around (Niestroy (2005), Russel (2007)). More recently, the UK has also stood out because of its very ambitious Climate Change Act (2008).

⁷ Project 3 'Flemish Sustainable Development Policy in a comparative perspective', see http://www.steunpuntdo.be/E_SDO_research_projects.htm

3.2 Model and strategy

The UK has never made a formal choice between an ecological and a holistic model. Based on the daily co-ordination tasks, the model tends towards an ecological one. On the other hand, the National Strategy covers a wide scope of economic, ecological and social issues.

The country is considered to be one of the first in the world to adopt a National Sustainable Development Strategy (Niestroy (2005)). This happened as early as in 1994. However, when the Labour government came into power, it considered this first strategy as ‘not sufficiently overarching’ (Niestroy (2005)). Moreover, the forthcoming situation with the devolved administration, made the new government decide to develop a new national strategy.

This second national strategy was adopted in 1999, with the title ‘A better quality of Life’. Shortly afterwards, a list of headline indicators was published for monitoring the progress. This second strategy was in place for five years. In 2004, a comprehensive review of the national strategy was organised, including a consultation round.

In 2005, the new National Sustainable Development Strategy was adopted, entitled ‘Securing the future’⁸. The new strategy was built around five principles, meant to form the basis of policy in the UK. The scheme and the principles are shown in the figure below.

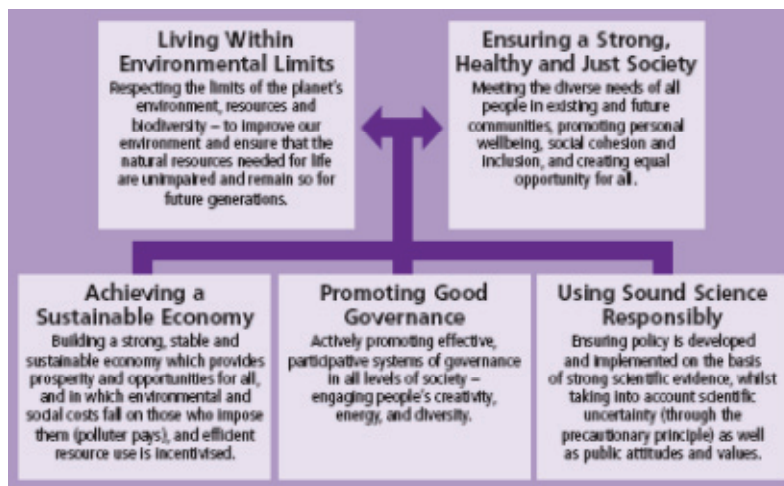


Figure 2. The five principles of the 2005 UK Strategy on Sustainable Development (source: HM Government (2005a))

In this strategy, a strong emphasis was put on ‘leading by example’. On the policy side, climate change was considered to be the ‘greatest threat’, and was put forward as an absolute priority. But many other issues were also addressed, like sustainable consumption and production, development aid, natural resources, housing, jobs, crime, liveability of town centres, transport, inequality, fuel poverty, education and child care.

Like in Belgium, policy making has become more complex in the UK as a result of the transfer of powers to the devolved governments. That's why, in conjunction with the UK strategy, a ‘Shared Framework for Sustainable Development’¹⁰ was adopted. This document is more concise and general. It provides a number of principles, priorities and indicators, which all

⁸ HM Government (2005a)

⁹ According to one interviewee, in practice the emphasis was on public procurement rather than wider forms of exemplary behaviour.

¹⁰ HM Government (2005a)

governments in the UK have agreed upon to take as a lead. It is a framework for the three devolved governments and the UK central government within which they would all make their own NSSD. Consequently, the scope of the 'UK strategy' is narrowed down to "*what the UK government proposes to do in England and in the areas for which it retains responsibility in the UK, including international relations*" (HM Government, 2005). This leads to a situation where Scotland, Wales and Northern-Ireland have separate strategies, but England has not. The framework document contains 20 'framework indicators' for the follow-up of the progress.

Four out of five interviewees considered the 2005 national strategy as 'outdated'; the fifth interviewee thinks it still has relevance and value, but recognises that it is now over 5 years since its adoption and it could be time soon for review and revision, or replacement.

The interviewees confirmed that, at the time, the strategy did make a difference, mainly in the areas of sustainable consumption and behavioural change. The five leading principles are still frequently used and DEFRA¹¹ still reports on the framework indicators. But most interviewees stated that it is time for a new strategy. This is not expected before the next national elections, which will take place before the summer of 2010.

Although it is not a research question of our governance study, it is interesting to highlight on the recent developments in the UK Climate Change Policy. In 2008, a new Climate Change Act was adopted, putting forward greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for up to 2022 (-34%) and even 2050 (-80%), and proposing an allocation of these targets among departments and policy sectors. This act can be considered very ambitious; it is even questioned by some for being unrealistic.¹² Nevertheless, the law was approved with consensus among all political parties.

The dynamics of the climate change debate are so strong, that it might be pushing (related) policy subjects, like sustainable development, to the background. This observation was shared by some interviewees, who added to this that this is not an ideal situation, because climate change is more narrow than sustainable development; important challenges, like wellbeing, social justice, other environmental challenges may find more of a struggle getting on the policy agenda and staying there. Moreover, according to one interviewee, the attention for climate change hasn't shifted society's way of (short term) thinking; the current policy is still based on picking the low fruits and spending more money to deal with this problem. Other important sustainability problems, like overconsumption and depletion of natural resources remain unaddressed if the focus is limited to the carbon problem.

3.3 Co-ordination, political responsibility, horizontal integration, vertical integration

Overall co-ordination

There is no single formal person or administration assigned explicitly for the overall co-ordination of the UK sustainable development policy. However, DEFRA is the leading department for the national strategy, and can be considered as the co-ordinator in the facts. DEFRA has a 'Sustainable Development Unit' of about 30 people. This unit is responsible for

¹¹ Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

¹² For example by the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research of the University of Colorado. Source: <http://environmentalresearchweb.org/cws/article/futures/39529>.

promoting the SDS across the government departments by liaising with them.¹³ It has no formal powers to trigger departments not meeting their targets.

Equally, there is no such thing as one ‘minister for sustainable development’ in the UK. Along with the remit of DEFRA, its minister is expected to take the lead with regard to sustainable development. Next to this, the Prime Minister and his administration, the Cabinet’s Office, are also expected to take the lead. In practice, the Prime Minister has made a number of speeches indicating his commitment to sustainable development (Russel (2007), p. 190). Several interviewees confirmed that the political leadership with regard to the sustainable development strategy has been strong and convincing.

Horizontal integration and departmental involvement

As in most countries, getting all government departments actively involved and designing their policies with a cross-departmental perspective, is a challenge in the UK. The departments are organised in a vertical way, leading in some cases to a ‘silo mentality’ of departments working independently from each other.

However, many efforts have been made to improve horizontal integration. Both the DEFRA Sustainable development unit and the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC, *infra*) have the remit to identify links between different policy processes and themes, and to facilitate an interdepartmental approach.

DEFRA heads the *sustainable development programme board*, a cross-government network with meetings on two levels: a meeting of senior officials of all departments, combined with on at a more junior level. Both meetings take place about four times a year, and are meant to contribute to integrated policy making.

The government also works with *Public Service Agreements* (PSAs). PSAs are bilateral agreements between two or more departments with statements, targets, intentions. First there was a separate PSA on sustainable development, but this approach didn’t have the levers necessary to encourage a interdepartmental way of thinking. Now DEFRA more tries to make sure SD is included in as many PSAs as possible.¹⁴

Each department also has a ‘sustainable development Minister’, a political responsible for the promotion of SD in each department. But according to one interviewee, like the separate PSA on SD, it didn’t bring about new dynamics, and they are not meeting on a regular basis anymore.

Climate change was named as one area where a strong interdepartmental collaboration proves to be possible.

Vertical integration

Since the competence shift to the devolved regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland set up their own administrations. Although this complicated the then sustainable development policy (Russel (2007), p. 190), it also meant that the three regions could set up a governance structure with a completely new structure, which they did. The result is that the devolved administrations are better capable of coping with the horizontal issues like sustainable development. It is beyond the scope of our research to go deeper into the devolved regions’ sustainable development governance.

¹³ Niestroy (2005) and interviews.

¹⁴ In the meantime, one interviewee informed us that the new coalition government, which took office in May 2010, decided to abolish the PSAs. It is not clear yet what will replace them.

On the local level, the central government encourages local communities to make their own ‘sustainable community strategy’. The SDC also has a number of actions aimed at capability building at the local level.

3.4 Implementation mechanisms

Although the UK SD governance is mainly co-ordinated by the environmental administration, the SD policies are clearly a responsibility of government as a whole, and of each individual department.

Departments have a number of formal commitments, inciting them to integrating sustainability into their daily policy making. One of these commitments are the ‘Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs)’, which each department and executive body¹⁵ has to deliver; annual reporting on the progress is also part of it. A whole policy cycle was built around these plans, so – next to making operations and policy more sustainable – they have a supplementary aim of capability building within departments. The SDC¹⁶ provides support in this cycle, this way further enhancing capability building.

The SDAPs have a strong focus on the operations-side¹⁷; nevertheless, issues concerning the integration of sustainable development into the policy making cycles can also be part of the plans.

The pivotal sustainable development implementation structure is undoubtedly the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC). This commission consists of ten independent experts from academia and civil society and about forty policy staff. The commission was established in 2000, but its role was strengthened in 2006, to include a scrutinising role: SDC became the independent ‘watchdog’, responsible for evaluation progress on the national strategy targets.

Many provisions were undertaken to ensure the success of the ‘operations side’ (“government leading by example”). A Centre of Expertise for Sustainable Procurement was created in 2008. The ‘Permanent Secretaries’ of each department are held accountable for their department’s performance. Departments are expected to reach 14 SOGE¹⁸ targets.

The SDC publishes a yearly evaluation of the progress¹⁹ of the departments, which tends to be very critical: it reports on the progress, but puts the emphasis on the targets which are not on track to be met. It also formulates constructive and concrete recommendations for further progress. The evaluation leads to a yearly ‘star rating’,²⁰ and a percentage rating: the pan-government rating was 78% for the periode 2007/08.

All interviewees agree that this cycle of making accountable, planning, implementing, indicator monitoring, reporting, evaluating, scrutiny and communication is a strong and coherent

¹⁵ Sustainable Development Commission (2006)

¹⁶ Sustainable Development Commission

¹⁷ procurement, the department’s car fleet, the department’s own waste collection,...

¹⁸ “Framework for Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate”

¹⁹ “Sustainable Development in Government (SdiG)” (SDC, 2008); the thematic areas are carbon, energy, travel, waste, water and biodiversity.

²⁰ In 2007, the pan-government score for the SOGE targets was four (out of five) stars. Next to these result, a number of targets have been put forward on a more ‘governance’ or ‘process’ level, like the use of the existing tools and mechanisms to improve their performance and the so-called SPAP-commitments from the ‘Sustainable Procurement Action Plan’. On both these last two, the pan-government score was only 2 stars (SDC, 2008).

system. However, as all governance approaches, it is no guarantee yet for a full integration of sustainable development into day-to-day policy making. It is beyond the scope of our research to measure the actual sustainable development performance of the UK policy making. All the interviewees are well aware that a strong governance system may be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a strong sustainable development policy. The experts we interviewed confirmed that good progress has been made by most of the departments, but it would be exaggerated to claim that sustainable development is at the core of all policy making nowadays. They acknowledge that the transition towards sustainable policy making is a slow process, and can only be taken step by step.

3.5 Reporting, Monitoring and evaluation

As mentioned above, departments have to report on the progress towards their targets, set forward in their action plans. The SDC is responsible for the evaluation of these departmental plans. SDC takes on this task, combining it with capability building and advice.

The SDC assessments are made publicly available via their website. All interviewees confirmed that the SDC indeed succeeds in remaining independent, and that it keeps a good balance between being constructive, collaborating with departments, advising and capability building on the one hand, and their scrutiny role, including name-and-shame through their publications.

The strict system of planning, reporting and scrutiny may come across as a heavy process, putting a high burden on departments. One interviewee confirms that some departments show a certain degree of 'reporting fatigue'. On the other hand, the broader policy cycle which the plans and reports are put in, makes sure the plans and reports are more than 'just making a plan or a report'. The support and the capability that is offered, makes it an interesting exercise for the people and organisations involved. Moreover, the SDC is looking for more ways to integrate different departmental reporting commitments.

The indicators that are chosen in the framework of the national strategy, are monitored and reported on by DEFRA.

In addition, a cross-cutting parliamentary committee, the 'Environmental Audit Commission (EAC)' was created in 1997. Its role is to examine to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development. Its scope is broader than only environment. The committee audits the performance against the existing targets and reports this to the parliament. Government is obliged to respond to the criticisms. This procedure sometimes leads to a parliamentary debate. The committee has no formal power but puts an extra pressure on the government to deliver results.

3.6 Capability-building

The UK has a well balanced governance system, at the same time encouraging, supporting, advising, pushing and scrutinising. The SDC plays a crucial role in many parts of this system.

The SDC performs its capability-building task primarily in combination with its other roles. It gives guidance in a SDAP process, when requested by a department. It can informally critique draft versions of an action plan, contribute to internal processes in departments, initiate network opportunities with SD officials of senior and junior levels, share experiences and promote collaboration. This integrated approach makes it easier for departments to accept the

scrutiny. Most interviewees consider this a *condition sine qua non*: a stringent evaluation system without a strong support and capability building would be hard to accept by the departments.

3.7 Legislative underpinning, link to budget processes

There is no separate legislation on sustainable development, and no separate budgets are allocated to sustainable development, except for the sustainable procurement initiative and the funding of the Sustainable Development Commission. The experts interviewed did not regard this as a weakness: both the sustainability concern and its budgets should be integrated in the regular departmental budgets. No evaluations have been carried out yet on the extent to which this principle is actually put into practice.

3.8 Citizens and stakeholder involvement

The UK hasn't got a strong tradition of involving NGOs in the national policy making processes. 'Forum for the future' has the profile to try and influence the national policy debate, but they choose not to focus on this because of three reasons. Firstly, they expect this kind of policy participation would take place at a too late stage of the policy cycle, resulting in a low impact on the final policy. Secondly, the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) plays the role of the watchdog which is usually taken up by an NGO. Although they are government funded, the SDC succeeds in keeping its independent position in a convincing way. Moreover, the SDC is consulted in a much earlier stage of the policy making cycle than NGOs would. Thirdly, Forum for the Future nor any other UK NGO is funded for playing this kind of policy-lobbying role, making it not obvious for civil society organisations to invest in this activity.

Various consultation procedures do exist²¹, but their impact is limited because of the late stage in the policy process, according to one interviewee.

On the local and county level, 'local strategic partnerships' have been created; these multistakeholder groups offer strong participation for local civil society actors, and they even have decision powers on certain issues. But according to an interviewee, sustainable development is not at the core of the debates held in these fora.

3.9 Conclusion: Towards a 'new policy' or unchanged business?

All interviewees agree that the UK governance system, with the SDC playing a central role with regard to capability building, departmental involvement, scrutiny, watchdog and monitoring and evaluation, is a strong system.²² It has led to a departmental involvement that is probably much higher than it would have been with a less comprehensive or a less binding system.

Nevertheless, the interviewees equally agree on the fact that this strong governance system hasn't led to a shift away from the 'classical' way of looking at policy making. There is a consensus that, in spite of this strong system, sustainable development today still remains in the margin of UK policy making, and not in the core. It is interesting to mention that the SDC

²¹ For instance, a consultation was organized for the 2005 national strategy.

²² Swanson (2004) calls it 'one of the most well established SD governance systems in the world'.

has triggered a debate on the 'prosperity without growth' issue²³. This initiative has shown that the debate is still more of an intellectual exercise than a realistic policy proposal.

Moreover, it appears that the governance system, which has worked in a strong way, based on the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy, now has come to a point where it needs a 'face-lift': the strategy is too old to actively be an stimulus for government departments, and it's not clear whether a new strategy is coming up or whether a different approach will be followed. These decisions will have to be taken by the new national government that will take office after the elections in May 2010. While the strategic direction of the new coalition government is yet to be awaited, one decision has already been taken: the SDC, which we described as the pivotal actor with regard to sustainable development in the UK government is likely to be abolished, as is announced in the UK press.²⁴ This decision, along with the abolishment of the Public Service Agreements mentioned earlier, could be signs that the new coalition government (May 2010) might decide to scale back the UK sustainable development governance model as it was shaped in the past thirteen years. This expectation (fear) was already raised by several of our interviewees, even months before the elections of May 2010.

The UK's sustainable development governance system is a strong and coherent system, with many incentives for all government departments to take sustainability concerns into account. These incentives are a well-balanced mix of positive incentives, like capability building and support, good examples, but also negative, such as the pressure of having to explain the non-achievements of targets in parliament and name-and-shame policies. It is also characterized by strong political leadership at the highest level, which is to be seen as an important factor in its success.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from this analysis: the first is that the UK case study shows that it is possible to set up a governance system that is strong enough to create a positive dynamic process, triggering *all* government departments to show at least a certain commitment to sustainable development.

The second conclusion, however, is that a governance system *alone* should not be expected to create a drastic shift in policy thinking overnight. This shift is undoubtedly a long-term process requiring a stronger paradigm shift and conviction of all stakeholders involved, in government, administration, the economy and society. But a strong governance system in the short run can make a contribution to this long-term shift, or - put differently - to this *transition*.

4. The Dutch case study

4.1 Introduction

The Netherlands are known for their 'Poldermodel', a term used to describe the way in which policy decisions are made by consensus. This means that an agreement has to be reached between the different political and societal parties involved. Much attention is paid to the process of decision making, during which all parties are supposed to co-operate to find the best possible solution for all concerned. The involvement by the stakeholders is traditionally organised through the Social Economic Council (SER). This is a tri-partite co-operation between employers' organisations such as VNO-NCW, labour unions such as the FNV, and

²³ SDC (2009b)

²⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/jul/20/sustainability-watchdog-axed-cuts>

government. This model was attacked in 2002 by the political party 'Lijst Pim Fortuyn', whose agenda focused on fewer strategies, less discussion and more action. As the party was very successful, its influence on policy decisions was considerable.

At the end of the last century, the Netherlands were frontrunners with regard to environmental planning. By 1984, they had already developed their first integrated environmental plan "more than the sum of parts". From 1989 this plan was followed by four National environmental plans (NEPs). Many initiatives were also taken in the field of development policy. So far, many successful projects have been completed in both fields. However, being an environmental spearhead seems to have had a negative effect on sustainable development policies. According to some interviewees the development of the NEPs created the impression that the Dutch government was performing well on sustainability issues. Therefore, it did not seem necessary to devote the same level of attention to sustainable development policies as such and changes did not seem necessary. One of the interviewees explained this through the 'law of the restraining advance'²⁵, and Niestroy called it the tragedy of the frontrunner (Niestroy 2005, p 231).

Presently, the Dutch environmental policy has weakened, and transition management has been foregrounded by the last National Environmental Policy Plan (NEP4) in 2001 (VROM 2001). This emphasised the need for long term policies in order to address persistent environmental problems.

4.2 Model and strategy

The Dutch governance approach made a strong distinction between the national and the international dimensions of sustainable development. The governance of the national dimension first focused on the environment, taking into account a number of social and economic parameters. This approach corresponds to the ecological governance model developed by Bachus et al. (2005). In contrast, when the international level of sustainable development was addressed, social and economic aspects received greater emphasis, although some environmental aspects were taken into account too.

Later on, attempts were made to develop a more holistic model giving equal weight to the three pillars of sustainable development. A global sustainable development strategy was developed in 2002, giving attention to environmental, social and economic aspects (VROM 2002). But this transversal approach failed to yield results and most sustainable development initiatives continued to be taken independently of each other.

The strategy was never adopted by the then government, and after the new elections in the same year the coalition between labour and liberals had to make place for coalition between Christian democrats and liberals, a very different coalition took office. This government blamed its predecessors for engaging in drawn-out strategy discussions while failing to take the necessary action. So instead of a new sustainable development strategy, two action plans were developed; one by the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning (VROM) and one by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both plans were merged in the action plan 'Duurzame daadkracht,' which was presented as the Dutch sustainable development strategy by Prime Minister Balkenende in Johannesburg (VROM 2003). The plan was developed at very short notice and was finalised in 2003. According to an interviewee it had no public support and did not have many consequences at the policy level. The plan was followed in 2007 with a follow up report (VROM 2007). The first action plan was studied by the peer review of the National

²⁵ 'wet van de remmende voorsprong': name given by the Dutch historian Jan Romain of the phenomenon that reaching an advance in certain fields often discourages further development. Inevitably in time others will surpass, and the lead position will be lost.

Sustainable Development Strategy²⁶, commanded in 2006 by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in response to an invitation from the European Commission. The review concluded that 'Duurzame Daadkracht' could not be regarded as a sustainable development strategy because it lacked an overall vision and a set of guiding principles. Furthermore, the plan's focus was 'predominantly environmental' and it 'failed to address the social and economic dimension' (RMNO 2007, p 34). The peers considered the action plan as an internal government exercise, because it lacked ownership in society and in the business sector and did not reflect the actions of civil society (RMNO 2007, p 34-35).

It was suggested during the interviews that this lack of strategic vision for sustainable development could also be due to the fact that sustainable development was previously dominated by environmental issues. Several National Environmental Policy Plans (NEPs) were made. Initially, these NEPs were compulsory every four years, and had ambitious quantitative targets. The first two plans were going beyond European standards. As they were very effective they brought about many changes. Internationally, they were considered as an example for other countries (Niestroy 2005, p 208). Throughout the years, however, the plans became less innovative. The latest NEP is said merely to meet European requirements (Niestroy 2005, p 225). According to the peer review, NEP3 and 4 miss strong quantitative targets (RMNO 2007, p 37). For most interviewees, the environment is clearly not the priority it used to be. Under a more liberal government, environmental rules have been eased and NEPs are not even obligatory anymore.

As mentioned above, the fourth NEP gave birth to a new kind of long-term strategies, called transition management. Presently, transition management is used in four domains: energy, agriculture, water and biodiversity. Although transition management is closely related to sustainable development, it is not considered as being part of sustainable development policies by the government (Niestroy 2005, p 212). According to some of the interviewees the practical results of these transitions are not yet impressive, but they seem to work.

Sustainable development was introduced in 2007 as an important part of the coalition agreement because Herman Wijffels, who was in charge of the formation of the last government, was highly committed to sustainable development. One of the six main pillars of the coalition agreement is a sustainable human environment. Some of the interviewees considered this the main reason why the Netherlands are still involved in sustainable development. The main action points are now climate change, CSR, sustainable public procurement and production chain management.

4.3 Co-ordination, political responsibility, horizontal and vertical integration

Overall responsibility and co-ordination

Since Brundtland, most Dutch prime ministers have been engaged in sustainable development, but until now their role has remained unclear. When Prime Minister Kok decided to tackle the issue head-on in 2000, he faced several criticisms on details of the sustainable development policies. Consequently, he withdrew his commitment and left the responsibility to the respective Ministries. Currently the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM), the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Niestroy 2005, p 210-211) are showing the strongest commitment. The present Prime Minister, Balkenende, agrees that sustainable development is important, but leaves decisions on the matter to the Ministries concerned. He has no clear agenda on sustainable development

²⁶ The peer review of the NSDS was done by several international experts and was guided by a steering committee established by the RMNO, involving other participating Dutch Advisory Councils, Dutch experts and civil servants.

and has not developed any personal initiatives. According to the peer review (RMNO 2007, p35) he does not offer real leadership.

In the Netherlands, the cabinet including all ministers makes the final decisions. To streamline the decision-making process, decisions are first debated within a restricted group in six different sub-councils. To enable the implementation of the coalition agreement, the sub-council for environment was renamed the sub-council for sustainable living environment (Duurzame Leefomgeving). Here, all decisions concerning sustainable development are prepared by ministers, sometimes in the presence of experts, on a weekly basis.

Several interviewees agree that apart from what was included in the coalition agreement, sustainable development was not an item that was actively taken up by politicians. This partially changed in 2005 when one of the parliamentarians began to ask questions to the Prime Minister on his sustainable development leadership. A plenary discussion was held, but most party leaders were absent. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister showed his commitment and organized two meetings resulting in some general official positions being adopted. Still the political impact of these positions was low. An interviewee said the prime minister's enthusiasm was stimulated by one of his advisors, who also ordered the peer-review of the NSDS. After her departure, the prime minister's commitment decreased significantly.

Horizontal integration

To achieve the 2007 coalition agreement's goal 'duurzaam moet je doen' (sustainability needs action) throughout the different departments, the government initiated KADO (Kabinetsbrede Aanpak Duurzame Ontwikkeling). KADO is a working group comprising high-ranking officials from six Ministries²⁷. They discuss weekly the implementation of sustainable development. The emphasis is on the link between planet, profit and international development. The KADO meetings are prepared by a lower-level working group, which must ensure horizontal collaboration between the different Ministries. This brings sustainable development within the regular governance structures, which can be seen as a positive evolution.

The peer review (RMNO 2007, p 35) mentions there is little cooperation and co-ordination between government levels on sustainable development issues. No structural multilateral framework is present. So apart from the KADO working group, whose aim is limited to the application of the coalition agreement, there is no meeting point for the development of new ideas or common projects.

However, on some specific topics cooperation is present. The co-ordination of the governmental actions on corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be hold up as an example. All governmental social responsibility projects are supervised by an interdepartmental working group, including the ministries of agriculture, social affairs; environment (VROM); foreign affairs and economic affairs. These actors meet every month and have informal contacts.

Traditionally, however, Ministries are used to working autonomously. If collaboration is needed on a specific project, then temporary cooperation may be undertaken. Consequently, several interdepartmental projects are ongoing; each led by only one of the Ministries. In most cases these projects concern bilateral relationships. Niestroy says the multiple fragmented collaborations and the lack of an overarching approach prevent coherent governance for sustainable development (Niestroy 2005, p 231).

Vertical co-ordination

²⁷ They represent the Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning; the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations; the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality; the Minister of Economic Affairs; the Minister for Housing, Community and Integration and the State Secretary for Transport, Public Works and Water Management.

An interviewee mentioned that in 2000 a three-year project was launched with a view to promoting vertical collaboration on sustainable development between the local authorities and the Ministries. This project mainly aimed at capability building at the local level and did not lead to many common actions. The project was not renewed, which according to one of the interviewees was for the best, as the municipalities are quite autonomous and do not always appreciate interventions from above. Several municipalities continue to autonomously develop sustainable development projects.

4.4 Implementation Mechanisms

Departments such as Economic Affairs, VROM, Agriculture and Development Cooperation have their own sustainable development implementation programmes. While Economic Affairs has a focus on CSR and energy, VROM focuses on environmental issues, sustainable purchases and climate. International Development addresses issues as poverty, human rights and international working conditions. Other departments, such as Agriculture and Employment, deal with core issues of sustainable development, but do not mention it as such. An interviewee confirmed that the frameworks of most actions are well defined, but that it is not always easy to monitor the outcomes. In addition, five Ministries have initiated an internal working group for the introduction of sustainable management within the department. All these processes started on a voluntary basis.

The co-ordination within the Ministry of VROM can be taken as an example of the difficulties the implementation of sustainable development encounters. Although the Department of VROM is the most involved in sustainable development policies, its sustainable development coordinator is not a high-ranking official and does not have a large staff. Interviewees said that sustainable development is supposed to be already embedded throughout the department and therefore does not need that much co-ordination. Some interviewees say that the current Minister of the Environment lacks authority and is not able to impose her priorities politically. This could be one of the reasons why sustainable development and the environment are receiving less political attention.

4.5 Monitoring, reporting and evaluation

Two successive reports on the exploration of sustainability were issued, the so called 'duurzaamheidsverkenningen' (MNP 2007, RIVM 2004). The aim of these reports is to provide an integrated view on the social, economic and ecological situation in the Netherlands, and to put this in a worldwide perspective, taking into account future generations. An interviewee regarded these reports as one of the most positive outcomes of the Dutch sustainable development policy.

Currently, efforts are made to reform the budgetary planning of the government into a policy plan. Therefore the budget of the cabinet's sustainable action programme has to contain delivery structures, and a control mechanism. Furthermore, the budgets spent on sustainable development must be included in the traditional annual progress reports of each Ministry, and are systematically debated in Parliament. As this action programme is more focused on processes and has no concrete objectives, this procedure does not allow for systematic monitoring of the progress made. One of the interviewees said this reporting suggests sustainable development is an important issue in the Netherlands but that in fact most of the projects mentioned are not developed within the framework of sustainable development. Rather, they are existing actions or actions started from a less integrated point of view. In his opinion, there is no real governance for sustainable development in the Netherlands.

As mentioned before, a peer review of the National Sustainable Development Strategy was held (RMNO 2007). According to an interviewee, the peer report contained many interesting recommendations, and he regretted these were not taken into account by the government.

The first monitor for sustainable development was issued early 2009. It was commissioned by KADO and is divided in natural, social, human and economic capital. The monitor is based on existing national and international data (VROM 2009). Several Ministries have also developed their own indicators for some aspects of sustainable development.

4.6 Capability-building

As a consequence of the statements made by the club of Rome in the early seventies, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) has been founded in 1972. The aim of the WRR is to advise the government about future developments of great public interest using a scientific approach. The government can use this advice to readjust existing policy, to develop new policy or to support decision making. Some of the issues addressed are closely related to sustainable development.

The “Learning for Sustainable Development” programme provides information and enhances learning processes on sustainability. It has set up programmes for schools, national civil servants, provinces and water board districts. The programme says to have helped to put sustainable development on the agenda of the national administration, provinces and major municipalities²⁸. Furthermore a government network for sustainable development²⁹ was created, enabling all civil servants to exchange knowledge on sustainable development.

As Ministry budgets have been slashed during the past few years, much knowledge has been lost. An interviewee remarked that this has made it more difficult for the administration to give sound advice.

4.7 Legislative underpinning, link to budget processes

None of the sustainable development processes is legally embedded, as there is no sustainable development legislation. An interviewee said Dutch policy has moved towards less regulation and a stronger emphasis on voluntary actions. Presently preserving economic competitiveness is considered as the priority. One of the reasons mentioned is the shift from a social-democrat coalition to a Christian-democrat government. Niestroy argues this new situation contributed to slowing down the sustainable development agenda (Niestroy 2005, p 2009).

As sustainable human development is part of the coalition agreement, a budget of 800.000 Euro has been earmarked for the entire period (2007-2011)³⁰. However, as mentioned by interviewees, most sustainable development activities are financed by the Ministries’ general budgets.

As mentioned above, the budgets spent on sustainable development have to be included in each Ministry’s traditional annual progress report.

²⁸ http://www.senternovem.nl/Leren_voor_duurzame_ontwikkeling/english.asp

²⁹ <http://rijksduurzaamheidsnetwerk.ning.com/>

³⁰ http://www.regering.nl/Het_kabinet/Begroting_2008/Miljoenennota_2008

4.8 Citizens and stakeholder involvement

Traditionally, employers and employees organisations are in policy making involved through the Social Economic Council (SER). But for sustainable development as a theme, there is no systematic consultation of stakeholders.

There is no Sustainable Development Council in the Netherlands. The Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and the Environment (RMNO) has tried to take up this role informally by organising stakeholder conferences and a peer review and by elaborating several recommendations on sustainable development. In general, the RMNO was established to advise the government and to do research on problems concerning environmental issues, spatial planning and sustainable development. The RMNO is tripartite in its composition, with members including researchers, policy-makers and research users (consultants, trade and industry and agencies). This independent advisory body was dismantled end of 2009 for political reasons.

Some of the projects do involve stakeholders on a regular basis. The project on chain responsibility guided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, included a large stakeholder consultation process and several round tables. The aim of the project was to stimulate discussion between the government, society and companies on possible actions and is part of the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH)³¹.

In general Dutch governance is not so much based on obligations and restrictions as on voluntary action. To get more leverage in the discussions, NGOs are used to create a counterforce to the business world. They operate as watchdogs; their reports enable the media and the Parliament to get more insights.

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs and VROM are also subsidising NGOs concerned with sustainable development matters to enable them to develop sustainable development projects. The URGENDA group, for example is an NGO playing an important role in stimulating sustainable development and is funded by the Ministry of the Environment (VROM). They organised the Day and the Night of Sustainability, and want to have at least 3000 electric cars on the streets of Rotterdam in the next 3 years.

4.9 Conclusion

In the Netherlands, discussions on the future of society have always been considered as important. Many studies are undertaken to predict how society will and can evolve. However, these discussions are not leading to a common long term political vision on sustainable development. Although the Prime Minister supports sustainable development, there is still no common sustainable development strategy. Nevertheless, many separate strategies are developed for the main focus points of sustainable development. When the Brundtland report was published, environmental questions were tackled intensively. Presently, the focus has shifted to climate change, CSR, sustainable public procurement and production chain management. Moreover, some of the environmental issues are incorporated in long term planning, through transition management. Interviewees said that every project run by the cabinet or one of the Ministries on one of these topics is put within a proper framework and the necessary budgets are earmarked.

But although most actions are well thought-out, there is no overall co-ordination and there is often no link between the different actions. Their implementation seems to be dependent on political interest and the trends of the moment. The existing sustainable development structures are also amenable to changes, as sustainable development is not legally embedded.

³¹ www.duurzamehandel.com

One of the consequences is that from first movers on the environmental level, the Netherlands are now operating on a more modest level, and aim to meet the requirements of the European legislation.

Although there is a political will to integrate sustainable development and long term visions into policy implementation, the continuation of these policies is not guaranteed. Therefore sustainable development policies are still dependent on front runners. This does not alter the fact that many useful actions are undertaken and results are achieved on several fronts.

The Netherlands have always had a governance model where many things remain un-formalised. This doesn't have to be a problem, as long as the government in place sees sustainable development as an political priority. However, if a new government decides to take a minimalistic approach, not many structures are in place to maintain the model: the risk of a severe collapse is always present. It remains to be seen what will be the impact of the government switch of October, 2010.

5. The Belgian federal case study

5.1 Introduction

Since 1970, Belgium progressively became a federal State with several governments, the government of the Federal State, the governments of the three Communities and of the three Regions, all of which are equal from the legal viewpoint. Generally, the Federal State covers everything connected with the public interest. The communities are competent for culture, education, the use of languages and matters relating to the individual such as health policy and assistance to individuals. Regions have competences in fields that are connected with their territory.

On the federal level, some politicians have shown early interest in sustainable development. After the Rio conference, actions were taken and in 1997 the act on sustainable development was approved, which included an institutional framework and the commitment to develop a strategy. This act ensures a continuous presence of sustainable development and shows the commitment to SD preoccupation of the then government. During the government of 2003-2007 a State Secretary for sustainable development was appointed, allowing several changes to happen. But even if sustainable development has been structurally embedded in federal policies, this does not mean it is currently considered as mainstream. Currently sustainable development has been assigned to the Minister for Climate and Energy and is not considered as a priority. Nevertheless its structural embedding allows continuity in implementation.

5.2 Model and strategy

At the beginning only limited knowledge was available on governance for sustainable development. Therefore the Federal Planning Bureau developed its own theoretical holistic model based on the DPSIR model, (Driving forces, Pressures, State, Impacts, Responses), developed at the OECD and the triangle model on interactions between human, economic and environmental capital and called it the TransGovern model (see Figure 3). The name is short for Transformation of Living Conditions through Governing.

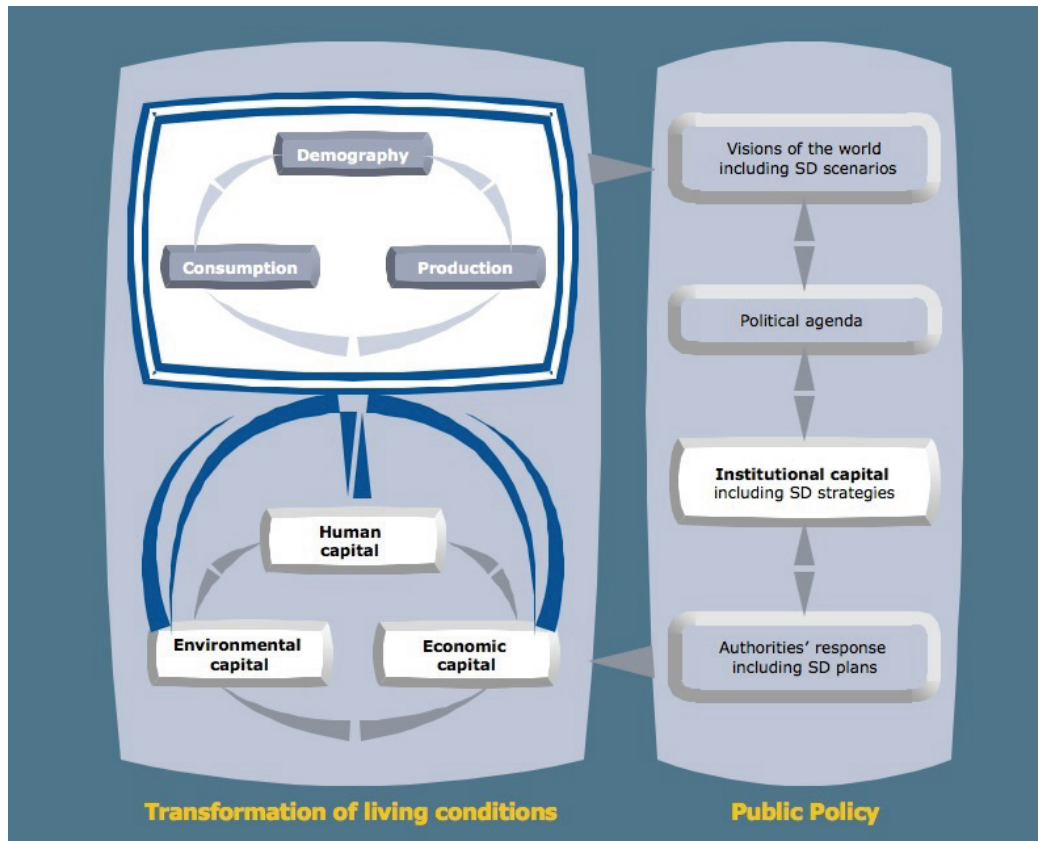


Figure 3: Transgovern Model (source: Federal Planning Bureau (2005))

It is a simplified instrument for assembling and utilizing information on society, environment, economy and politics. Furthermore, it allows a transversal integration of all data. The model was tested a first time in the first Federal Report on Sustainable development. All information on sustainable development plans and actions of the different departments were connected and linked to governance processes.

At the federal level the strategy for sustainable development is written down in the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development. This plan contains a model for the strategic implementation of sustainable development, based on the governance cycle (see Figure 4), and an overview of the measures to be taken to progress towards sustainable development. In principle it is issued every four years. The first plan was established by the Task Force Sustainable Development of the Federal Planning Bureau³². Presently the plan is prepared by the ICDO, and the Task Force monitors its implementation. The plan is based on the annual Federal Report of Sustainable Development of the ICDO and the bi-annual Federal Report for Sustainable Development of the Federal Public Planning Service for Sustainable. Its draft version is submitted to a large consultation of the Belgian citizens. The remarks are integrated and the Federal Government approves the plan. Two of these plans were already presented to the public. The latest was from 2004-2008 (ICDO 2004).

³² Task Force Sustainable Development, 1999

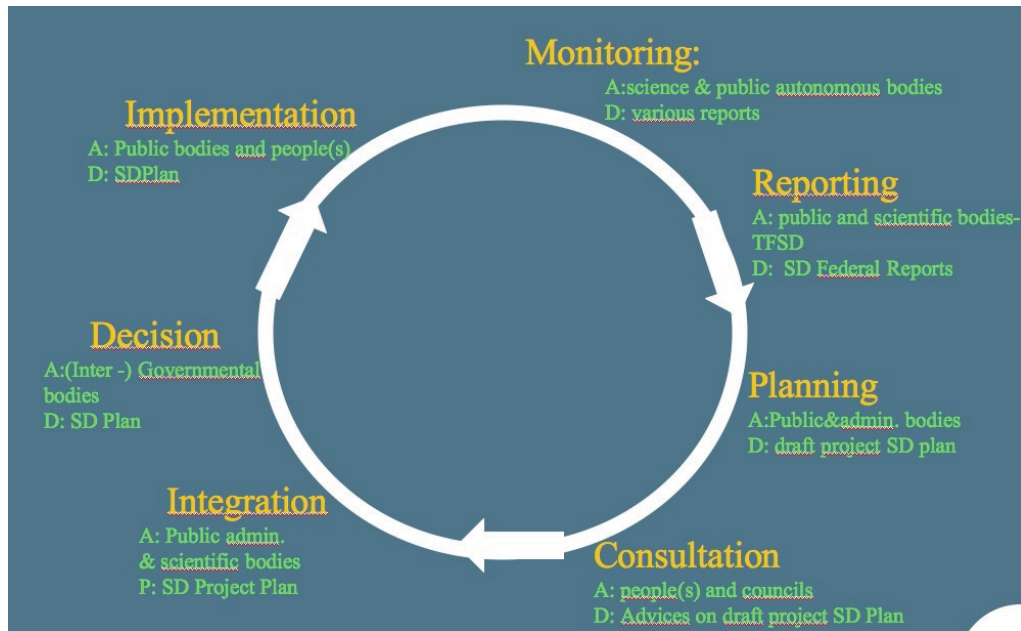


Figure 4 The federal Strategy Cycle (source: Zuinen (2006))

In 2007, a draft of the newest Federal Plan for Sustainable Development was submitted to public consultation. Although 11.000 copies of the draft were distributed, only 350 responses were received according to an interviewee. Until now, the new plan still has not been approved due to the problems of the federal government, and to the fact that the issue of a new law on sustainable development has been delayed.³³

The 2007 government agreement mentions sustainable development repeatedly. But still it was said by interviewees that neither the Federal Plan, nor the government agreement are part of a long term planning. They were also not translated into concrete actions, with clear goal setting and planning. As a result, it seems very difficult to evaluate the realisation of what was promised. The interviewees consider in general the first plan as the most consistent. The following plans are said to lack an underlying coherent framework. They are considered as important, but are more a proposition of several individual actions that can be realised. Sustainable development should theoretically be at the base of the Belgian governance system, but this is not yet the case. Also it was uttered that most decisions for sustainable development were made consensus based, and that this tempered the level of ambition of the final goal setting. The weak international dimension of the policies was another criticism.

The report of the Court of Audit of Belgium (2005) on the federal policy of sustainable development observes a discrepancy between the Government's commitments and delivery. It states that 'the federal Government has failed to turn its sustainable development plan into a genuine strategic tool or to integrate sustainable development criteria into the normal processes of management of activities and services falling under its administration.' One of the main reasons, according to the Audit Court, is the fact that no institutional player has been entrusted with leading the initiative. Interviewees confirmed that this problem subsists until now.

³³ www.plan2009.be/startpagina_nl.html; www.icdo.be/NL/publicaties/federale_plannen/3e_plan

5.3 Co-ordination, political responsibility, horizontal integration, vertical integration

During the last government a secretary of state for sustainable development (2003-2007) was appointed by the former federal government, and was placed under the tutorial of the prime minister. Although this secretary of state had limited political leverage, she was able to introduce some supplementary instruments such as an obligatory Sustainability Impact Assessment (DOEB) for every law proposal.

Presently, the Minister for Energy and Climate change bears is also responsible for sustainable development. According to most interviewees, sustainable development is not his main focus. They observe that presently little political attention is given to this issue. It was said that politicians should show more decisiveness, and more audacity. They were considered as lagging behind, while many initiatives are taken by other players.

The Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICDO/CIDD) co-ordinates contacts between the different departments. Each Ministry is represented and interactive discussions are held.

On several SD topics, such as public sustainable procurement, the federal government works together with several regional Ministries. These collaborations are done at hoc and are not structural.

Representatives of the (three representatives each) participate in the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICDO). The regions and communities are represented within the ICDO, and are considered as “associated partners”, which means that they don't have the right to take part in the votes.

Regional authorities are encouraged to issue official statements during the preparation of the Federal Plan. The federal Plan is not legally binding at the sub-national levels. As some of the objectives and targets of the plan relate to sub-national competencies, the political levels involved can establish “cooperation agreements”. Once adopted, the implementation of these agreements is mandatory (ESDN 2010).

In 2004, the federal government initiated the discussion on a National Sustainable Development Strategy with all governments. Several interviewees said that as there was a strong difference between the capacities and interests of the federal level and those of the other governments, this process never surpassed the initial phase. The other governments began to develop their own policies as to maximise their input in the National Strategy. In the meantime Belgium has established a framework for its NSDS. It is not respecting the deadline of the European Union of June 2007, by which every member state should have completed its first NSDS (Council of the EU 2006; art 40).

5.4 Implementation mechanisms

Several institutions were created to support the federal policy in a legally embedded way. This makes it possible for civil servants to continue their work independently from the political interest. Still many interviewees mentioned that the interest of politics is necessary to move forward at an interesting pace. Most remarked also that the implementation of sustainable development is very much dependent on the enthusiasm of the civil servants concerned.

The Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICDO/CIDD) started in 1997. The Commission prepares the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development, verifies the

implementation of the Federal Plan, co-ordinates contacts between the different departments and provides the annual³⁴ report on the progress of sustainable development within all ministerial departments.

The Federal Public Planning Service for Sustainable Development (POD DO) prepares since 2002 the sustainable development policies of the federal government and co-ordinates the implementation of the plan. They provide expertise and sensitize citizens and civil servants sustainable development to sustainable development.

The Task Force on Sustainable Development of the Federal Planning Bureau started in 1998 and monitors the implementation of the plan and issues a bi-annual Federal Report for Sustainable Development. In principle this report is issued every 2 years and must contain the planning,³⁵ a state of affairs and the future visions of sustainable development at the federal level.

From 2004 on every Ministry established a sustainable development cell. According to interviewees some of these cells are quite active, but this seems to depend on the personality of the person in charge.

5.5 Capability-building

Several initiatives are taken to enhance capability building within the federal government.

Every year the week of sustainable development is organised by the POD DO, including the day of sustainable development for all federal civil servants. Regularly seminars are organised on specific themes.

The POD DO provides for capability building if asked for, and the ICDO supports its members on all sustainable development issues.

On the websites of the POD DO, and the ICDO information can be found on their activities. Furthermore a global site for sustainable development was created (www.duurzameontwikkeling.be) and an accessible site for everyone (www.duurzame-info.be). Also a guide for sustainable purchasing of the government was put online.

5.6 Monitoring, evaluation and strategy renewal

The Task Force on Sustainable Development of the Federal Planning Bureau monitors closely the implementation of the plan and issues a bi-annual Federal Report for Sustainable Development. The report describes the existing situation in the field of sustainable development in Belgium and in the rest of the world. It includes several sustainable development indicators (SDIs).

Each year a progress report on sustainable development by all departments of the administration is foreseen. This report is written by the responsible of the sustainable development cell of each ministry. As mentioned these reports are put together and published by the ICDO in their annual report. It was said that these reports are not drawn up in a consistent way, and make it difficult to evaluate the progress made. It shows some issues are getting more and more important, as sustainable public purchase and CSR. Other actions that

³⁴ www.icdo.be/NL/publicaties/jaarverslagen

³⁵ www.plan.be/publications/Publication.php?lang=en&TM=61&IS=63

were planned have not been taken up as foreseen (eg. ethical investments and labelling). The quality and the structure of the reports of the Ministries vary considerably. Still the report is seen by some as a stimulus to achieve results.

Till recently every four years a renewed sustainable development plan must be brought forward. Due to the changes brought by the new SD act, this must now be done every five years, as to enable the co-ordination of the actions with regional and European strategies.

5.7 Legislative underpinning, link to budget processes

In May 1997, the Belgian Act on the Co-ordination of Federal Sustainable Development Policy was voted deciding the way sustainable development should be implemented on the federal level. It gives a strong legal, administrative and strategic framework for the co-ordination of the federal governance for sustainable development.

In April 2007 sustainable development was introduced in the Belgian constitution as Title I, Article 7bis. The text is concise, but shows the political recognition of sustainable development. Now the application of the principles of sustainable development has become a constitutional obligation for the federal state, the communities and the regions. They all must respect the goals of sustainable development taking into account the social, the environmental and the economic aspects, and intergenerational solidarity.

This law will probably be adapted in 2010, in response to the report of the Belgian Court of Audit (2005). The main changes will be the introduction of a long term vision in the SD-plan, more co-ordination with European and regional authorities and a simplification of the existing instruments.

Every law proposal must be screened by the Sustainability Impact Assessment (DOEB) procedures. In 2008 one full assessment was carried out, and 108 quick scans.

An estimate for sustainable development is foreseen in the government budget. However, the report of the Court of Audit of Belgium (2005) estimates the budget insufficient for realising the goals of the Plan. According to the interviewees, this is still the case nowadays.

5.8 Citizens and stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder consultation has been part of the model since the beginning. The most important stakeholders are officially represented in the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD). It is composed of stakeholders representing, environmental, consumers and development NGOs, trade unions, employers, business and scientific community. They give advice on the federal sustainable development policies and act as a multi-stakeholder forum to encourage the sustainable development debate. The FCSD was established in 1997 and replaced the national Council for Sustainable development (1993). According to Niestroy (2005), the federal government has a 'strong negotiation culture and social-economic stakeholders institutionalised as economic and employment councils, existing on the federal and regional level.' This made it difficult for the FCSD to be accepted as the multistakeholder forum for SD.

The draft version of every Federal Plan for Sustainable Development is submitted to a large consultation of Belgian citizens and other stakeholders.

The POD DO organised several stakeholder meetings on SD subjects as Corporate social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainable public procurement.

The large stakeholder involvement was considered by some interviewees as obstructive to vigorous and effective governance, as too much consensus can level off policies. It was said that some measures have to be taken even if not everyone agrees. Consensus also takes time, and sustainable development should be implemented as soon as possible.

5.9 Conclusion

The Belgian federal government has been a first mover for a long time. The act of 1997 laid down a strong institutional base, and together with a number of highly motivated civil servants the first Secretary of State for Sustainable Development was able to introduce some structural changes.

Recent political problems in Belgium make it difficult to foresee how the current government will manage sustainable development in the future. It is currently under the competences of the Minister for Climate and Energy. Many interviewees mentioned that currently this Minister and even politicians in general show little interest for sustainable development. On the political side not much ambition is shown with regard to sustainable development, even for the realisation of the goals that were set in the coalition agreement.

It is clear that this lack of political support has an important impact on the further implementation of SD. But as sustainable development policies are legally enforced and the strategy has to be implemented, many actions continue to take place. But although obliged by law, the federal plan 2008-2012 still has not passed yet.

Most initiatives on sustainable development seem to depend on the dynamism of the civil servants concerned. Some issues, like CSR and sustainable public procurement, receive growing interest, others are not taken up anymore. It is possible that the new law on sustainable development will create a momentum and will induce a new wind as to accelerate further implementation.

We can conclude that the Belgian federal level has a sustainable development governance model with strong institutions in place. However, it may be a challenge to keep the 'momentum' for the current cycle of planning and reporting.

6. Conclusions

The study of 4 different governance models applied in neighbouring countries gave us ample information on the strong and weak points of their governance for sustainable development, and provided a number of interesting practices.

A comparison of the sustainable development policies, turned out to be difficult as we were faced with a diversity of the themes they deal with. In the Netherlands, for example, climate change is an important political issue, but it is not considered to be part of sustainable development policies, while in the UK climate change was the main subject of SD-policies. Some interviewees experienced that when a sustainable development topic, such as renewable energies, becomes politically important, it will shift away from sustainable development policies and will be taken up by a more established department. This could be explained by the need for more specialist involvement, but maybe also because sustainable development is not yet considered as mainstream policy. Furthermore it seems to lose some of its attractiveness in countries as in the Netherlands and Belgium, due to the fact that it is losing its status of a 'new' concept.

During our study some recurrent elements of success were noticed. In this conclusion we will summarise the most pertinent observations. These concern the following topics:

- The model
- High level support
- Institutional framework
- Strong co-ordination
- Continuous incentives
- Capability building
- Appropriation of the concept
- Reporting, monitoring and evaluation
- Stakeholder involvement

6.1 The model used

Several governance models exist for sustainable development. They can be divided in ecosystem based models and models using sustainable development as a meta concept. Most countries apply a model putting the environmental protection as first goal. Few use all aspects of sustainable development as an integrating principle.

In all countries we visited, governance for sustainable development finds its origin in the environmental departments. Many references were found to the importance of the integration between the three aspects, but we haven't found a country where government works in a truly integrated way. The fact that often sustainable development is divided in three (or four) pillars is an indication of the compartmentalised way of considering the concept.

As in the Netherlands the department of development showed a strong commitment to SD, the social situation in third world countries are also an important issue, but it is not systematically linked to environmental aspects.

The Belgian federal model shows the most elements of a holistic system, but this doesn't mean that the policy making is truly integrated.

We found that the categorisation of governance systems into the four theoretical models, is sometimes difficult. The government don't use these categories, and sometimes a country shows characteristics of several models. We conclude that this type of categorisation has only a limited analytic value.

6.2 Political support

In all countries high level support was seen as one of the most important leverages of sustainable development policies. Although in literature 'softer' steering instruments are recommended for the implementation of sustainable development, a strong leadership is necessary (Lafferty, 2004:5). Lafferty claims sustainable development as defined during the UNCED conference '*may be realised under a strong and persistent leadership, but will clearly not be realised without it*' (Lafferty, 2004:326). Also the OECD stipulates the effectiveness of the sustainable development implementation is closely related to the placement of overall responsibility at top level, with a preference for the prime minister or president (OECD, 2007).

The current Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, is a former Minister of the Environment and she has shown personal commitment towards sustainable development. Her personal

vision on the subject and the projects she initiated constitute a significant driving force for the implementation of sustainable development in the German federal government.

In the Netherlands, the coalition agreement of the latest government has forced policies to continue to take into account sustainable development, even if there was low political interest. The importance given to SD in this agreement was largely due the commitment of the person in charge of the government formation. On the other side the lack of political leverage of the Dutch Minister for the Environment, who is the main responsible for SD, limits the extent of the implementation of the coalition agreement.

In the UK, the support of the Prime Minister was a key factor for the design of the UK's a strong and coherent governance model.

6.3 Institutional framework

Some authors claim it is not possible to introduce sustainable development without an institutional reform. For Bleischwitz et al. (2004) government for sustainable development must be paired with reforms, which go further than the traditional policies where the state occupies the central position. At the same time Meadowcroft (1997) pragmatically remarks that a thorough reform is time-consuming and expensive. In a first stage, one can incorporate the idea of sustainable development in the decision paths of planning structures and processes of the current governance model.

In Belgium, a sound institutional framework was developed. This enabled the administration to continue to work on sustainable development, even with a low political support. Long term projects can be set up and the implementation is much less influenced by political changes.

In the German federal government, no legalised institutional framework is present but the last report on the strategy proposed an elaborated management system for sustainability, defining the responsibility of each institution. The aim of this system is to ensure the continuity of the sustainable development policies and actions.

The UK governance model has a very solid and coherent institutional framework, with the Sustainable Development Commission fulfilling many important roles.

6.4 Horizontal integration

In all four cases it appears that traditionally an intensive collaboration between different Ministries is no general rule yet. Many examples of collaboration can be found, but most of them are ad-hoc and don't interfere with the general mode of (vertical) policy making.

In the four case studies, regular interdepartmental meetings are set up, allowing high level civil servants to discuss sustainable development issues. In none of these countries these discussions seem to have lead to structural collaboration between the different departments. Still many projects on sustainable development concern multiple departments. Most of the time, these are bilateral collaborations issued from individual initiatives. But it happens that a project concerns all departments, as does 'sustainable public procurement' in Belgium, UK and the Netherlands.

As mentioned above, the pillar view of sustainable development might hamper an integrated approach of sustainable development, as it encourages compartmental thinking.

6.5 Strong co-ordination

The OECD (2002c) considers that governance for sustainable development needs a co-ordinating government structure to stimulate and evaluate sustainable development policies. The criteria III of the Checklist for Sustainable Development of the OECD indicates that *'the need to enforce sustainable development strategies through an overarching institution acting as a 'catalyst' is particularly important, as is the need to ensure mechanisms for critical evaluation'* (OECD, 2002c). A later OECD document stipulates the effectiveness of the sustainable development implementation is closely related to the placement of overall responsibility at top level, with a preference for the prime minister or president (OECD, 2007).

A leading co-ordination appears to be present in most countries. In Belgium, most initiatives come from the POD DO, they co-ordinate several actions on sustainable procurement, Corporate Social responsibility and general sensitisation. In the Netherlands, no real co-ordination is taking place. The recent KADO tries to draw general guidelines, but most Ministries install their own systems. It was said that this is one of the main reasons for the a lack of coherency between the policies of the different departments.

6.6 Capability building

According to Connor and Dovers (2004:209) sustainability transition requires the creation and support of flexible structures and processes to inform about sustainable development. It also needs *'an evolving consensus on values to support institutional change'*.

One of the main reasons evoked for the slow introduction of sustainable development into some laggard departments seems to be related to insufficient manpower, knowledge and experience within the departments with regard to sustainable development.

Compared to the more traditional policy concepts, sustainable development is still a relatively recent concept and many civil servants and politicians are not familiar with it. Several interviewees mentioned that if the concept of sustainable development is not understood, it will not be supported; even it is a 'hot' topic on the international level.

A large part of the success of the Belgian Federal Public planning Service for Sustainable Development is due to the yearly sustainable week and day of the civil servant. Transmitting the information on sustainable development creates a larger support and facilitates the introduction of various projects.

Capability-building is one of the reasons why the UK governance system is so strong: all departments are actively supported by the SDC; thanks to this continuous capability-building, all departments have build up their own competences.

6.7 Reporting-monitoring and evaluation

In all countries visited departments must deliver an annual report on sustainable development. This report gives an indication of the commitment of the departments for the matter. Some deliver a thorough report, others just some sentences.

As said before, transparent reporting, monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development can be a strong incentive and can have a very positive influence on SD policies. On the one hand it brings forward positive results, which are encouraging and reward those who put effort in the realisation of sustainable goals. On the other hand it will bring in the open lack of initiatives, or negligence.

In Germany, the recent peer review and the annual reports pointed out the lack of initiatives of some departments in contrast to others. This transparency encouraged laggard Ministries to show they can do better. It moved them to take initiatives to ensure more positive results during the next reporting and monitoring.

In the UK, the reporting-monitoring and evaluation cycle is particularly strong. An independent watchdog, the SDC, makes sure that all departments comply with their obligations.

6.8 Citizens and stakeholder participation

Citizens and stakeholder participation is considered as a main issue in sustainable development policies. But not all countries have a tradition of stakeholder consultation. In Germany for instance, it is a new way of doing politics. Currently it is finding its way through and is even applied in more mainstream political topics. In the Netherlands stakeholder consultation is seldom done. Policy makers claim that their official stakeholders are involved at an early stage through the official channels, and thus are not to be consulted anymore in a later stage. In the UK, it is not the NGOs playing the watchdog role vis-à-vis government sustainable development policy, but the SDC, which is an independent body, but funded by government.

Not all attempts to implicate third parties are successful. In Germany, for example, NGOs are not very responsive because sustainable development is not seen as a political priority, and therefore they prefer to spend more time on more specific topics.

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ANNEX: Table comparing the four studied governance models

Governance elements	German federal government	Netherlands	UK	Belgian Federal level
Model	First driven by environment Now collaboration environment and economy	Driven by environment and cooperation	Holistic, but environment (and - increasingly – is the main trigger)	First driven by environment Now holistic
Nature of strategy	Combination ec/soc and env	No strategy, only two action plans who were put together (action plan cooperation and environment)	Combination ec/soc and env. Environment and CC receive most attention	Holistic
Common vision and strategic objectives	Strategy developed by chancellery and agreed upon by all ministries	KADO gives common vision and develops strategic objectives Strong strategic objectives in coalition agreement	Strategy developed by Cabinet office and DEFRA with collaboration of all departments.	Strategy SD
Horizontal integration	State secretaries' Committee on Sustainable development at the chancellery	Several Ministries are present in KADO Working groups on several theme's concerning SD	SD Programme Board	ICDO POD-DO
Vertical integration	Recently first collaborations between Länder an Federal level	Project on national level stopped Regional levels act independently	Devolved governments are more cross-cutting than central government. Central gov steering regional and local levels through 'National Indicators'.	

Political responsibility	Overall responsibility with Chancellor Chancellor has shown commitment to SD	Responsibility min of general affairs, but shows little commitment Driven by min of environment, min of economy and min for development cooperation	No explicit political responsible. Both minister of DEFRA and PM are implicitly responsible.	With ministry of energy Not a priority anymore
Co-ordination			No-one formally has the overall SD-co-ordination, but: SDC Watchdog and capability builder DEFRA SDU actively seeking collaboration with other departments	
Legislative underpinning	Care for future generations in the constitution No other Sd laws	No legislative underpinning	None explicitly on sd	Strong legislative underpinning
Link to budget processes	No specific budget SD. Part of the budget of the ministry, in function of projects. SD Council is appreciated.	Very small budget for SD Dependent on budgets of leading ministry Not that much stakeholder consultation Stakeholder consultation in transition processes	No specific SD budget	
Citizens and stakeholder involvement	Strategy was presented to stakeholders. Communication via press centre of chancellery		Mainly through SDC, which is something in-between civil society and government. NGO's can only participate through consultation which takes place very late in the policy process.	Large stakeholder involvement for strategy FRDO VODO

<p>Implementation mechanisms</p>	<p>Chancellery State secretaries' Committee on Sustainable development Working group Parliamentary Advisory Council</p>	<p>KADO Councils for SD in several Ministries</p>	<p>SDC DEFRA SDU Cabinet's Office</p>	<p>Ministry for energy ICDO POD-DO SD-cells within Ministries</p>
<p>Capability-building</p>	<p>SD council helps to develop capability building Organisation of conferences by ministry of environment and chancellery. Implication of stakeholders in different projects</p>	<p>No central capability building Each ministry has its own system Capability building on theme's for stakeholders and other governmental levels (eg. CSR)</p>	<p>Organised by SDC in combination with their scrutinising role</p>	<p>Annual day of SD Regular seminars for civil servants</p>
<p>Reporting, monitoring and evaluation</p>	<p>Annual reporting by every Ministry, available on Internet (not yet realised by all) Interdepartmental Working Group on Sustainability Indicators Monitor for SD Progress report every 2 years Recent peer review Monitoring through parliament</p>	<p>Monitoring of progress of realisation of coalition agreement Environmental monitoring SD-reporting in every Ministry in annual budget report</p>	<p>Each dep has to make a yearly SDAP. Evaluation (scrutiny) by SDC Monitoring and reporting on the general objectives (headline indicators of the NSSD): SDU Regional and local level: 'national indicators' Evaluation also by EAC, connection to the Parliament</p>	<p>Reporting of every Ministry on SD Monitoring by plan bureau Reporting by Task Force Sustainable Development</p>